

Mere Incarnation: On the Fallenness View of Jesus's Human Nature

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Chalcedonian Christology has always been clear on the full humanity of Jesus, but in recent years select scholars have begun to make the further claim that the Son assumes not merely a human nature, but a fallen human nature (henceforth the “fallenness view”). The argument is caught up in incarnational logic and its rootedness in the matter of atonement. Thus writes Edward Irving, “What are the two things to be brought at one? Are they not God and sinful fallen man? And where are they to be brought at one, but in the person of Christ, where we have them now brought together without any original sin?” (1866, 160). Karl Barth held that Jesus’s humanity was fallen for similar reasons. “If it were otherwise, how could Christ be really like us? What concern would we have with Him? . . . God’s Son not only assumed our nature but He entered the concrete *form* of our nature, under which we stand before God as men damned and lost” (1936, 153, emphasis mine). These and other works led Kelly Kopic to issue a call for clarity in 2001.

As I see it, there are two principal pieces of evidence in favor of the fallenness view. First, the author of Hebrews writes that the Son “had to be made like His brethren in all things.” And later, he is one “who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 2:17; 4:15 NASB). If Jesus is like us in all things, fallenness would appear to be included; furthermore if fallenness sets the terms for temptation, it seems to follow that Jesus’s humanity must be fallen to be tempted as we are. Second, there is the now axiomatic suggestion from Gregory of Nazianzus with respect to Apollinarianism that Jesus must have had a human mind, “For that which he has not assumed he has not healed” (1954, 218).¹ If the Son only heals what he assumes, and if he is to redeem fallen humanity, it would seem to be the case that he must assume a fallen humanity in order for us fallen humans to be redeemed. Conversely, against the fallenness view is the problem of how fallenness relates to sinfulness; if the two are logically interdependent or exist in an entailment relation, it is difficult to affirm a fallen human nature in Jesus without locating sinfulness in God.

In what follows, I investigate the fallenness view on the basis of these two pieces of evidence. The first half of the essay centers on the available literature around the fallenness view. I here show first how others have distinguished between fallenness and sinfulness, and second the relation of fallenness and temptation in order to get a better sense of what it means to be tempted “as we are.” I then move to raise a few immediate concerns with the fallenness view. The second half of the essay is more constructive. Crisp has observed, “An important motivation in much of the literature in favor of the fallenness view is that Christ must assume a fallen human nature in order to heal fallen human natures” (2019, 244). I take up this line of reasoning with respect to Gregory’s axiom in order to show that fallenness is not itself a likely object of healing, but rather the kind of thing *of which* such an object (e.g., the human nature)

¹ Ian A. McFarland understands Gregory to be expanding on the concern in Hebrews 2; Jesus became like his brethren in all things *so that* he might be a faithful high priest (2008, 400).

might be healed. I will show that though the fallenness view is logically permissible, there is little impetus to affirm it. An unfallenness view is thus to be preferred.²

1. The Fallenness View in Writing

1.1 Defining Fallenness

If the fallenness view is to be at all entertained, we must first capture an approximate sense of its meaning; unfortunately, as Kopic has noted, the many voices involved in the debate on fallenness tend to disagree on the matter (2001, 163–64). At minimum, “fallenness” must refer a priori to the distinguishing feature of some thing as opposed to its condition in Eden. As far as I can tell, with regard to the content of “fallen humanity,” three views seem common: [1] Fallenness is a *passive condition* with which humanity is afflicted or burdened, having to do with whatever weaknesses or infirmities now attach to it (e.g., weariness, hunger, etc.); [2] fallenness is humanity’s present inability not to sin, or the *status* of being *non posse non peccare*; or [3] fallenness is identical with *original sin*, whether we take that to involve corruption only (however that be understood) or corruption and guilt.³ But fallenness is not confined to human beings or even moral actors; it rather extends to all creation. God’s pronouncement of judgment in Genesis 3 makes this clear enough. The major actors in the creation drama—the serpent, Eve, and Adam—receive consequences in due turn, but God does not stop there; the ground is implicated in Adam’s decision to eat of the tree, growing thorns and thistles and yielding its product only in toil (Gen. 3:17–19). Paul tells us that nature is itself subject to “corruption,” that it groans (and we with it!) in wait of glory (Rom. 8:18–25). It therefore seems that a good definition of fallenness will be able to account for the various objects to which it attaches. If I am right, [2] should be ruled out; the proclivity to sin does not differentiate pre- and post-lapsarian ground because ground does not sin.⁴ Options [1] and [3] seem workable, but for [3] to work, original sin must not involve original guilt (a question beyond my present interests); that is, fallenness could be identical with original corruption. But if fallenness is just original corruption, it could be included in the kind of “passive condition” emphasized in [1]. Still, to avoid possible conflation, I will simply suggest that [1] or something like it is probably our best bet for understanding fallenness in a way that can account for fallen creatures beside humanity. That is, fallenness makes the most sense as a *passive condition* afflicting creatures east of Eden.

