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The Incarnation: a philosophical case for kenosis

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Abstract: **As a preliminary, I shall clarify the kenotic position by arguing that a position which is often called kenotic is actually a quasi-kenotic version of the classical account, according to which Jesus had normal divine powers but chose not to exercise them. After this preliminary, I discuss three problems with the strict kenotic account. The first is that kenosis conflicts with the standard list of attributes considered essential to God. The second problem is posed by the Exaltation, namely the resumption by Jesus of normal divine powers after his life on Earth. Finally there is the problem of how it was possible for Jesus to be the same person as the pre-incarnate Word. My solutions to these problems constitute my defence of a strict kenotic account of the Incarnation.**

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to compare two rival accounts of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, the classical and the kenotic, defending the latter. These accounts agree that the second divine person, the Word, remained divine at the Incarnation. They disagree, however, in that the kenotic account denies that Jesus had the powers *normal* for a divine person. Here the plural 'powers' is a reminder that I am including both the power to act and the power to know. So the normal divine powers would include a capacity to act and know far exceeding the human, without the implication that these capacities are exercised.

As a preliminary, I shall clarify the kenotic position by arguing that a position which is often called kenotic is actually a quasi-kenotic version of the classical account, according to which Jesus had normal divine powers but chose not to exercise them. I suggest that Thomasius, the source of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century kenotic theories, and Stephen T. Davis, often cited as a philosopher defending kenosis, held the quasi-kenotic theory. This might suggest that my terminology is eccentric, so if readers prefer, they could re-label quasi-kenosis as moderate kenosis, and kenosis in my sense as extreme kenosis. In that case this

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paper is a defence of extreme kenosis as a serious alternative to both the classical account and moderate kenosis. This dispute over terminology is not entirely trivial, however. For mine is the natural one if we are primarily interested in the relevant philosophical issues, whereas the alternative might be more appropriate if we were considering Scripture or the beliefs of the early Church. For I doubt if such considerations would distinguish between quasi-kenotic and kenotic accounts except via philosophical argument such as I provide in this paper.

After this preliminary, I reply to three objections to the kenotic account. Of these the most widespread is that it conflicts with the standard list of attributes considered essential to God, including immutability. I consider but reject as ad hoc the strategy of merely qualifying the standard list of divine attributes. Instead I offer the more robust reply that the objection is based upon a misguided conception of the divine. After that I turn to the problem posed by the Exaltation, namely the resumption by Jesus of normal divine powers after his life on Earth. Finally I tackle a question which defenders of kenosis must answer: how is it possible for Jesus to be the same person as the pre-incarnate Word? I offer a suggestion as to how the conditions for personal identity can be met in the case of the Incarnation.

Quasi-kenosis and qualified kenosis

A kenotic account of Incarnation is contrasted with the classical account according to which the Word never ceased to have normal divine powers. Now those who hold the classical account may well do so because they consider that divinity entails omnipotence and omniscience. But I want to leave open the possibility that, even prior to the Incarnation, God had freely given up some power for the sake of creatures, perhaps in order to ensure their freedom. So normal divine powers may or may not be taken to imply omnipotence and omniscience. I am, of course, assuming that, but for the Incarnation, the Word would have had vastly greater powers than any human being. In particular these powers would not have been spatially limited.

With that qualification, then, I mean by a quasi-kenotic account one according to which Jesus possessed but chose never to exercise these normal divine powers. This comes in a number of versions which may be illustrated by supposing that we grant that water was turned into wine at Cana.[1] On the kenotic account Jesus did not and could not work this miracle. Instead he exercised a perfectly normal human power of praying for a miracle. On an unqualified classical account Jesus, having normal divine powers, exercised the power directly to turn water into wine. According to the least kenotic version of the quasi-kenotic account Jesus could have directly turned water into wine but chose not to, praying instead for a miracle. On another version he had no power directly to turn water into wine but could have decided to reacquire that power. And, if we insist, we can iterate the dis-

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tinction between having a direct power and having the power to acquire a direct power, but there would be little point in such iteration. Now I shall assume that having the power to acquire the power to do X is already having the power to do X, but is not having the power directly to do X. Hence even if Jesus had no power directly to turn water into wine he had the power indirectly to do so if he had the power to acquire the power directly to do so, or, implausibly, the power to acquire the power to acquire the power directly to do so.

