Timothy Pawl. *In Defense of Conciliar Christology.* Oxford, Oxford University Press: 2016. xiv + 251 pp. $110.00 (hbk).

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Timothy Pawl's book is worthy of public celebration. It is a fine example of analytic theology: historically informed, philosophically rigorous, and theologically faithful. The book has three parts. First, there is a presentation of the doctrine of the Incarnation, some key definitions, and the minimal metaphysics needed to understand the doctrine (chs. 1-3). Second, there is a discussion of the fundamental problem of apparently inconsistent predications of Christ along with some fifteen proposed solutions (chs. 4-7). Third, there is a discussion of two rather more metaphysical problems: one concerning Christ's immutability, impassibility, and atemporality; the other concerning number-troubles such as whether it could be that one person has two natures, intellects, and wills (chs. 8-9). All this with a *Nihil Obstat* and *Imprimatur*. What more, I ask, could you want in a monograph? One word of warning though: those who don't know their elementary propositional logic will find some parts hard going.

Though comprehensive, even having a section, albeit rather brief, on dialetheism (the view that some contradictions are true) as an unsatisfactory solution to the fundamental problem (see 84-5), the book omits altogether any relative-identity approach as a solution. This is a rare oversight on Pawl's part and I wish to spend some time convincing folk of this. I shall first consider some problems that Pawl's key definitions raise and then consider his own proposed solution to the fundamental problem. In each case, I hint at how a relative-identity approach has something to say here.

Some Problems with Definitions

Conciliar Christology, the conjunction of claims about Christ in the first seven ecumenical councils, implies that, in Christ, only one person has only two natures. Distinguish abstract from concrete natures. Any abstract nature is a feature. Any concrete nature is an individual. Pawl defines 'abstract nature' and 'concrete nature':

> *Abstract Nature* x is an abstract nature of some type, y, if and only if x is a property or complex of properties the instantiation of which by a thing is necessary and sufficient for that thing's being (a) y (35).

Concrete Nature   *x* is a concrete nature of some type, *y*, if and only if *x* is an individual instance of *y*, and *y* is an infima species [i.e. a lowest level type] (36).

Divinity and humanity are abstract natures. Our interest, however, more concerns concrete natures. Christ has only two concrete natures: the divine nature (DN) and a human nature (CHN). Moreover, DN is a *divine* concrete nature because it is of the type, divinity, which is an infima species. And CHN is a *human* concrete nature because it is of the type, humanity, which is an infima species. Pawl also defines 'supposit' and 'person':

Supposit (Hypostasis)   *X* is a supposit (hypostasis) if and only if *x* is a complete being, incommunicable by identity, not apt to inhere in anything, and not sustained by anything (32).

Person   *X* is a person if and only if *x* is a supposit with a rational nature (32).

The divine persons are supposits. DN, however, is a non-supposit because it is communicable by identity: each divine person has it. And CHN is a non-supposit because Christ sustains it (in the way that occurs when Christ assumes it). So, there are three supposits in the Trinity, but only one supposit in Christ.

As we already saw, there are at least two concrete natures in Christ. Are there more, though, on Pawl's own definition of 'concrete nature'? Each divine person is an individual instance of the type, divinity, which is an infima species. Clearly, each divine person is an individual and is of the type, divinity. How then could only DN be an individual *instance* of the type, divinity? What would it be about DN that makes it alone such an instance? And what would it be about each divine person that makes it fail to be such an instance? After all, the word 'instance' just means *example*. And each divine person is an example of the type, divinity. If Pawl is using the word 'instance' in some alternative technical sense here, he should tell us what that sense is. So, absent qualification, on Pawl's definition, each divine person is a concrete nature—indeed, a *divine* concrete nature. Moreover, each divine person is, but DN is not, incommunicable by identity. So, DN is not identical to any divine person. So, counting by identity, there are four divine concrete natures in the Trinity: the divine persons and DN, and there are two *divine* concrete natures in Christ: Christ and DN.