² Crisp dubs the two options “fallenness” and “sinlessness” views, but the terms are unequal in force; I have opted for the rather unwieldy “unfallenness” in order to avoid some of the problems Crisp creates (2004, 271).

³ I have borrowed these points (with some modification) from Timothy Pawl (2020, 21–22). Pawl collapses the second and third point into one, but I think there is some distinction.

⁴ Where “sin” refers to moral decision-making/rebellion, anyway. Where sin is something more ontological, (e.g., a thing’s conformity to God), perhaps [2] can fit, but the idea of being *non posse non peccare* seems more active in scope. C.f. the discussion in Crisp (2019, 238–39). One could here argue that I am being unnecessarily broad. We know different creatures exemplify fallenness in different ways; just as fallen humans are prone to sin while fallen ground is not, so also fallen ground grows thorns and thistles while fallen humans do not. It therefore might be the case that fallenness simply manifests differently in different creatures. It seems to me, however, that these differences make the most sense as varying symptoms of one “disease,” in which case a broad approach like mine makes the most sense. If that is right, proclivity to sin and growing thorns and thistles are not themselves to be understood as fallenness, but its consequences.

With regard to the Son's assumption of a fallen or unfallen human nature, the matter seems to turn on the relationship between fallenness and sinfulness. Darren Sumner puts it, "The basic question in the dispute, then, is whether the notion of 'fallenness' is coherent, or has any useful content, if it does not entail sinfulness by necessity" (2014, 196). Likewise Ian McFarland, arguing for the fallenness view, cautions, "[I]f fallenness is a symptom of sinfulness, then it becomes difficult to affirm a fallen nature where there is no sin" (2008, 401). And Kopic, describing some of the reformed literature on the matter, writes, "To speak of fallen man is to speak of man the sinner. To try and separate these two can be perceived as artificial, leading only to further debate" (2001, 163).

If some distinction can be made between fallenness and sinfulness, the fallenness view is at least on the table. Oliver Crisp is doubtful any such distinction exists: "The problem is that all existing attempts to give some account of this distinction are unable to make good on this requirement" (2019, 239). He may be overstating his case; there are options that appear workable. First, we might regard sinfulness as the condition of someone who commits sins rather than that of being affected or corrupted by sin.⁵ This is easily distinguished from my own description of fallenness as something passive. It of course could be the case that fallenness and sinfulness normally cohere, but if the two are logically distinct, there is at least conceptual space for fallen yet sinless human being, however extraordinary. But then, if there is any human we expect to be extraordinary, it would doubtless be the God-man.⁶

McFarland provides a more technical means by which we might distinguish fallenness from sinfulness by attempting to delineate the relation between the individual and her nature: "In short, human nature is indeterminate in the sense that a human being is *someone* rather than *something*, and thus not adequately or fully described in terms of *what* they are" (2008, 410, emphasis original). This leads McFarland to differentiate between nature and hypostasis or person, the "whatness" versus the "whoness" of an individual. In this sense, human nature is "indeterminate." "Whatness" only provides a part of the picture. But further, "whatness" is insufficient to understand what actually causes humans to sin. McFarland writes, "[T]he reason human beings sin is that their desires are perverse. But when it comes to explaining *why* those desires are perverse, the only answer that can be given is, 'Because we are sinners'" (411, emphasis original). But "sinner" is a category of "whoness," and this is how McFarland attempts to reframe how we conceive of the will; though the will is for McFarland a property of human nature, he suggests its content actually derives from the hypostasis. This allows him to chart an important difference between fallenness and sinfulness by relating them to separate categories of being, as it were. "[F]allenness is a property of nature and sin of hypostasis" (412). In the case of normal human being, nature and hypostasis are inseparable, "so that if the former is fallen, the latter is sinful" (412). But since Christ's hypostasis pre-exists his human nature, he can himself be sinless in his person though his human nature be fallen. McFarland ultimately supposes that a fallen human nature is a damaged human nature (option [1] above) but does not specify what this damage comprises. Whatever its content, McFarland argues that this damage should not be construed either as punishment for sin or as itself sinful (406, 413–