Thomasius argued that the 'omni' properties of omnipotence, omniscience, and, he added, omnipresence, were not essential divine attributes because they were relative, presupposing there exists a universe to have power over, to know, and to be present in.[2] These 'omni' attributes are, however, said to be manifestations of the essential divine attributes. This suggests that the essential divine attributes include the power to be omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, which would make Thomasius a proponent of the quasi-kenotic version of the classical account.

Davis distinguishes omnipotence and omniscience *simpliciter*, which he denies are essential for divinity, from qualified senses which are essential.[3] He distinguishes between having a power and choosing to exercise it and he identifies omnipotence and omniscience *simpliciter* with the nonessential total exercise of the essential divine power. So his is, in my terminology, also a quasi-kenotic classical account.

Some attempts to qualify kenosis result, then, in versions not of the kenotic account but of the classical one. To further clarify the position which I am defending, I note that a kenotic account is, however, quite compatible with some other qualifications. The first of these is that, as Davis and others have pointed out, being truly human does not entail being a normal human being.[4] So, for instance, I hypothesize that Jesus had some memories of his pre-incarnate state. The next is that I hold that Jesus resumed normal divine powers, hence the kenosis of the Incarnation is qualified by its temporary character. One reason for holding this doctrine of the Exaltation, as it is called, is that it makes sense of the Ascension without requiring an otherwise unnecessary hypothesis about space.[5] Jesus did not go anywhere – by becoming omnipresent he went everywhere. A more important reason is that the love which is an excellence does not involve reckless sacrifice, such as taking a serious risk of drowning in order merely to retrieve an object of sentimental value to your beloved. Kenosis is easily accused of recklessness and permanent kenosis really would be. And if that is not persuasive I suggest that the divine joy experienced by the persons of the Trinity requires normal divine powers. So, out of love for each other, none of them would permanently abdicate their powers.

Although I am not committed to this, we might also suppose that the temporary character of kenosis is not merely true but is essential for being a divine person. So no divine person could abdicate power permanently. I mention this largely because Morris, who eventually rejects the kenotic account, provides a

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sympathetic interpretation of it in which the 'omni' properties are not essential. Rather the essential properties have the qualification 'unless freely and temporarily choosing to be otherwise'.[6]

Kenosis and the essential divine attributes

The most widespread objection to kenotic accounts is that the 'omni' properties are essential divine attributes, so divine persons cannot lose them, whether they want to or not. A similar objection is that to be unchanging is essential to being divine, so divine persons could not lose any attributes, even if not considered essential on other grounds.

Here we could distinguish between: (a) an attribute being necessary *de dicto*, that is, necessary if something is to belong to the kind, divine person; and (b) an attribute being necessary *de re*, that is, necessary for the existence of the person in question, whether or not that person ceases to be divine. As Morris points out, if the 'omni' attributes were necessary *de dicto* but not *de re* then kenosis would be possible but would imply that the Word ceased to be divine.[7] If, however, the 'omni' attributes were necessary *de re*, then the Word could not lose them, except perhaps by ceasing to exist. In whichever sense we take it, if the 'omni' attributes are necessary then the kenotic account as I have stated it is false. For I am proposing that Jesus was truly divine but lacked normal divine powers.

At this point defenders of the kenotic theory are tempted to qualify the standard list of attributes. Morris suggests the qualification 'unless freely and temporarily choosing to be otherwise'.[8] I think he is right, but by itself this provides no defence against the objection that a divine person is immutable. For an immutable divine person cannot choose to be otherwise. In any case, unless some further rationale is provided, the method of qualifying traditional attributes is ad hoc and so a weakness in an account.

