

The Scylla and Charybdis of Libertarian Christology

RANDALL K. JOHNSON

Scholé Christian Tradition

randalljohnson86@gmail.com

Abstract: Any Christology that posits a libertarian sense of free agency to Christ in his humanity is caught in a dilemma between two conciliar heresies. If it affirms the orthodox view that Christ has two wills (dyothelitism), then it succumbs to Nestorianism. If, in order to avoid Nestorianism, it affirms only one will in Christ (monothelitism), then not only has it rejected orthodoxy with respect to the number of wills, but it has also likely embraced some variant of Apollinarianism. Applying a compatibilist sense of free agency to Christ in his humanity is a way to avoid the dilemma altogether.

Keywords: Christology, Libertarianism, Compatibilism, Monothelitism, Dyothelitism, Apollinarianism, Nestorianism

The rise of analytic theology has sparked an increasing interest in the intersection between Christology and free agency. In most cases, contemporary models seek to reconcile the tenets of conciliar orthodoxy with a libertarian sense of free agency.¹ In this article, I argue that any Christology that posits a libertarian sense of free agency to Christ in his humanity is caught in a dilemma between conciliar heresies. As all Christologies must do, a libertarian model of Christology must affirm either dyothelitism (two wills) or monothelitism (one will). If it affirms dyothelitism, it maintains historical orthodoxy with respect to the number of wills, but it falls prey to Nestorianism. If, in order to avoid Nestorianism, it affirms monothelitism, then it not only abandons historical orthodoxy with respect to the number of wills, but it also likely embraces some form of Apollinarianism. Thus, libertarian Christology is caught between the Scylla of Nestorianism and the Charybdis of monothelitism and

¹ For examples, see (Grössl 2024), (Loke 2023), (Schärfl 2021), (Kraschl 2021), (Pawl 2019), (Rogers 2016), (Flint 2001), (Sturch 1991) and (Morris 2001). For compatibilist models, see (Couenhoven 2024) and (Johnson 2026).

Apollinarianism. In what follows, first, I clarify what I mean by a libertarian sense of free agency. Second, I demonstrate how a libertarian dyothelitic Christology cannot avoid the charge of Nestorianism. Third, I show how a libertarian monothelitic Christology can avoid Nestorianism but is stuck not only with monothelitism but likely Apollinarianism, too. Finally, I argue that a compatibilist sense of free agency can maintain historical orthodoxy and avoid the dilemma altogether.

1. Libertarianism and Christology

Libertarianism is a species of incompatibilism. Incompatibilism is the notion that free agency is incompatible with determinism. Determinism is the idea that every event is made necessary by a set of prior and sufficient conditions. This set of prior and sufficient conditions may be the state of the world and the laws of nature, as in physical determinism; or it may be the will of God, as in theological determinism. Libertarianism claims that determinism, in any sense, is false and that people do have genuine free agency, at least on some occasions.

Libertarians may be divided into two groups. First, those libertarians who think free actions require alternative possibilities are called ‘leeway libertarians’ or ‘PAP libertarians’ (named after the *principle of alternative possibilities*). For an action A at time *t* to be free, the agent must be able to do A or not-A at *t*. Second, those libertarians who deny that free actions require alternative possibilities are called ‘sourcehood libertarians.’ Sourcehood libertarians argue that an agent must be the ultimate source of the agent’s action for the action to be free. Although the agent may not have alternative possibilities, the action may be considered free so long as it has not been determined by any prior condition.

Libertarianism certainly has an intuitive appeal. For many people, it seems *prima facie* that free choices are the ones which are undetermined and uncaused, and which come from ourselves, and which might have been otherwise. Moreover, there is intuitive support that moral responsibility depends on this kind of freedom. It seems *prima facie* that I should be held morally responsible for my actions only if I am metaphysically responsible for my actions. In other words, they have to be *my* actions in order for me to get praise or blame for them; and it seems that they are *my* actions only if I am the ultimate determiner of the actions.