⁵ This seems to have been Irving's understanding; though he suggests God and "sinful fallen man" are united in the person of Jesus, Jesus himself is not sinful (Irving 1866, 158–60).

⁶ Of course proponents of such a view will need to defend themselves from the charge of Pelagianism. (As one anonymous referee has pointed out, however, if one maintains that this sinlessness is only achievable through grace, this charge is easy enough to ward off.) Thomas H. McCall's description of a corruption-only view of original sin is helpful (McCall 2019, 156–61).

14).⁷ If his argument that sinfulness obtains in the person rather than the nature holds, “talk of sinful *natures* is best avoided, since even a nature so damaged as to be ‘fallen’ remains good and not evil” (413). For McFarland, this discussion is sufficient only to show that the fallenness view is logically *permissible*; it should be noted he does not attempt to demonstrate the view is logically necessary (400–401).⁸

Something should also be said of *anhypostatic* fallenness. The idea is most clearly articulated in Sumner, but he suggests it “is finally all that advocates of the fallenness position want to say” (2014, 201). Here Jesus’s humanity is anhypostatically fallen such that, were the same human nature to exist in another human hypostasis, that person would be sinful. Despite his criticism of the fallenness view, Crisp thinks something like this can succeed if this anhypostatically fallen nature is enhypostatically sanctified. This seems another workable option, though not without risks (2019, 244).⁹ It may also be worth noting that such a view is a good candidate for historical support.¹⁰ As for Sumner’s suggestion that this is all the proponents of fallenness mean to say, this is less than clear. In McFarland’s case, for instance, the nature the Son assumes is damaged (somehow); the will is deified in the assumption but the nature is not (409, 413–14). Thomas Weinandy, in another recent entry to the debate, seems to conceive of fallenness as prevalent in the life of Jesus, such that a fallen humanity in Jesus actually makes him concupiscent (2006, 168).¹¹

1.2 Temptation and Peccability

If sinfulness and fallenness can be distinguished, the fallenness view is at least permissible; McFarland and Sumner provide two workable options to achieve this. Turning now to the issue of temptation, it should be observed that the fallenness view is attractive because it more closely reflects the solidarity between Jesus and man with regards to the fact that he became tempted “in every way as we are.” As Sumner puts it, “If his work is to atone for the sins of our entire species, Jesus had to be completely *like us*—and not just like us but *one of us*” (2014, 197–98, emphasis original). Jesus can be tempted if he possesses an unfallen nature, but it is less clear that he can be tempted *as we are* with an unfallen nature, particularly if we understand fallenness in terms of a proclivity to sin. McFarland draws this point out well: “Because Christ came to be among fallen human beings so that he could be (as both Hebrews 2 and 4 agree) tested *as they were*, it would seem reasonable to suppose that he would need to share the damaged condition of postlapsarian humanity” (2008, 408). On the other hand, though, if Christ’s will is indefectible (as thinkers on both side of the matter have affirmed), this solidarity

⁷ McFarland’s move here is to suggest that this damage is not punishment for our own individual sinfulness (otherwise, the sinless Jesus could not be fallen) nor is this damage morally reprehensible, “a symptom rather than a cause of our separation from God” (415). He goes the extra mile and rejects original (or congenital) guilt on this basis, arguing that it conflates fallenness (to do with nature) and sinfulness (to do with hypostasis).

⁸ It is also worth noting that McFarland has not taken this case further since his 2008 piece.