The problem, as I understand it, is not with the kenotic account of the Incarnation itself so much as the attempt to combine that account with a classical conception of the divine. The problem is solved by adopting a more thoroughly kenotic theology. To argue for this I first note that there can be various different *conceptions* of God without any ambiguity in the *concept* of God.[9] This may be illustrated by means of a once common abuse of students by philosophy lecturers. A purportedly unbiased discussion of the Argument from Evil would begin with something not discussed at all – a definition of God as omnipotent, omniscient, and morally good. Any students who suggested qualifying these attributes would be told they had changed the topic. But that is not a definition, at least not in the sense of an accurate analysis of our concept of God. Far better is St Anselm's 'that than which no greater can be conceived of', although, for various reasons I would then gloss 'greater' as 'properly more awe-inspiring'. For present purposes these details may not matter much, so let us just talk of a perfect being. Our conceptions

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of God are based upon (implicit) inferences about what sort of entity a perfect being would have to be. For a start I share with most Christians a personal conception of God, namely that a perfect being would be either a person or a community of persons. But it does not follow that a pantheist who rejects the personal conception of the divine is using the words 'divine' and 'God' differently from me.[10] Rather there is a different conception because an inference I find obvious has been rejected by the pantheist. Likewise the philosophy lecturer who defined God as omnipotent, omniscient, and morally good was mistaking the 'omni' God conception for a definition. This 'omni' God conception is based upon an (implicit) inference that a perfect being would 'obviously' have to have the maximum amount of power, knowledge, and goodness.

Now the Anselmian definition coheres well with a process of subration or *aufhebung* whereby we progress from more to less inadequate conceptions of God as we conceive of something greater than anything we had previously conceived of. The central thesis of kenotic theism is that we should progress beyond the 'omni-God' conception to that of the kenotic God who out of love abandons absolute power, while retaining sufficient power to warrant total trust. It follows that there is nothing ad hoc about Morris's 'unless freely and temporarily choosing to be otherwise' qualification to the 'omni' attributes. Likewise, there is nothing ad hoc in first replacing the divine attribute of immutability by the power to remain unchanged and then qualifying that power with the 'unless freely and temporarily choosing to be otherwise' qualification.

The resulting conception is of a God who had the power to remain forever unchanging, as an omnipotent and omniscient being. Such a being, even if a single person, would have been great, but there is something greater yet, namely a community of divine persons who are able and willing to abandon their initial omnipotence and omniscience.[11]

I now turn to three objections to the account I have just given of the divine attributes. First, there is Feenstra's objection that Morris's qualification is too permissive. I am committed to that qualification, so I need to consider Feenstra's objection. It is that, given Morris's qualification, all three divine persons could simultaneously abdicate the powers normal for a divine being.[12] I shall restate this problem as an inconsistent tetrad:

(1) Each divine person has the unqualified power to abdicate normal divine powers.
(2) If a number of persons have the unqualified power to do something then it is possible that they all exercise that power.
(3) If all divine persons exercise the divine power to abdicate normal divine powers then God as a whole would cease to have normal divine powers.
(4) But necessarily God retains normal divine powers.

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Feenstra rejects (1), and after some discussion, suggests instead that a divine person has the essential attribute of only being able to abdicate divine power by becoming kenotically incarnate which can only happen for the purposes of redemption.[13] Not only does Feenstra's qualification seem rather ad hoc, it does not prevent the possibility of all three persons simultaneously abdicating normal divine powers by becoming incarnate. For that might happen if there were three planets whose inhabitants simultaneously required redemption. So I shall not reject (1).[14] Now (3) could only be rejected if we thought of God as something additional to the community of divine persons, which is not merely an unnecessary complication, but would seem to suggest that creation is the work of some impersonal force which operates through the divine persons who are not therefore free. This would conflict with my personal conception of a perfect being. Therefore to defend my position I should abandon either (2) or (4). First consider (4). I ask why we would object to the idea that God as a whole, and not just one (or two) divine persons, might abandon normal divine powers? The only reason I can think of is that it would be foolish or wrong to do so. Perhaps this is because it would interfere with the life of the Trinity, or because God needs to exercise providential care over the universe or perhaps because God's continual activity is required to keep the universe in existence, and it would be wrong having created the universe just to let it cease to exist. Now it has been pointed out that none of these reasons require the retention of *full* divine powers.[15] While I grant this I note that the problem being discussed can be restated with the phrase 'normal divine power' interpreted as 'sufficient divine power to sustain a universe in existence'. And rejecting (4) will not solve the restated problem. So there is a case for retaining (4) but I note that it depends on the thesis that God is necessarily good.[16] Otherwise we could say that we have every reason to hope the divine persons would not do anything as rash as simultaneously abandoning normal divine powers, but that this is nonetheless possible.