If libertarianism is true, then we ought to think Jesus was free in this libertarian sense. After all, the Bible portrays Jesus as a moral agent. Indeed, Jesus is *perfectly* good and moral. He is the standard and teacher of morality (Matt 5–7). And his active and passive obedience is praised and rewarded (Phil 2:5–11). Moreover, Jesus

was truly tempted (Matt 4:1–11), yet without sin (Heb 4:15). If libertarianism is true, then Jesus' temptations entail that sin was a real possibility for him, that the events of his temptations could have played out differently, or, at least, that God did not determine the outcome of his temptations.²

But if libertarianism is true, then the doctrine of Christ is caught in a dilemma between historical heresies: the Scylla of Nestorianism and the Charybdis of monothelitism and Apollinarianism.³ In what follows, first, I address the Scylla of Nestorianism. Second, I address the Charybdis of monothelitism and Apollinarianism. Third, I consider a way out of the dilemma, namely, compatibilism.

2. Libertarianism, Dyothelitism, and Nestorianism

Conciliar orthodoxy affirms dyothelitism—the notion that Christ has two wills: the one divine will common to the Father, Son, and Spirit, and a created human will. To be clear, dyothelitism is not the view that Christ wills two things (i.e., two objects or states of affairs); rather, dyothelitism is the view that Christ has two faculties of volition.⁴ The number of wills, in this sense, corresponds to the number of natures. Christ has both a divine and a human nature, so he has both a divine and a human will. Not only is dyothelitism implied by the Chalcedonian Creed in affirming that Christ's humanity includes both a body and a *rational soul*, but it is also taught explicitly in the Third Council of Constantinople:

And we proclaim equally two natural volitions or wills in him and two natural principles of action which undergo no division, no change, no partition, no confusion, in accordance with the teaching of the holy fathers. And the two natural wills not in opposition, as the impious heretics said, far from it, but his human will following, and not resisting or struggling, rather in fact subject to his divine and all powerful will. For the will of the flesh had to be moved, and yet to be subjected to the divine will, according to the most wise Athanasius. (Tanner 1990, 128)

² A libertarian Christology also seems *prima facie* inconsistent with Christ's impeccability. For if Christ really could sin, then he would not be impeccable. Yet, orthodox Christians have almost universally maintained the impeccability of Christ despite the fact that none of the major ecumenical creeds explicitly affirm it. See (McKinley 2011). Elsewhere, McKinley seems to favor a compatibilist dyothelitic Christology (2021).

³ Scylla and Charybdis are two sea monsters who appear in Book XII of Homer's *Odyssey*. To avoid one monster was to fall prey to the other.

⁴ Maximus the Confessor writes, "For the will and the object of that will are not the same things, just as the eye of the observer is not the same thing as what is being observed. The first is inherent in a thing, but the second is external to it," (2014, 60–61).

In this section, I argue that if Christ is a free, moral agent, and free, moral agency is defined by libertarianism, then dyothelitism results in Nestorianism.

This article is not concerned with the beliefs of Nestorius himself but with the heresy as rejected in the language of the Chalcedonian Creed: “not parted or divided into two persons” (Grillmeier 1975, 443–87; cf. Kelly 1978, 310–17). Thus, for our purposes, Nestorianism is the view that Christ is two persons—the divine Logos and the man Jesus Christ. Nestorianism maintains not only a natural distinction but a personal division between the divinity and humanity of Christ.

This article is also not concerned with divine freedom as such. We are considering Christ’s human freedom insofar as it is distinct from Christ’s divine freedom. Just as the one person, the incarnate Christ, is rational in one way according to his divinity and rational in another way according to his humanity, so too is Christ free in one way according to his divinity and free in another way according to his humanity. As we shall see in the following section, monothelitism minimizes the distinction between Christ’s divine and human freedom, but it is not so with dyothelitism. We are interested, here, in Jesus’ human will, his human acts of volition. And it should be clear that distinguishing Christ’s human freedom from his divine freedom is not itself Nestorian. Jesus Christ, unlike any other person in history, exists on both sides of the Creator-creature divide. Thus, Christ *according to his divine nature* (hereafter ‘CDN’) has whatever freedom God has. And Christ *according to his human nature* (hereafter ‘CHN’) should have the kind of freedom appropriate for created human beings.⁵ We are interested in his *human* freedom—the freedom by which he resisted temptation, actively obeyed God, and willingly endured the cross.