⁹ Crisp identifies what seems to me the most pertinent risk, that this view seems to conflict with inseparable operations. If it is the Spirit who generates the human nature of the Son only for the Son to sanctify it in his assumption thereof, it is not immediately clear how the Son and the Spirit can be said to cooperate in the Incarnation in any reasonable sense.

¹⁰ For instance, Athanasius suggests in his *On the Incarnation* that corruption and incorruptibility meet in the person of Jesus, so the corruption is itself destroyed (2011, 58).

¹¹ By “concupiscent” Weinandy means to emphasize temptation’s pull on Jesus, but he is clear that Jesus never committed any sins.

is called into question, since Christ's will is kept from sin in a way distinct from that of other humans.¹² Thus the matter of impeccability is involved in the question as well.

Hebrews tells us Jesus was tempted as we are; if Jesus's human nature *must* be fallen for this to be true, we will have to either accept the fallenness view or find a way to interpret the text beyond what seems to be its plain sense. If Jesus *can* be tempted as we are without a fallen nature, however, both fallenness and unfallenness views remain viable. From the outset, we should resist the view that temptation necessarily depends on fallenness, such that no subject can be tempted if he is not fallen, otherwise we can make no sense of how Adam fell in the first place (at least, not without appealing to some form of determinism). Unfallen subjects can therefore be tempted. Still, set this point aside for the time being and suppose we are now tempted in a way somehow distinct from the way Adam was in Eden; we need Jesus to be tempted in *this* way. Is such a thing plausible if Jesus's human nature is unfallen?

Theologians have tended to answer in the affirmative, as the relative novelty of the fallenness view (or at least, a clear articulation thereof) would itself seem to demonstrate. It would be strange for the church to go nearly two millennia with no categories within which to understand Jesus's temptation.¹³ John Calvin rejects the idea that Jesus takes on corruption and yet has no problem affirming the validity of Hebrews 4. Reflecting on Christ's apparent despair on the cross, he suggests that Jesus is expressing a kind of fear or angst, and he connects this to Hebrews 4:15, arguing that Jesus empathizes with our weakness:

Our fallen nature, whose violent and turbulent emotions know no bounds, is without moderation. . . . But since he was uncorrupted, a moderation that restrained excess flourished in all his emotions. Hence, he could be like us in sorrow, fear, and dread, yet in such a way as to differ from us by this characteristic. (Calvin 2006, II.xvi.12)¹⁴

More recently, Crisp has argued that Jesus's impeccability does not itself disqualify the validity of the temptation: "It is rather like an invincible pugilist battling it out in the ring with an opponent. The outcome is a foregone conclusion if our pugilist is invincible; but that does not mean the he [*sic.*] does not have to put up a real fight in the ring" (2009, 133).¹⁵ Rolfe King has thrown his weight behind Crisp on this point and argued that though Christ cannot act on sin, this does not negate the reality of temptation's pull (2017, 63).

¹² Thus McFarland's fascinating observation that the sinlessness of Jesus's human nature is characteristic of a *glorified* humanity (2008, 409). To recall, though, for McFarland, though the will is a property of the nature, its content is informed by the hypostasis. Thus that Jesus's will is indefectible tells us more about his divine identity as the Son of God than it does about his human nature.

¹³ Weinandy makes the case that the fallenness view is present in the church fathers (2006, 23–38). His argument is *not* that the fallenness view is *the* theology of the early church, but instead that the fathers tended to emphasize both Jesus's solidarity with us and his perfection/sinlessness, sometimes even overemphasizing the former claim. Kathryn Tanner makes a similar move, naming Athanasius and Gregory of Nyssa as affirming the same position of Barth, but the position she describes is ultimately that Jesus's humanity suffered the "effects" of sin; whether or not this constitutes fallenness is debatable (2001, 27–28). For an argument on how Jesus's humanity can suffer the effects of sin without being fallen, see King (2017, 56–57). Also see Kopic's survey of the debate on the view's novelty (2001, 156–57).

¹⁴ This weakness is "pure and free of all vice *and stain*" (emphasis mine). It cannot be construed as fallenness without doing serious damage to the surrounding context and Calvin's thought on corruption more broadly. C.f. II.i.9–10; II.xiii.4.

¹⁵ Millard Erickson has curiously laid out the same tension but to the opposite effect: "[W]hile he could have sinned, it was certain that he would not" (2013, 768–70).