I now argue that if we accept the thesis of necessary divine goodness, as I think we should, then (2) should be abandoned. (And if we do not accept that thesis we can reject (4).) Now (2) seemed plausible only because we took it for granted that if a person has a power it is possible for that person to exercise it, and then we asked ourselves what could possibly prevent several persons simultaneously exercising their powers. But I reject what was taken for granted. Having the freedom to exercise a power is compatible with necessarily never exercising it. For, a necessarily good person will necessarily never exercise the power to act wrongly, a necessarily wise person will necessarily never exercise the power to act foolishly, and so on. The necessity governs the intentions, and so does not interfere with the freedom to act in accordance with other, impossible, intentions.

I grant that this is a compatibilist position, reconciling necessity and freedom, but it is not an attempt to reconcile causal determinism and freedom. If someone is caused by earlier events to act in one way rather than another that, I grant, is not

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freedom. The sort of moderate compatibilism I am here considering occurs when no earlier event causes the divine person to act one way or the other. It is just that the divine character is necessarily such that wrong or foolish acts are never performed. To those who reject even this moderate compatibilism I have a doubly *ad hominem* argument. Can God create something God has no power over – a stone too 'heavy' for God to 'lift'? It would seem that an essentially omnipotent God has less power than one who is not essentially omnipotent, because an essentially omnipotent God lacks powers of self-limitation.[17] Now the classical conception of God as omnipotent is based on the assumption that power contributes to greatness. So as an *ad hominem* we can argue in favour of the kenotic conception of God as having once been omnipotent but as having exercised a kenotic power of self-limitation. Against this, defenders of the classical conception could provide the compatibilist reply, namely that God has the power of self-limitation but necessarily does not exercise it. This is fair enough except that I am engaged in an *ad hominem* against those who deny such compatibilism.

The above reply to Feenstra's objection might make us reconsider the question of divine immutability. The kenotic account was that divine persons are under no compulsion to change but may freely do so. Now it could be objected that while this is adequate as part of an account of divine greatness, there is another reason for holding that God is immutable. For, as Davis observes in his discussion notes, Geach argues that a mutable God would have to have a cause, but God has no cause.[18] But, as Davis points out, Geach's argument seems to depend on a strong version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, namely that anything changeable has a cause, not the less controversial version that anything that comes into existence has a cause.[19] Or we might replace the strong version with the appealing principle that every change has an intuitively adequate explanation, where in the case of divine changes the divine motives of goodness and love would be adequate as explanations of the change.

The Exaltation

Does a kenotic account of the Incarnation require the Exaltation? Or might, instead, the kenosis be permanent? One reason for rejecting permanent kenosis is the thought that the Word might have extra-terrestrial incarnations and that the saving power of these would require resumption of normal divine attributes before the further incarnation. But that is too speculative to be of much weight. Instead, as I have already mentioned, permanent kenosis would be reckless. Moreover it would conflict with the love for the other divine persons. For surely giving is part of loving and giving is frustrated by lack of means.

Feenstra in his discussion notes the problem posed by the Exaltation. If, as Baillie argues, the 'distinctive' divine and human attributes are incompatible then the Exaltation requires that Jesus lose his humanity on resuming normal divine

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powers.[20] The simplest response to this is that of Brown and others cited by Feenstra: deny the humanity of the exalted Christ. I would be reluctant to adopt this response because of its incompatibility with traditional devotion to Jesus as mediator between the purely divine and the purely human. Moreover, it is excluded by the considerations of personal identity to be discussed at the end of the paper. Feenstra considers two other solutions: arguing that kenosis is required for becoming human but not for remaining human; and arguing that the Incarnation does not imply kenosis even though the Incarnation was accompanied by kenosis.[21] These two solutions agree that the kenosis could come to an end even though Jesus continued to be human, or, in a minor variant, resumes humanity in the future after a non-human interlude. And that is the position which I shall defend.