Libertarian Christology cannot avoid Nestorianism. Both leeway and sourcehood libertarianism create a rift between the divinity and humanity of Christ. On both forms of libertarianism, CHN and CDN become two distinct agents, rather than one agent acting by and through two distinct natures.⁶

1. *Leeway libertarianism and dyothelitism.* Leeway libertarianism holds to the principle of alternative possibilities: an agent *S* is free and morally responsible with respect to action *A* at time *t* only if *S* could have done otherwise than *A* at *t*.⁷ If *S*’s

⁵ Please note that the initialisms ‘CHN’ and ‘CDN’ stand for the person (Christ) willing or acting by means of a nature (human or divine). They do not stand for the natures *per se* because natures are not agents but principles of action. Thus, Christ is one agent whose activities flow from two distinct principles of action.

⁶ For the clearest attempt at reconciling dyothelitic Christology with libertarianism, see (Pawl 2019, 119–31).

⁷ For an overview of leeway libertarianism, see (Timpe 2013, 69–80).

action is determined, then S cannot do otherwise. Therefore, determinism undermines S's freedom and moral responsibility. Applying leeway libertarianism to dyothelitic Christology results in Nestorianism because leeway libertarianism prevents Christ's divine will from determining his human will. For CHN's actions to be free and moral, they must not be the necessary result of any prior and sufficient condition. But if CHN's actions are not the necessary result of any prior and sufficient condition, they cannot be the necessary result of the will of CDN—that is, the divine will. Thus, CHN must be able to act contrary to the will of CDN. And if CHN can act contrary to the will of CDN, then CHN is not the same person as CDN. Indeed, Constantinople III deems the notion that the two wills of Christ could be in opposition to be heretical: "And the two natural wills not in opposition, as the impious heretics said..." (Tanner 1990, 128). Therefore, a leeway libertarian and dyothelitic Christology results in Nestorianism.

a. *Objection about 'person.'* One might object to this line of reasoning in a couple places. One might reject the notion that CHN acting contrary to the will of CDN would result in two persons. After all, there is no consensus on the definition of 'person.' Some hold that a person is an individual substance (or subsistence) of a rational nature. Others hold that a person is a unique center of consciousness, intellect, and will. And others are concerned with notions of self-consciousness, mental capacities, psychological and social structures, and so on. Thus, as this objection goes, there is no reason to believe that a person cannot have two wills which are actually able to choose or act contrary to each other.

But in response to this objection, there is compelling intuitive support that the notion of unity is at the center of personhood—unity of subject, unity of action, and unity of will. But in order to affirm this unity of subject, action, and will within the bounds of conciliar orthodoxy, we must understand it in light of Christ's two distinct natures and wills. Christ is indeed one subject and one agent, but he is the one subject of two natures which function as distinct principles of action. And because Christ's wills cannot be united in the sense of being singular in number, they must be united with regard to their object. As an analogy: despite my having two eyes, I have unity of vision when both eyes perceive one object. But if each eye perceived a different object, I would not have a unity but a bifurcation of vision. Likewise, it seems that if CHN can will contrary to the will of CDN, there is no reason to believe that CHN and CDN are the same subject. When we separate the wills of CHN and CDN in this way, we divide Christ into two persons.

The objector might appeal to the doctrine of the hypostatic union to preserve the unity of subject. But, according to a two-natures, dyothelitic model of the

incarnation, the hypostatic union cannot be understood as a unity of consciousness or experience, or as a single causal principle, so the objector cannot appeal to these notions for the unity of subject.⁸ Rather, the hypostatic union is a unity of personal identity. CHN and CDN are the same person, that is, the same *hypostasis* (or subsistence). And if CHN and CDN are the same person, then it is reasonable to say that CHN is how CDN would be if CDN were human. And if CHN is how CDN would be if CDN were human, then we should expect CHN to act exactly how CDN wills CHN to act. But if CHN can do otherwise than what CDN wills, then there is no reason to believe CHN and CDN are the same person.

The objector might insist that affirming the hypostatic union is sufficient for avoiding Nestorianism. So long as we say that CHN and CDN are the same hypostasis, we can reject Christ's unity of will; Christ can will contrary to himself.⁹ But, again, I think intuition tells us otherwise. Consider this analogy: If I were to play a video game or role-playing game, my character represents me in the game. The character and I are the same *person* even though my character exists within the game and I transcend the game. Now imagine other humans playing the same game. These people would expect my character's actions in the game to reflect my will and choices. Indeed, if my character somehow did things I did not want him to do, I would dissociate from the character and say something like, "That wasn't me. I didn't do that." Constantinople III reflects this intuition when it rejects the notion that Christ's wills could oppose one another.