Even more useful, though, is McFarland's suggestion that fallenness has to do with nature while sinfulness has to do with hypostasis: "A nature can be damaged (and thus fallen); but a nature cannot sin, because sin is ascribed to agents, and thus is a matter of the hypostasis" (2008, 413). King takes this idea further: "But it then follows that *non posse peccare* applies to every human nature as such, including Christ's" (2017, 63). Natures do not act and therefore cannot sin; it follows that natures cannot actually be tempted, but persons can. It may well be the case that the condition of an agent's nature makes him more or less likely to act on temptation, particularly given that the will is supposed to be a property of the nature. But if McFarland is right to suggest that the will's content derives from the person, and further if temptation is directed at the person rather than the will, it is not immediately clear how the fallenness or unfallenness of Jesus's nature actually has any bearing on the efficacy of temptation. Ultimately it is the eternal Son of God who is said to be tempted. If that is right, the condition of Christ's nature does not actually inform our reading of Hebrews 4:15.

1.3 Concerns

The aforementioned discussion leads me to suppose the fallenness view to be at minimum logically permissible. However, it also comes with inherent risks—everyone appears to sense this. The foremost concern has to do with the validity of the distinction between fallenness and sinfulness. Thus Crisp writes,

[I]here does not seem to be any way of making sense of the notion that Christ had a fallen but not sinful human nature, where "fallenness" is understood in the same way as in traditional theology, that is, as sinful. And no substantive meaning can be given to the notion of "fallenness" that does not entail sinfulness, even in some weak, non-culpable form. (2004, 271–72)

This last point is critical. Even if fallenness is not representative of sinfulness in an active sense, it constitutes a kind of sinfulness insofar as those who are corrupted are reprehensible (and thus punishable) by God. Here Crisp is thinking largely in Augustinian terms: Corruption is itself a privation of the good, which is to say it is evil.¹⁶ Thus even if we attribute a fallen nature to Jesus while maintaining that he does not commit any sins, that his nature is fallen—that Jesus has a nature tinged with corruption—is itself constitutive of real sin.¹⁷ It puts sin *in* Jesus and as such renders Jesus *sinful*. McFarland attempts to avoid this conclusion by maintaining that damaged natures are not sinful per se and thus not punishable by God, but in order to make this case he will need to define sin in a way that does not involve privation. More recently Crisp has challenged McFarland's attempt to distinguish between fallenness as a function or property of nature and sinfulness as that of hypostasis: "[A]re they not both properties?" (2019, 242). Crisp's argument rests on his view of Christ's human nature as a concrete particular (and therefore a property bearer) rather than as a property or property-like thing. He writes, "[L]ike any human nature, the human nature of Christ is a concrete particular that would form a fundamental substance or human person without the act of assumption"

¹⁶ For instance, see Augustine's *Enchiridion* (XIII). C.f. *Confessions* (VII.xii).

¹⁷ This holds if sin refers to more than active individual sins. Otherwise, we have to disagree with Augustine on the nature of evil (a daunting task!) or differentiate somehow between evil and sin.

(246).¹⁸ Mere humans just are their natures, which is to say that mere human hypostases are identical with their natures (247). If Crisp is right, it is not possible to confine fallenness to nature and sinfulness to hypostasis.

One alternative method to differentiate between the two is the idea proposed in Sumner and later expanded (though not endorsed) by Crisp, that Jesus's human nature is anhypostatically fallen insofar as, were it not assumed by a divine hypostasis, the human person would be sinful. It is not clear to me, however, what benefits arise from this kind of view. Whatever solidarity might be achieved seems functionally docetic, given that the assumption of the anhypostatically fallen nature is simultaneous with its healing. Whatever we have to say of this anhypostatic human nature, *Jesus's* human nature is not fallen; with regard to our own fallen condition, we stand in solidarity with an anhypostatic human nature, but not with Jesus. Crisp thinks the greatest boon to this kind of view is its description of the mechanism by which fallen humans are healed. He says, "By healing his own human nature, the Word is able to act on behalf of all other fallen human beings in his salvific work of reconciliation" (2019, 244). Here he has in mind the aforementioned axiom of Gregory of Nazianzus. As I will show, however, "fallenness" is not the kind of thing Gregory's axiom is able to address.