This leaves me with the following problem: why should we abandon the classical account of the earthly life of Jesus if we are to assume just that account of his exalted life?[22] The answer to this question depends on the reasons we have for preferring a kenotic to a classical account. Since the purpose of this paper is merely to defend the kenotic account I will not discuss those reasons in detail. I shall merely claim, without further argument, that while being human is compatible with having normal divine powers there are some limitations which a person of normal divine powers could not have, but which in the Incarnation reveal the nature of divine love. I shall call these limitations the *paradoxical* attributes because there is an air of Kierkegaardian paradox in Jesus' possession of a limitation necessary for revealing that which is unlimited. I believe, but shall not here argue, that Jesus had two such paradoxical attributes: his capacity to share human suffering at its worst, namely suffering unrelieved by any accompanying joy; and his capacity to be genuinely tempted. These paradoxical attributes were required in order for Jesus to reveal divine love but not in order for him to be human. Having revealed divine love there is no need for him to go on revealing it. Hence the exalted Christ can be human while having the normal divine powers even though the purpose of the Incarnation required that Jesus, while on earth, did not have these powers.

How is kenotic incarnation possible?

The defence of a kenotic account of the Incarnation is incomplete until we answer some awkward questions concerning personal identity, questions which have been unduly neglected. For unless it is possible, and not merely conceivable, that the human being Jesus is the very same person as the pre-Incarnation Word, not even divine power can bring it about.

There are two main contenders for theories of personal identity: versions of the Simple View and versions of the Psychological Continuity Theory. The former asserts that either personal identity cannot be further explained or is explained by

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positing some enduring component or constituent of a person, such as a Cartesian ego or, on Swinburne's current version of the Simple View, a thisness.[23]

The Psychological Continuity Theory comes in many versions but the following is representative. It asserts that: (i) persons are essentially historical beings, so that to be a given person is to be as that person now is and to have had that person's history; (ii) a person's history is a sequence of stages which are (a) explanatorily connected in the appropriate way, that is, later stages are as they are largely because earlier stages were as they were, and (b) there are no abrupt changes or discontinuities in the sequence of stages; (iii) a person at one time is said to be the same person as a person at another time only if one of the histories is part of the other.

I am not asserting that there is nothing more to personal identity than the conditions given in this account. For a start even though persons are essentially historical every person has to be a person of some kind, and, I assume, no one can remain the same person if they lose one of the attributes characteristic of that person-kind. Hence I assume that a divine person cannot cease to be divine. Furthermore, just as according to moderate dualists the mental depends upon but is not fully explained by the physical, likewise it can be said that being the same person is a mysterious matter which is not fully explained in terms of such necessary and sufficient conditions which we are able to formulate for personal identity. The Psychological Continuity Theory, then, might not be the whole truth concerning personal identity. But I am not concerned with the whole truth, merely that part of the truth which makes it problematic to say of a certain human being, Jesus, that he is the very same person as the Word.

The Psychological Continuity Theory has the consequence that a person could undergo fission, which, in the human case Swinburne takes as a reason for holding the Simple View, positing thisnesses. But, for good reasons, he rejects this in the divine case, where it would have the further disadvantage of making the Trinity problematic.[24] I am inclined to reject the Simple View in all cases, but, fortunately, this issue need not be decided here. For I note that if we hold the Simple View, the possibility of a kenotic incarnation would be trivial in two ways. First it would be trivial in the sense that the required identity of thisness or ego may simply be asserted. But second, it would be trivial in the sense that nothing much has been accomplished. For the point of the doctrine is not to assert the unity of the human and the divine in some ontological sense with no consequence, which is what identity of thisness would amount to. Even were the Simple View correct Christians would need to assert in addition the psychological continuity of the humanity and divinity of Jesus, resulting in discussions just like those which arise for the Incarnation if we assume the Psychological Continuity Theory.

As far as the dispute between the Simple View and Psychological Continuity is concerned, then, we should concentrate on the latter. Before doing so, however, we should briefly consider two other, less popular, theories of personal identity.