b. *Objection about meticulousness.* If CHN's being able to act contrary to the divine will results in Nestorianism, one might, instead, reject the notion that the divine will is meticulous over Christ's human will. Perhaps CDN's will is coarse-grained rather than fine-grained. For example, it may be the will of God that CHN preach a sermon on the Mount of Olives, but exactly where to stand, which words to use, and so on are left open for CHN. In this way, CHN is not acting contrary to the will of CDN, yet he has alternative possibilities on a range of fine-grained decisions. Thus, CHN can have leeway without becoming a separate person.¹⁰

⁸ Joseph Jedwab argues for a unity of consciousness in (2011, 168–85), but R. T. Mullins is right when he shows that a unity of consciousness is impossible according to dyothelitic Christology and classical theism (2021, 164–82).

⁹ I should note that dyothelitic Christology is not like supposed cases of multiple personality disorder in which one person seems to have multiple wills, *contra* (Morris 2001, 104–7). Rather, dyothelitic Christology views Christ's wills and volitional activity as distinct and simultaneous.

¹⁰ Pawl makes this argument: "Perhaps the divine will subjects the human will by means of putting parameters on the sorts of activities the human will could will. . . . Within the parameters there may well be multiple options" (2019, 129–30).

But in response, there are several reasons for affirming a meticulous divine will — especially with respect to the life and activity of CHN. First, meticulous providence is a very plausible interpretation of the entire biblical witness and of particular passages such as: God “works all things according to the counsel of his will,” (Eph 1:11); “for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose,” (Rom 8:28); and

for I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is none like me,
declaring the end from the beginning
and from ancient times things not yet done,
saying, ‘My counsel shall stand,
and I will accomplish my purpose.’ (Isa 46:9b–10)¹¹

Moreover, meticulous providence has been the majority view of the church historically, including such major traditions as Augustinianism, Thomism, Molinism, Calvinism, and classical Arminianism.¹²

Second, there is biblical support that the divine will is meticulous not just in general but over CHN in particular. Jesus explicitly claims that he can do nothing apart from the will of God; he says, “the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise,” (John 5:19). Similarly, Jesus says, “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me,” (John 5:30). Again, Jesus says, “The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works,” (John 14:10). And again, he says, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me,” (John 6:38).

Third, the words of Constantinople III seem to demand a fine-grained understanding of CDN’s will: “And the two natural wills not in opposition, as the impious heretics said, far from it, but his human will following, and not resisting or

¹¹ All Bible quotations come from the English Standard Version.

¹² Thomas P. Flint calls meticulous providence the ‘traditional view.’ He writes:

Not surprisingly, those we have called orthodox Christians have (with rare exceptions) in fact historically embraced this traditional notion of providence. Virtually all of the major Christian voices through the centuries, from such early figures as Justin Martyr, Origen, and Augustine, through such great medieval thinkers as Anselm, Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham, to Reformers such as Luther and Calvin, would firmly embrace this traditional picture. Councils and catechisms [e.g., the Westminster Confession and the First Vatican Council] are equally explicit in their endorsements. (1998, 14–15)

struggling, rather in fact subject to his divine and all powerful will. For the will of the flesh had to be moved, and yet to be subjected to the divine will..." (Tanner 1990, 128). CHN was not in opposition to CDN; Christ did not resist or struggle against the divine will. The will of CHN was subject to and moved by the will of CDN. For these reasons, we ought to believe that the divine will is fine-grained—especially with respect to Jesus' life, will, and works.

2. *Sourcehood libertarianism and dyothelitism.* By holding to the principle of alternative possibilities in their doctrine of Christ, leeway libertarians succumb to Nestorianism. Sourcehood libertarians, however, recognize the difficulty that the principle of alternative possibilities places on Christology, for example, in their understanding of Christ's temptations and impeccability.¹³ But I argue that even rejecting the principle of alternative possibilities is insufficient for avoiding Nestorianism. According to sourcehood libertarianism, an agent *S* is free and morally responsible with respect to action *A* at time *t* only if *S* is the ultimate source of *S*'s doing *A* at *t*.¹⁴ Thus, even if *S* could not have done otherwise than *A*, so long as the ultimate source of *S*'s doing *A* is found in *S* and not in a set of prior and sufficient conditions, *S* was free and morally responsible with respect to *A*. Applying sourcehood libertarianism to dyothelitic Christology still results in Nestorianism because it makes the will of CHN independent of CDN.¹⁵ By making CHN the ultimate source of CHN's actions, CHN becomes a distinct agent, a distinct person, no longer the same person as CDN. In order to avoid Nestorianism, we must be able to say that CHN's words and actions come *from* God. Indeed, CHN must be a true revelation of the will of God. But if all that CHN says and does is ultimately from his humanity, then there is no reason to think that Jesus and the Logos are the same person.