2. On Gregory's Axiom

2.1 Its Scope and Limits

That Gregory's axiom has limitations is acknowledged by all. In taking on a human nature, the Son took on a kind of particularity; Jesus took on a human body/soul composite, with a set of properties that would seem to exclude other available properties. Properties rightly attributed to Jesus could include *Jewishness*, *having brown hair*, *maleness*, or *being five-foot-nine*.¹⁹ But of necessity such properties require there to be other properties Jesus does not instantiate; if Jesus is male, he is not female.²⁰ At a glance, then, Gregory's axiom is immediately in tension with the variety that obtains within humanity. There are three available options to defuse the issue. First, we could leave Gregory's axiom completely intact, such that *Jewishness*, *brown-haired-ness*, *maleness*, and *five-foot-nine-ness* are redeemed, but other properties of ethnicity, hair color, sex, and height are not.²¹ This intuitively seems the least likely option. The Son assumed the property of *Jewishness* in the incarnation, which means he did not assume the property of *Gentileness*. But Paul is adamant that the gospel is for Jews and Gentiles, which is at minimum

¹⁸ It should be noted that Crisp is here writing in light of McFarland's work, but he does not mean to suggest McFarland conceives of the human nature as a property. "It is not clear (to me, at least) which view, if any, of the metaphysics of the incarnation McFarland adopts" (Crisp 2019, 242 n. 15). On my reading, McFarland does not here seem particularly interested in the question, but in a later work he writes, "I hold to the position that the human nature Christ assumes is concrete rather than abstract, in the sense that the 'nature' assumed by the Word is an individual instance of humanity rather than a property of set of properties" (McFarland 2019, 7 n. 15; c.f. Crisp 2013, 36–38).

¹⁹ What is important is not whether Jesus's exemplifying these properties is demonstrably true, but that exemplifying certain properties makes other properties unavailable. Jesus might be five-foot-nine or six-foot-two, but he cannot be both.

²⁰ For a lucid treatment of this point see McFarland (2019, 130–31).

²¹ "Redeem" and "heal" do not bear precisely the same weight in meaning, but it seems to me that each refer to the same objects. That is, whatever is redeemed is also healed, and whatever is healed is also redeemed. I largely confine my usage to healing in what follows, but I think we can understand both ideas as present in the scope of the piece without equivocating the terms.

difficult to understand if only Jewishness is redeemed (Rom. 1:16; Gal. 6:6–9).²² Second, we could disregard Gregory's axiom and attempt to dissolve the assumption/healing connection altogether; the obvious risk here is the same that Gregory sought to combat: Apollinarianism. Gregory's aim was to defend Jesus's human mind, but we might just as quickly deny Jesus's human soul or human will. If we can stave off the danger of heresy, perhaps this option could work, but it does not seem necessary. Rather the third option, a *via media* approach that seeks to modify or contextualize the axiom, seems most appropriate.²³

First, it should be noted that Gregory's axiom is applied to the mind, which does not seem to be the same kind of thing as, say, *having brown hair*. Gregory articulates the stakes thus: “[I]f he has a soul, and yet is without a mind, how is he man, for man is not a mindless animal?” (219). The same does not follow, of course, for *having brown hair*. McFarland thinks monenergism and Monothelitism fall under the same umbrella of “Apollinarian logic” and were rejected at later councils for the same reasons. He writes, “[I]f Christ did not have a fully human activity and will, then he had assumed only a partial human nature, and therefore could not be the redeemer of the whole human being” (2014, 146–47). The gist is that the mind seems essential to full human being; without it, the Son's assumption of human nature is incomplete.²⁴ Therefore on Gregory's logic, those things not assumed are not healed and do not persist into glory. But if things essential to human being are not present in glory, then there are no humans in glory. “Glorified humanity” is then a term devoid of any real content, basic nonsense. There is only the glorified “mindless animal.” The same cannot be said for *having brown hair* insofar as there are things called “human” with various other hair colors.²⁵ What we need, then, is not for Jesus to instantiate every available human property, but to

²² I grant (with some reluctance) that one could push back and point out that Jesus has Gentile blood in his lineage, as a descendent of Ruth the Moabitess.