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There is the possibility of requiring both a strictly identical component, say a thisness, and psychological continuity. But given the triviality of the implications of the Simple View for the Incarnation that would leave us with the same problem as with Psychological Continuity. There is also, of course, the theory that to be the same person there must be the same living organism. Although this would be inconsistent with the Incarnation as usually stated, it would not be a genuine threat to Christianity. For were we to accept that theory, then psychological continuity would be more significant for us than personal identity. So rather than reject the doctrine of the Incarnation, we should reformulate it as asserting the psychological continuity of the humanity and divinity of Jesus.

Regardless of just which is the best theory of personal identity we should, therefore, assume the Psychological Continuity Theory when discussing the Incarnation.

Prior to the Incarnation, the Word enjoys normal divine powers. Perhaps these are limited by previous kenotic acts such as granting free will to some creatures. Nonetheless, on the kenotic account there is an infinite difference between the power and knowledge of the pre-incarnate Word and the powerlessness and ignorance of Jesus at birth. So how could there be continuity? But even supposing continuity, we might wonder whether the enormous difference between the two states is compatible with personal identity. And there is a third problem, to do with the explanatory connection. To be sure there is no problem with the pre-incarnate Word causing Jesus to be born with certain characteristics. This requires only that either at creation or subsequently the Word guide humanity's and Israel's history providentially. But there is still a problem for psychological continuity. For how can it be that the details of Jesus' life on Earth are explained by the details of earlier stages of the Word?

First let us consider the continuity problem. There is no difficulty with a continuity between the finite and the infinite provided it is possible for a process to be made up of an actual infinity of stages. We may suppose that to have divine power is to have knowledge of an infinity of possible worlds, knowing which parts of them are actual and which merely possible, and to be able to actualize any part that is not actual but still possible.[25] We may think of this infinite domain of possibilities as divided into infinitely many portions, each comparable to that which a human being can know and have power over. Whatever infinity we are considering, removing the knowledge and power piece by piece must, in an infinity of stages – the same infinity – reduce the divine consciousness to a human one. Instead of one big act of kenosis there could be a kenotic process made up of an infinity of small kenotic acts whereby the Word gradually comes to have purely human powers.

There are three possible objections to this account of continuity. First there are those who deny the actual infinity. Clearly they would reject the account I gave of the divine knowledge and power, but they would also reject the idea that there

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could be an actual infinity of real stages in any process. They may well be right, but if they are then the same objection holds to any continuous process, such as that occurring in Zeno's paradox of Achilles and the tortoise. Hence whatever we say of the latter we can say of the process of kenosis.[26]

The second objection is that, given the usual ideas we have about time, we cannot have a process made up of more than countably many stages yet there must surely be uncountably many possible worlds. Suppose I grant the impossibility of a process with uncountably many stages. I could still insist that continuity requires only that at each stage an infinitesimal proportion of the divine power and knowledge be removed from the Word, even if each infinitesimal proportion is itself infinite. Since anything, however large, can be thought of as made up of countably many parts which are infinitesimal as proportions of the original, it would follow that only countably many stages are required.

The final objection is, I think, the most important. It is that as kenosis occurs there should be physical correlates to the process – something should happen in the universe. But, the objection goes, this would be contrary to the laws of nature and, more serious, noticeable. My reply is that either, as I hold, free acts are quite compatible with the laws of nature or these laws have exceptions which accommodate free acts. I see no reason why the act of kenosis should raise problems not already there in the case of free human acts. To reply to the more serious part of the objection, we need to speculate about the physical correlates of a gradual restriction of the Word's powers. To illustrate the sort of speculation we might come up with, let us concentrate on the moral order and let us suppose that it has been decided that providential guidance for human beings is divided up as follows: that which provides the basic understanding of morality and a command-like motivation to act rightly comes from the first person, that which provides the practical wisdom to act rightly rather than merely with good intentions comes from the third, and that which provides the opportunity for repentance or change of heart comes from the second, the Word. We may also suppose that to rebel freely against the divine will expressed by the guidance of the first two persons nullifies the guidance of the third until there is repentance, and, as a result, general moral principles are respected but misapplied. That in turn results in appropriate guilt but no effective means for improvement. If that were so, then as the Word underwent kenosis, humans were increasingly left without any providential guidance towards repentance, which therefore becomes haphazard. This would result in a gradual deterioration of the moral order, accompanied by an increase in guilt and a corresponding increase in misguided ways of trying to eliminate guilt, such as human sacrifice. Such a deterioration would have been of immense importance but not perhaps that noticeable to historians.