¹³ For example, William Lane Craig writes, "This [sourcehood] understanding of libertarian freedom has the advantage that it enables us to ascribe libertarian freedom to God and to Christ in resisting temptation," (2011, 225). Likewise, Loke writes, "a person who is not a mere human but who is also the necessarily existent ground of objective morality would not require such "alternative possibilities" in order to be morally valuable. As long as Christ is the first cause of his choices, he is free and morally responsible for the character of the human nature which he assumed," (2023, 254). See also (Stump 2018, 242).

¹⁴ For an overview of sourcehood libertarianism, see (Timpe 2013, 141–61).

¹⁵ That is not to say that CHN's will *exists* independently of CDN, for nothing created exists independently of God. Rather, it is to say that CHN's choices and actions do not flow from the will of CDN.

a. *Objection about sourcehood.* A sourcehood libertarian might escape Nestorianism by accepting that the ultimate source of Christ's human actions is found in his divinity, not his humanity. Indeed, the condition for freedom and moral responsibility for sourcehood libertarianism stated above is that S be the ultimate source of S's doing A at *t*. So long as the will of CDN is the source of the will of CHN, *Christ* is free. CHN and CDN are the same person—the same agent—after all!¹⁶

This objection does reveal the inadequacy of standard definitions of sourcehood applied to Christ who is uniquely both God and man. On the dyothelitic model, there is one agent with two natures, that is, two wills and two principles of action. And this distinction between the agent and the principle of action makes standard sourcehood accounts ambiguous. Therefore, the libertarian sourcehood condition must be made more precise: an agent S is free and morally responsible with respect to action A at time *t* only if the ultimate source of S's doing A at *t* is found in the nature by which S performs A at *t* (see Johnson 2026, 87–88). This definition can account for persons with one or more natures. For example, Christ is free to break bread in his human nature on the night before his crucifixion only if the ultimate source of his breaking bread is found in his human nature.

We should accept this more precise definition because it allows us to address the issue under consideration, namely, Christ's *human* freedom. Was Christ *as man* free? This is the question which theologians have sought to answer throughout history.¹⁷ Moreover, although Christ is a divine person, his human nature is created: "he had to be made like his brothers in every respect," (Heb 2:17). And according to the conciliar model, his humanity has a complete set of mental faculties which are distinct from his divine nature. Thus, we must ask whether the ultimate source of Christ's acting according to his human nature is found in that very nature. To appeal to his divine nature would be to skirt the issue. As an analogy: imagine waking up from spinal surgery, and the surgeon asks if you can feel your legs, and you proceed to touch your legs with your hands and say, "Yes, I can feel my legs!" The surgeon would not be satisfied with your answer. Likewise, to appeal to CDN to prove CHN's *libertarian* freedom is infelicitous.

¹⁶ Sturch makes this argument: "Now if Jesus is united to God not only by the central self but in a single person or *πρόσωπον*, it follows that any causal power exerted by the goodness of God upon the human life of Jesus is not external to Him at all, and therefore not destructive of His freedom" (1991, 166).

¹⁷ Some theologians consider the question directly, such as (John of Damascus 2019, Book III, chap. 14) and (Aquinas 2012, III, q. 18, a. 4); others address the matter indirectly via discussions of Christ's impeccability, for example (Shedd 2003, 659–70).

Furthermore, for the libertarian to place ultimate sourcehood in the divine will rather than Christ's humanity would seem closer to compatibilism (or, at least, determinism) regarding Christ's human freedom than to libertarianism. The sourcehood libertarian might say that the agent, Christ, is free, but all of his human faculties are determined by the divine will. But in saying so, the sourcehood libertarian would agree with the compatibilist. Therefore, the sourcehood libertarian must choose between Nestorianism or a notion of freedom that is indistinguishable from compatibilism.

b. *Objection about actual agreement.* One might object to the charge of Nestorianism by appealing to the *actual* agreement in all that CHN does with the divine will. CHN *actually* says and does all that CDN wills (and without the possibility of doing otherwise!). Because the wills of CHN and CDN are not in opposition—so the objection goes—they do not succumb to Nestorianism.