²³ It is worth considering an alternative approach found in ch. 5 of Amy L. B. Peeler 2022, esp. pp. 133–44. Peeler attempts to view the incarnation in a way that involves both maleness and femaleness in a unique way; she suggests that Jesus actually *must* have been male for this to be true (141). Jesus's human body is composed of his human mother's flesh, such that there is a sense in which he is a male made of female stuff, as it were. “Jesus, son of Mary, radically includes females and males in his *imago Dei* body. The body that embraces male and female is the same body that reveals God” (142). And later, “[Jesus] is male but unlike every other male, for his embodied maleness broadens to include the female body from which he came” (144). Peeler's aim is not to show that Jesus is in fact intersex (a point raised as possibly a fruitful thought experiment, but not actually true (140)), but to demonstrate the uniqueness of the composition of his male body. It is not ultimately clear whether Peeler thinks this paradigm is necessary for the redemption of women; if so, it fits the spirit of the first approach. (She raises the question on p. 135, and seems to suggest as much on p. 151.) In all, Peeler's treatment is a laudable approach to questions of gender, but I will demonstrate that accidental human properties (like bodily sex) need not be assumed for the humans in whom such properties instantiate to be redeemed. It is therefore hard to see precisely what is gained in affirming a unique maleness.

²⁴ Perhaps Gregory or I will here be accused of rendering the camp of human being (better, human personhood) too exclusive by naming “mind” as one of its constituent ingredients; the accusation would be that, if mind is required for human personhood, I seem to exclude those in whom the mind (or access to the mind) is perhaps weaker or more difficult to discern, thus falling into a kind of ableism. It seems to me, however, that to reject the reality of the mind or its access in such persons is the truer instance of ableism. Perhaps I can reorder the logical flow, such that *if* any substance is a human person, *then* that substance will exhibit the faculty or power of “mind.” Thus humanity and mind always cohere, but not such that mind (let alone some observer's perception of it) can function as a test for whether any thing be called human or not.

²⁵ The question could be raised of whether the mind is a property, a substance, or a substance-like thing—I am not interested in solving this issue. Whatever we make of the mind ontologically, the important point is that it is essential to humanity, such that there is no such thing as a human person without a mind. My argument should therefore be amenable both to those who hold the mind to an essential property or complex of properties and to those who hold it to be something like a substance.

instantiate whatever is essential to human nature. We need him to be “as we are” in those ways that make us what we are. Gregory’s logic is therefore minimalistic; it only aims at what is essential to human nature, rather than the wide breadth of available properties.

If I am right, Gregory’s axiom is not able to address what is accidental to human nature. This includes the properties of individuals (taken up in questions of identity—my brown eyes, Jonah’s red hair).²⁶ Furthermore, it cannot address what is accidental to humanity *as such*.²⁷ The difference is simple enough to understand. Suppose something like transmutation via natural selection is true, and some five-million years down the line, our descendants evolve to have eight fingers, rather than ten. If *having ten fingers* is essential to humanity as such, these new creatures will have to be called something else; alternatively, though, it could simply be the case that *having ten fingers* is accidental to humanity as such. If Gregory’s axiom does not apply to these kinds of accidental properties, they are not subject to the assumption/healing connection. But more importantly, the Son need not assume every accidental property in order to heal those in whom such accidents instantiate. For Gregory, then, on the one hand, that Jesus was (probably) not red-haired does not preclude Jonah’s having red hair in the last days; on the other, that Jesus was (probably) not red-haired does not preclude his ability to redeem the human person Jonah. The same follows for properties accidental to humanity as such; if our descendants do wind up outgrowing their pinky fingers, Gregory does not provide any reason not to expect to see our eight-fingered progeny in glory.