Gradual kenosis does not by itself establish the psychological continuity between the pre-Incarnation and post-Incarnation stages. For the psychological states of Jesus must be explained by and continuous with earlier stages. Here, I

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suggest, we need to consider character, projects and memories. As regards character, continuity could be ensured by Jesus having perfect love. And Jesus' project seems to have been to call as many as he could to repentance, leading to friendship with himself and reconciliation with the first person. And we may assume that this is a continuation of the distinctive role of the Word in human affairs. We still need to give an account of Jesus' memories. Now full recall is not required for psychological continuity, but I do not think the continuity of character and projects is sufficiently great to establish psychological continuity if Jesus had no memories of the pre-Incarnation state. So I am committed to something that might seem all too classical to those attracted by kenosis, namely that Jesus had some sort of memories of his former state. My commitment might surprise those who would insist that in the ordinary human case persons could survive total amnesia. But the case of the Incarnation lacks those factors which replace memory in the case of total amnesia: the continuity of body image; and the continuity of routine behaviour patterns, such as the way of eating, the way of dressing, the way of walking, and so on.

We should suppose, then, that Jesus had a memory of the life of the Trinity, and in particular of what the first person was like, which he could not communicate to his disciples. Perhaps this memory would, in neurophysiological terms, be somewhat like the recollection of a mystical experience. But in any case we may suppose it to be connected with his incapacity to sin and his having perfect divine love.

For personal identity the successive stages should not merely be continuous but earlier stages should explain later ones, and explain them in the appropriate way. If we ignore the proviso that the explanation be appropriate then we have no problem. The Word providentially arranges for the occurrence of the requisite kind of human being to occur just as the last of the normal divine powers is abdicated. The proviso cannot, however, be ignored. For an appropriateness condition is standard in accounts of memory and psychological continuity more generally. For example, you do not remember your first birthday if you have an apparent memory caused by seeing a video recording of the event, even though that apparent memory depends, in detail, on the events of your first birthday. Likewise, it is doubtful if psychological continuity is ensured if a human being dies and eventually leaves no trace but God then decides to recreate a qualitatively identical person at the Resurrection of the Dead. Hence is it is not sufficient for an incarnation that the Word providentially arranges for a perfect human being to have the appropriate character, projects and apparent memories, while simultaneously abdicating all power.

The appropriateness requirement is, I submit, satisfied if and only if the divine kenosis itself may be said to cause the existence of the human being who was Jesus, with that character and projects, and with those memories, which, as a consequence are genuine, not merely apparent, memories. This might prompt a redescription question directed at the kenotic account. What, it could be asked, is

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the difference between the divine kenosis causing Jesus' existence and the hypothetical situation in which the Word ensures the occurrence of human being with appropriate character projects and 'memory' at just the moment that all power and knowledge are abdicated? In either case the Word gradually restricts power and knowledge and ceases to have anything like normal divine powers just prior to the coming into existence of the human being, Jesus, who has the appropriate character, projects, and memories. In either case we have for each stage S of the kenosis a set of possibilities P(S) which the Word has power to actualize at stage S, where if S* is later than S then P(S*) is contained in P(S). Fortunately this redescription question can be given a precise answer. The product of the process of kenosis is specified by the intersection of the P(S), that is the by the set of possibilities which the Word has the power to actualize at every stage in the process. In the case of total abdication this intersection would be empty. In the case of the Incarnation this intersection is just the set of possibilities which Jesus has the power to actualize by making such free choices in his life as he can make.[27]

A corollary of this is that Jesus must have been excepted from any divine kenosis by which the Word ceased to have power over human affairs, for the sake of our freedom. For were Jesus not such an exception then the Incarnation would have resulted in a total abdication of the Word's power rather than the required continuity between the Word's power and that of Jesus.