But appealing to the actual agreement between the two wills of Christ is insufficient for avoiding Nestorianism because sourcehood libertarianism lacks an *explanation* for the agreement between the wills of Christ. Why *does* CHN always act in accordance with the divine will? One might say that CHN knows the will of God perfectly, so he acts according to what he knows to be God's will.¹⁸ But then, dyothelitic sourcehood libertarians place themselves in another dilemma: either CHN *must* act according to his knowledge of the divine will or CHN can act otherwise. If CHN must act according to his knowledge of the divine will, then the divine will is sufficient for CHN's actions. And because the divine will is also prior (ontologically and logically) to the human will of Christ, CHN is determined by the divine will. But if CHN can act otherwise, then the argument against leeway libertarianism applies.

3. Libertarianism, Monothelitism, and Apollinarianism

Affirming both libertarianism and dyothelitism results in Nestorianism. One way to keep libertarianism and avoid Nestorianism is to deny dyothelitism in favor of

¹⁸ Thomas Joseph White makes this argument:

For the human actions of Jesus are actions of one person who is divine, and what the Son wills humanly is expressive of his personal identity. However, this person, the Son of God, possesses a divine will, and it is impossible for the Son of God to act personally in such a way that his divine will should be absent from his personal action. The Word incarnate, then, must be humanly conscious of his own divine will in all of his actions, so that his human actions are indicative of his personal, divine willing as God. (2017, 254)

monothelitism. Many theologians and philosophers have indeed embraced monothelitism for fear of Nestorianism. For example, Garrett J. DeWeese writes, “it is not clear that the dyothelite model actually succeeds in avoiding something that looks suspiciously like Nestorianism” (2007, 131). Likewise, commenting on Constantinople III, J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig write, “But no explanation is given of how one can have two separate wills and operations without two persons. By condemning monothelitism, the church seemed in danger of dividing the person of Christ” (2017, 599–600). For this reason, Moreland and Craig affirm monothelitism:

The will of the Logos had in virtue of the incarnation become the will of the man Jesus of Nazareth. This implication of the model is, in our view, one of its advantages, since it is extraordinarily difficult to preserve the unity of Christ’s person once distinct wills are ascribed to the Logos and to the individual human nature of Christ. (2017, 608)

Monothelitism certainly avoids Nestorianism, but it is still heretical according to conciliar orthodoxy. By avoiding the Scylla of Nestorianism, libertarians succumb to the Charybdis of monothelitism.

Moreover, monothelitic Christology almost always implies some variant of Apollinarianism. Apollinarianism is the ancient heresy that Christ’s human nature did not include a uniquely human rational soul; rather, at the incarnation, the Logos takes the place of the rational soul in the humanity of Christ.¹⁹ The Chalcedonian Creed rejects Apollinarianism when it says, “the Same perfect in Godhead, the Same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, the Same [consisting] of a rational soul and a body” (Grillmeier 1975, 544). Monothelitism almost always results in Apollinarianism because it views the one will of Christ to be the preexistent will of the Logos; and the Logos himself is viewed as a unique center of consciousness, intellect, and will. At the incarnation, the Logos assumed a created human body, and with it, a human way of being, but the Logos does not assume a created human will. And without a distinct *human* will (i.e., a *created* human will), Christ cannot have a distinct *human* rational soul. Thus, monothelitism typically implies Apollinarianism.

Some theologians explicitly affirm some variant of Apollinarianism. For example, Moreland and Craig write, “*We postulate with Apollinarius that the Logos was the rational soul of Jesus of Nazareth*” (2017, 605, italics in the original). For others, Apollinarianism is an unintentional entailment of monothelitism and kenoticism. Kenotic Christology teaches that, in the incarnation, the Logos emptied himself of

¹⁹ For Apollinarius’ Christology, see (Grillmeier 1975, 329–43); cf. (Kelly 1978, 289–301).

certain or all of his divine attributes and prerogatives, either ontologically or merely functionally.²⁰ Kenotic Christology presupposes that the Logos is a unique center of consciousness, intellect, and will; thus, kenotic Christology associates the will immediately with the person rather than the nature. Kenotic Christology teaches that the Logos undergoes a sort of transformation in which he experiences a limitation in knowledge, power, and glory. The preexistent Logos becomes a man by taking on flesh but not a distinct human soul; for, if the Logos assumed a human soul, there would be two centers of consciousness, intellect, and will (or two souls or two minds).²¹ And if the Logos is not identical to the human soul of Christ, kenotic theologians could not say that it was the Logos who underwent an emptying.

