

Inclusion and Incarnation: a reply to Sturch

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Abstract: I make three points in response to Richard Sturch's comments on my paper: I defend my interpretation of the Morris–Swinburne (M–S) account of the Incarnation; I argue that the M–S model appears to undercut the view that the unity of consciousness can be explained in terms of the self; and third, I argue that M–S model seems to entail that God has false beliefs.

Let me begin by retracting a claim I made in 'The inclusion model of the Incarnation: problems and prospects'. I wrote there that the Morris–Swinburne account of the Incarnation had not yet been the subject of sustained scrutiny. I made this claim unaware of Sturch's impressive book *The Word and the Christ: An Essay in Analytic Christology*. In addition to containing a sophisticated version of the two-minds model, Sturch's book contains a wealth of scholarship on the models of the Incarnation and it deserves far more attention than it has received to date.

I turn now to Sturch's criticisms of my paper. Sturch has two central points. First, he argues that I've misunderstood the model of the Incarnation that Morris and Swinburne defend. Second, and more importantly, Sturch argues that, when properly understood, the Morris–Swinburne model is able to meet the problems that I raise for it. Let me begin with the exegetical question.

According to Morris and Swinburne, God the Son (Christ) had two consciousnesses: a divine consciousness, and a human consciousness, where the latter consciousness is contained with the former. I dubbed this the 'inclusion model', thinking that this label was more illuminating than the labels that Morris and Swinburne prefer – namely 'the two-minds model' and 'divided-mind model' respectively. Calling the Morris–Swinburne (M–S) model the 'inclusion model' emphasizes the claim that Christ doesn't just have two consciousnesses, but that Christ's two consciousnesses are related in a certain way.

But exactly how are they related? What did Morris mean when he said that 'the divine mind of God the Son contained, but was not contained by, his earthly mind, or range of consciousness' (Morris (1986), 103)? And what did Swinburne have

in mind is saying that we ‘get a picture of a divine consciousness and a human consciousness of God incarnate, the former including the latter but not conversely’ (Swinburne (1989), 65)? I took these claims to mean that Christ’s human experiences are quite literally contained in two consciousnesses, a human consciousness and a divine consciousness, whereas his divine experiences are only contained within his divine consciousness. That is, I took the M–S model as claiming that Christ’s two consciousnesses are related by the part–whole relation.

Sturch holds that I have misunderstood the M–S model. He holds that by ‘inclusion’ and ‘containment’ Morris and Swinburne meant that Christ’s divine consciousness contains *representations* of his human experiences. Unfortunately, he provides no textual evidence for this interpretation. I grant that Morris and Swinburne *could* have had a representational notion of inclusion in mind, but I’m inclined to think that my inclusionist reading is the more natural. In fact, Sturch himself makes a point that supports it (1991, 133). Sturch asks how Morris’s model is meant to account for the uniqueness of the Incarnation if Christ’s human experiences are only represented in the divine consciousness, for presumably Christ has representations of *all* human experiences. This point seems to me to count against a representational reading of Morris and Swinburne, since they clearly think that Christ’s divine consciousness has a form of access to his human consciousness that he lacks to any other human consciousness.

Let me now turn to two other points I made in my paper. First, I argued that the M–S model seems to be inconsistent with certain influential accounts of the unity of consciousness. Second, I argued that it seems to put pressure on the idea that God is infallible. I will deal with these two criticisms in turn. (The force of these criticisms isn’t significantly affected by whether the M–S model should be understood in inclusionist or representational terms.)

A number of authors have suggested that we can account for the unity of consciousness by appealing to a substantial self (or soul). Swinburne seems to hold such an account (1997, 160), and Sturch also has some sympathy for it (see Sturch (1991), 129). But if Christ, a single subject, can have two consciousnesses, then we can’t appeal to the self to *account* for the unity of consciousness. Even if a set of experiences must be had by the same self in order to be unified, their being had by the same self doesn’t explain why they are unified. This means that we need to appeal to other factors to account for the unity of consciousness, and this undercuts the (or at least *a*) central motivation for positing a soul or substantial self.

And so to infallibility. I argued that inclusionists are committed to the claim that Christ had false beliefs, for if the contents of Christ’s human consciousness was ‘thoroughly human, Jewish, and first-century Palestinian in nature’ (Morris), then it seems reasonable to expect that it will contain various false beliefs, and thus it follows that God is not infallible. The argument may not be all that sophisticated, but it does strike me as rather persuasive.

Sturch isn't impressed. He grants that Jesus had false beliefs, but denies that this implies that God has false beliefs, even though he holds that Jesus was God. 'God has no false beliefs, and can have none; but false beliefs could be and doubtless were held by someone who was in fact divine.' I really don't know what to make of this claim. If Jesus was God, and Jesus had false beliefs, then God had false beliefs. Something has to give. Sturch states that it is important to distinguish the 'Word' which refers to God the Son, from 'Jesus', which refers to the son of Mary (n. 3). This distinction may be important in opaque contexts, but it is not relevant in a debate that is premised on the orthodox belief that the son of Mary was none other than the Son of God. Presumably the reason why it's permissible to apply the same predicates to both the Word and Jesus is that, being the same individual, they share the same properties.

There is, I realize, much more to be said about the two-minds accounts of the Incarnation – in particular, Sturch's 'central-self' version of the model deserves some critical attention – but further discussion will have to wait for another occasion.

References

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