Finally, I need to consider whether the exalted Christ could be identical to the human being Jesus if, as Brown suggests, he is no longer human. The problem here is that a purely divine Christ would have the same sort of knowledge of what it was like to have been Mary, or John, as of what it was like to have been Jesus. It is only if the exalted Christ knows some things in the divine way and others in a human way that he can have the memories which seem to be required for him to be identical with Jesus, rather than anyone else who came to share in the Word's project of reconciling humanity to the God. I conclude that the identity of Jesus with a purely divine person prior to the Incarnation is less problematic than any supposed identity with a purely divine person after the Exaltation.[28]

Notes

1. Or that the water was annihilated and wine created *ex nihilo*. For present purposes this will not be distinguished from the turning of water into wine.
2. See Ronald J. Feenstra 'Reconsidering kenotic Christology', in Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga Jr (eds) *Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 130.
3. Stephen T. Davis *Logic and the Nature of God* (London: Macmillan, 1983), 125–126.
4. *Ibid*., 125.
5. As C. S. Lewis noted, twentieth-century ideas about space and time make a fairly literal interpretation of the Ascension more believable than they have been at any time since the medieval world view was abandoned. For there is nothing in contemporary physics that excludes treating heaven as a parallel universe literally less than a mile from ours – or an inch. So Jesus might have moved continuously from our universe to heaven. But why hypothesize this without good reason?

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6. Thomas V. Morris *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 99.
7. *Ibid*., 93.
8. *Ibid*., 99.
9. I am indebted to Fred d'Agostino for helping me see just how important the Rawlsian concept/conception distinction is in so many contexts.
10. I am indebted to Michael Levine for drawing this to my attention.
11. See my 'Divine fission: a new way of moderating social trinitarianism', *Religious Studies*, **34** (1998), 281–298.
12. Feenstra 'Reconsidering kenotic Christology', 140.
13. *Ibid*., 142.
14. Feenstra also considers the suggestion that only one of the three persons has the capacity to become incarnate. He rejects this because it contradicts the orthodoxy that the three persons are coequal (142).
15. By one of the anonymous referees for this journal.
16. For a discussion of this see Morris *The Logic of God Incarnate*, ch. 5.
17. The classical reply here is that 'a stone too heavy for God to lift' is incoherent because, God being omnipotent, there cannot be such a stone. So, it is said, the supposed power is not a genuine one. But incoherence requires more than necessary falsehood. It requires, at least, inconsistency with the definition of God. So this classical reply is itself based upon the incorrect premise that our *concept* of God is of an omnipotent being.
18. Davis *Logic and the Nature of God*, ch. 3.
19. *Ibid*., 50–51.
20. Feenstra 'Reconsidering kenotic Christology', 144.
21. *Ibid*., 147–148.
22. I take it that this is Baillie's objection when, in a passage quoted by Feenstra, he says 'The presupposition of the [kenotic] theory is that the distinctive divine attributes… and the distinctive human attributes… cannot be united simultaneously…'; (Feenstra 'Reconsidering kenotic Christology', 144).
23. Richard Swinburne *The Christian God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), ch. 2.
24. *Ibid*., 163–169.
25. God's actualizing preexisting *possibilia* is Plantinga's way of describing the divine creative power. I prefer to describe it in terms of God increasing the determinacy of an indeterminate actual world. Some might object to the (moderate) modal realism implicit in either of these descriptions. Presumably they can be paraphrased so as to avoid ontological commitment to *possibilia*.
26. Either a small finite number of comparatively small discontinuities occur and this is compatible with the persistence of the same objects or there is a continuous process but its infinitely many stages are not real stages of which the process is the sum but rather Whiteheadian extensive abstractions from the process.
27. Here I agree with both Morris and Swinburne in assuming that it is metaphysically impossible for Jesus, being divine, to choose the bad. Nonetheless, I hold that he had the ordinary human power to do so. But even if he did not he would still have had the power to choose the lesser good.
28. I would like to express my gratitude to the anonymous referees for this journal for their most helpful comments.

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