1. *Objection about Apollinarianism.* One might argue that not all monothelites are Apollinarian. Perhaps by taking on a human body and, in particular, a human brain, the divine Logos takes on a new mode of experience and way of thinking. And this new mode of experience and way of thinking are so connected with Christ's human brain and so informed by his humanity, that it is not appropriate to say that the Logos takes the place of the rational soul in Christ. Rather, the rational soul in Christ is as much human as it is the preexistent Logos. Indeed, this view may be especially appealing for those who hold to a physicalist view of humanity, in which case, Christ's humanity is nothing over and above his body. This view may also appeal to hylomorphists who view the human soul not as a distinct substance but as an internal principle of organization and action.

I am not convinced, however, that this monothelitic approach—whether physicalist or hylomorphist—truly avoids Apollinarianism, but even if it did, it would still be problematic for two reasons. First, it is still monothelitic, and thus, heretical according to conciliar orthodoxy. Conciliar orthodoxy affirms two wills, not one. Second, monothelitism seems to imply some form of monophysitism which is the ancient heresy that Christ has one nature, or that his two natures are mixed together. The Chalcedonian Creed rejects monophysitism when it says that the two natures of Christ exist “without confusion” and “the difference of the natures having been no wise taken away by reason of the union, but rather the properties of each being preserved” (Grillmeier 1975, 544). If, as monothelites insist, the will of Christ's human nature is the numerically same will which preexisted in divine eternity, then

²⁰ For more on kenoticism, see (Senor 2011, 88–113) and (Evans 2006). For the distinction between ontological and functional kenoticism, see (Crisp 2007, 118–53).

²¹ Senor writes, “Furthermore, in taking on the human mind and body, the Son has a single centre of consciousness and locus of action; the human mind and body. The Son is not conscious of or through the divine mind during his earthly ministry” (2011, 112).

Christ's humanity is confused with his divinity. And this result holds regardless of the truth of physicalism, hylomorphism, or substance dualism.

4. Compatibilism and Orthodoxy

Libertarian Christology is caught between a rock and a hard place, between Scylla and Charybdis. Either it affirms dyothelitism, and thus, Nestorianism; or it affirms monothelitism and Apollinarianism (or, perhaps, monophysitism). One way to lighten the burden of this dilemma is to downplay conciliar authority.²² But for those who want to remain within the bounds of conciliar orthodoxy, there is a way to bypass the dilemma: reject libertarianism in favor of compatibilism. Compatibilism is the view that free, moral agency is compatible with determinism. Although there are various species of compatibilism, they are united in rejecting ultimate sourcehood and the categorical ability to do otherwise. In other words, compatibilists deny that the ultimate source of an agent's actions must be found in the agent in order to be free and morally responsible; and compatibilists deny that alternative possibilities must be metaphysically open to the agent in order to be free and morally responsible. In this section, I explain how a compatibilist Christology can maintain dyothelitism without succumbing to Nestorianism. And because a compatibilist dyothelitic Christology need not succumb to Nestorianism, there is no reason to reject dyothelitism on the grounds of free, moral agency. Therefore, there is no reason to discuss the possibility of a compatibilist monothelitic Christology, here.

Libertarian dyothelitic Christologies become Nestorian because they cannot affirm that CHN was determined by CDN, so they see a division between the deity and humanity of Christ. But a compatibilist dyothelitic Christology has no problem with CHN's actions being determined by CDN. On this model, CDN determines all that CHN says and does. CDN is the ultimate source of CHN's actions, and CHN cannot do otherwise than what God wills. Thus, compatibilism helps to preserve the unity of personhood in Christ. Although he has two natures, two wills, and two principles of action, Christ is one person, one subject, and one agent whose wills are unified—not by confusion of natures but by personal identity and divine power. CDN, by his all-powerful will, ensures that CHN is a true revelation of the eternal Son of God—that everything Jesus says and does has a direct link to God's will. Thus, Jesus can say, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father," (John 14:9). Yet, a

²² For discussions about conciliar authority in Christology and free will respectively, see (Wessling 2013) and (Timpe 2024).

compatibilist Christology maintains that even though CHN is determined, he has free agency and is morally responsible for his actions.