Christ is also an individual instance of the type, humanity, which is an infima species. Again, clearly, Christ is an individual and is of the type, humanity. And Christ is an example of the type, humanity. How then could, in Christ, only CHN be an individual *instance* of the type, humanity? CHN is something like a compound of a human body and soul, with an intellect and will—roughly, something intrinsically just like a complete human person. If CHN counts as an individual instance of the type, humanity, which it does, then how could Christ fail to be such an instance? So, on Pawl's definition, Christ is a concrete nature—indeed, not only a *divine* but also a *human* concrete nature. Moreover, CHN is, but Christ is not, assumed by Christ. So,

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Christ is not identical to CHN. So, counting by identity, there are two *human* concrete natures in Christ: Christ and CHN. And, so, all in all, counting by identity, there are three concrete natures in Christ: Christ, DN, and CHN. This seems, though, the wrong result. It seems rather that, according to Conciliar Christology, there are only two concrete natures in Christ: one divine and the other human.

Pawl, following medieval tradition, carefully crafts the definition of 'supposit' so that neither DN nor CHN counts as a person. Perhaps then he should also carefully craft the definition of 'concrete nature' so that no divine person counts as a concrete nature. We could define 'concrete nature' as *individual instance that is not a supposit*. Or if every concrete nature is such that more than one divine person could have that nature at once, we could, rather elegantly, define 'concrete nature' as *individual instance that is shareable by more than one person*. One problem with this is that Pawl welcomes the idea that we mere unassumed humans are both persons and concrete natures (see 65-7). If, though, we are persons but no concrete nature is a person, then we are not both persons and concrete natures.

But why be so very crafty? Why not just allow that each concrete nature in Christ is a person? After all, one of the first to provide classic definitions of Christological terms is Boethius, who defines 'person' as *individual substance of a rational nature*, and 'substance' as *what can act or be acted upon*.[1] And, on Boethius' definitions, each concrete nature counts as a substance and person. Each counts as a substance because it acts. The Exposition of Faith from the Third Council of Constantinople (680-681 AD) says, "the difference of the natures being made known in the same one subsistence in that each nature wills and performs the things that are proper to it in a communication with the other".[2] What wills and performs things acts. So if each nature wills and performs things, it acts. And each counts as a person because it is rational—having an intellect and will. Of course, if we count by identity and if, following Boethius' definitions, each of Christ, DN, and CHN is a person, but if they are not identical to each other, then there are three persons in Christ, which is definitely the wrong result.

But why must we count by identity? Here's an alternative. Each of the Father, Son, and Spirit is a person and a concrete nature; they are the same concrete nature, but different persons, and so, there are only three persons in the Trinity. And each of the Son and the human being Jesus of Nazareth is a person and a concrete nature; they are the same person, but different concrete natures, and so, there is only one person in Christ.[3] On this alternative, we count not by (classical) identity, but by some other relative-identity relation: same person and same concrete-nature. This alternative implies that such relative-identity relations aren't reducible to (classical) identity: that, where 'F' stands for a sortal count noun, it could be, for some x and y, x is the same F as y but x is not identical to y. I'm not saying that this works. All I'm saying is that it's at least worthy of consideration.

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[1] Boethius, "*Contra Eutychen*," in *The Theological Tractates*, trans. H.F. Stewart, E.K. Rand, and S.J. Tester (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 79, 81, 85.

[2] Norman Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Vol.1 (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 129.

[3] See Peter van Inwagen, *God, Knowledge, & Mystery* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), chs. 8-9.

The Fundamental Problem

The following claims seem inconsistent: anything divine is impassible, anything human is passible, and Christ is divine and human. Pawl cogently argues that, even according to Conciliar Christology, there are such pairs of apparently inconsistent predicates F and G such that (i) at the same time, (ii) in the same way, (iii) F is apt of anything divine, and (iv) G is apt of anything human (see chs. 4-7). Pawl allows that two versions of the reduplicative strategy might solve the problem, though at the cost of making the predicates or their copulas express relations to natures (ch. 6). Pawl's own proposal (ch. 7) doesn't carry this cost. He presents initial and revised truth-conditions for the predicates 'passible' and 'impassible':

Initial Truth Conditions
> Passible: s is passible just in case it is possible that at least one
> other thing causally affect s.
> Impassible: s is impassible just in case it is not the case that it is
> possible that at least one other thing causally affect s
> (154).