1. *Objection about compatibilism.* One might object to a compatibilist Christology because if compatibilism is true with respect to Christ, then compatibilism is true *simpliciter*. If CHN is a free, moral agent despite being determined, there is no reason to think free, moral agency is undermined by determinism. But, so the objection goes, a compatibilist view of free agency is not robust enough. Only an incompatibilist view of free agency satisfies our intuitions about moral responsibility.

I have two points of response. First, I disagree that compatibilism is insufficiently robust, but a full defense of compatibilism is beyond the scope of this article, so I will merely note that compatibilism has many able defenders throughout church history (e.g., Augustine, Calvin, Turretin, Edwards) and direct the reader to contemporary compatibilists in a footnote.²³

Second, for those who desire to stay within the bounds of conciliar orthodoxy, it is better to side with historical and conciliar orthodoxy in affirming dyothelitism and avoiding Nestorianism, monothelitism, Apollinarianism, and monophysitism than it is to affirm incompatibilism which is not a matter of orthodoxy. And for the same reason, it is better for our Christology to determine our understanding of free agency than for our understanding of free agency to determine our Christology. Johannes Grössl — who is no advocate for compatibilism — writes,

The theology of Maximus the Confessor, which shaped the doctrines defended in the Third Council of Constantinople in the seventh century, was not based on a libertarian account of free will. When Maximus taught that Christ has a truly human and truly divine will, he explicitly did not want to say that the human will could act against the divine will. . . . [T]he Third Council of Constantinople is clear that the divine will trumps the human will. (2021, 219; cf. Watts 2017, 475–77)

Incompatibilism is inconsistent with conciliar Christology.

2. *Objection about personal identity.* One might reject this compatibilist dyothelitic Christology because it seems to imply that all human beings share the same relation to CDN that CHN has. If God exercises meticulous providence in a deterministic way, then he not only determines what CHN does but what *all* humans do. So, it seems that if Jesus is the same person as the Logos because he is determined to do

²³ See (Fischer and Ravizza 1998), (Bignon 2018), and (Preciado 2019).

God's will, then everyone is the Logos because everyone is determined to do God's will.

Even if theological determinism and compatibilism are true, it does not entail that every human being is hypostatically united to the Logos. Rather, only Jesus has the identity of Son of God. Consider the following analogy: I use two instruments to chop a log into firewood. One instrument is an axe. I use the axe to accomplish an end, namely, to chop wood; and the axe does exactly what I want it to do. The other instrument is my arm. I use my arm to swing the axe; and my arm does exactly what I want it to do. The difference between the axe and my arm is that my arm is really part of me; when my arm moves, *I* am moving. But the axe is not part of me; when the axe moves, it is not *me* moving. Likewise, if determinism is true, all human beings may be considered instruments of God in the same way that an axe is an instrument.²⁴ But the humanity of Christ is an instrument in the way my arm is an instrument. When Jesus speaks, *God* is speaking.

The critic might wonder why libertarians cannot give the same answer to affirm the unity of Christ's person. After all, libertarians explicitly affirm the hypostatic union. But libertarians cannot appeal to the instrumentality of Christ's humanity because CDN does not determine what CHN does. Imagine having an arm that acts on its own, apart from your intention. If your arm moved apart from or contrary to your intentions, you would dissociate from your arm and its motions. Likewise, if CHN can act apart from or contrary to the will of CDN, we ought not to think Jesus and the Logos are the same person.

Conclusion

In this article, I showed that any Christology that affirms libertarianism is in a dilemma between the Scylla of Nestorianism and the Charybdis of monothelitism and Apollinarianism. If we say that Christ has two wills and a libertarian sense of free agency, then his humanity is divorced from his divinity—which is tantamount to Nestorianism. But if, in order to avoid Nestorianism, we say that Christ has one will, then we are explicitly monothelites and probably Apollinarian. The best way out of this dilemma is to reject libertarianism and to affirm compatibilism. If compatibilism is true, then we can posit two wills in Christ without dividing his person.

²⁴ Indeed, Isaiah 10:5–19 uses the metaphor of an axe to describe the way God uses humans instrumentally.

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THE SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS OF LIBERTARIAN CHRISTOLOGY

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