Revised Truth Conditions
> Passible: s is passible just in case s has a concrete nature that it is
> possible for some other thing to causally affect.
> Impassible: s is impassible just in case s has a concrete nature that it
> is impossible for some other thing to causally affect
> (159).

The pattern of how to provide initial and revised truth-conditions for other problematic pairs of predicates should be clear enough from this one example. On the initial truth-conditions, it couldn't be something is both passible and impassible. On the revised truth-conditions, though, it could be that something is both, and the council fathers might well have intended the predicates to have the revised rather than initial truth-conditions.

But even so, there's a closely related problem. Set aside this whole business of predicates, what they mean, and who intends what they mean. Consider only the revised truth-conditions themselves. DN satisfies the conditions for being causally unaffectable by another and CHN satisfies the conditions for being causally affectable by another. Because of this, Christ satisfies the conditions for having a concrete nature (i.e. DN) that is causally unaffectable by another and having a concrete nature (i.e. CHN) that is causally affectable by another. But now consider only the following conditions: that it is possible for some other thing to causally affect it, and that it is impossible for some other thing to causally affect it. We can't very well deny that there are such conditions. After all, they are part of the revised truth-conditions themselves. And if they aren't so part, then, in the revised truth-conditions, what exactly are the conditions we are saying some concrete nature that s has satisfies? So, we can still

ask: granted all this, what conditions does Christ himself satisfy? Is he causally affectable by another or not? He can't be both. But he must be one or the other. If it is possible that he is so affected, then, in every possible world wherein he exists, it is possible he is so affected. So, if Christ is causally affectable by another, he is essentially so. And, presumably, every other divine person is too. Likewise, if it's impossible that he is so affected, then, in every possible world wherein he exists, it is impossible he is so affected. So, if Christ is causally unaffectable by another, he is essentially so. And, presumably, every other divine person is too. So which? It's not like we have no intuitions about these conditions. Classical theistic intuitions say that anything divine, being a perfect being, is causally unaffectable by another and essentially so. Ordinary intuitions say that anything human that has a human body and soul is causally affectable and essentially so. All this is to say that, even granting all that Pawl says about his own proposed solution to the fundamental problem, something very much like the original problem still stands.

One version of a relative-identity approach, however, might solve this related problem.[4] Strictly speaking, nothing is both divine and human for the reasons the fundamental problem indicates. The Son is divine, and the human being Jesus of Nazareth is human. The Son is the same person as Jesus, but the Son is not the same being as Jesus. Moreover, since the Son is the same person as Jesus, and since the Son, being divine, is impassible, Jesus can say truly, using the pronoun 'I', 'I am impassible' and you can say truly of Jesus, using the pronoun 'he', 'he is impassible'. Conversely, since the Son is the same person as Jesus, and since Jesus, being human, is passible, the Son can say truly, using the pronoun 'I', 'I am passible' and you can say truly of the Son, using the pronoun 'he', 'he is passible. Finally, to say Christ is F is to say the person who is the same person as the Son and Jesus is F. On this reading, it is true to say Christ is passible and it is true to say Christ is impassible. And if, by saying Christ is passible and impassible, one means to assert the conjunction 'Christ is passible and Christ is impassible', then that is true. If, though, by saying Christ is passible and impassible, one means to assert of something the conjunctive predicate 'is passible and impassible', then that is false. Again, I'm not saying that this works. All I'm saying is that it's at least worthy of consideration.

We have looked at two problems: the first is about some problems that Pawl's key definitions raise; the second is about his own proposed solution to the fundamental problem. In each case, I have hinted at how a relative-identity approach to the doctrine of the Incarnation might solve them. The approach itself is worthy of consideration, which Pawl's book altogether omits. Perhaps, in the promised and much-anticipated companion volume, which defends Extended Conciliar Christology, Pawl will see fit not just to consider the relative-identity approach, but even set it alongside alternative proposals that he contends succeed, even if at a cost.[5]

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[4] See van Inwagen, *God, Knowledge, & Mystery*, ch. 9.

[5] I am grateful to Tim Pawl for comments on a previous draft.