2.2 Healing: An “Of/To” Vocabulary

Take an object o with some set of properties P , of which bad-making properties F constitute a subset.²⁸ Then $F(o) = P$ where P comprises the entirety of properties attaching to o . When o is healed, we articulate a change from one collective set of properties P into another set of properties P' . This movement will involve both the loss of those bad-making properties F and also the addition of certain good-making properties F' . So $F'(o) - F = P'$. Similarly to above, F' is only those good-making properties that are added to o in the act of healing, while P' includes both F' and whatever properties remain attached to o . That is, P and P' are not mutually exclusive, whereas F and F' are. An example: In the country of the Gerasenes, Jesus confronts and heals a man inhabited by demons (Luke 8:28–39). Negatively, this involves the loss of properties F , such as *demon possession*, *not wearing clothing*. Positively it involves the gain of properties F' , such as *freedom* and, presumably, *being clothed*. In being healed, some properties are left behind and others gained. Other properties in P go unchanged, though. On both sides of healing the man exhibits *maleness*. And though the text does not say as much, it seems fair to assume properties to do with hair color, ethnicity, and height also remain the same. The same pattern obtains in other healings; some lose properties F *blindness*, *muteness*, or *lameness* and gain properties F' *sight*, *speech*, or *mobility*. With respect to healing, we say o is healed *of* F

²⁶ Kevin Timpe’s treatment on disability is well known and faces this problem directly (2020, 207–31). Timpe, in dialogue with R. T. Mullins, pushes back on Hauerwas’s claim that “to eliminate the disability means to eliminate the subject”: “If having a particular disability is an accidental rather than essential property of the person who has that disability, then it is possible that the person be resurrected without having that property and yet not having their personal identity endangered” (220).

²⁷ I do not here mean to endorse a realist view of some universal “humanity,” but I think my argument is amenable to this kind of position.

²⁸ Alternatively, I think the reader may treat F as a rich property or a cluster property.

and healed *to F'*.²⁹ But we do not say *F* is healed; it is something *of which o* is healed. Jesus does not heal demon possession, but a man with the property of *demon possession*.

Gregory's axiom should be taken to concern itself with *o*; taken alongside my argument in the previous section, then, let *o* be whatever is essential to human nature. This might include the mind (as it does for Gregory), the soul, the will, creatureliness, finitude, and so on. If Gregory's axiom only applies to *o*, *the assumption/healing connection only obtains in o*. For Gregory, whatever is essential to human being is what Jesus must assume in order to heal it, or move it from one set of properties *P* to another set *P'*. In the human nature's being healed, it loses some properties *F* and gains some others *F'*. Any property gained or lost, however, will be accidental to human nature. This does not entail that *all* accidental properties attaching to *o* will be lost in the nature's move from *P* to *P'*, since *F* is only a subset of *P*; Jonah's red hair might belong to *P* but not *F*, and thus persist in *P'*.

The difficulty arises at this juncture, then; it is no easy task to name which accidents belong to *F* and which do not, and as I have already suggested, Gregory's axiom does not help us on this matter. But there is space between allowing a level of flexibility and embracing plain agnosticism on this point, and some accidents seem clearly enough to belong to *F*. Paul gives us a good handful of such properties in his account of the resurrection. Where the human body is *o*, it is sown *P* with bad-making properties *F* *perishable, in dishonor, in weakness, a natural body*; it is raised *P'* with good-making properties *F'* *imperishable, in glory, in power, a spiritual body* (1 Cor. 15:42–50 NASB). This would seem to be a good account of the human body's being healed. Paul is clear that Christ is the model for this movement. We know our bodies *o* will be healed of *F* and to *F'* because Christ, who heals *o*, is the first fruits (1 Cor. 15:20–22). Or take something like peccability; classically, humanity has been seen as *posse peccare* in Eden, *non posse non peccare* after the fall and *non posse peccare* in glory. The accident *non posse non peccare* will belong to *F*, something lost when we are healed, and *non posse peccare* to *F'*, something gained when we are healed.³⁰ But again, perishability, peccability, etc. are not the things actually being healed, nor need they be assumed for the human nature itself to be healed. The Son assumes essential humanity, which includes the human body, in order to heal it *of* those properties *F* such as perishability and peccability.

Here is an interesting wrinkle, though: Is it not the case that the Son *does* assume at least one property in *F*? Jesus did perish on the cross. Why assume the accidental property *perishability* that is neither essential to human being nor to survive humanity's healing?

To solve this riddle, we need only broaden our horizons a bit to consider the soteriological aspect of the incarnation. If Jesus had to perish as a sacrifice for human sins, a perishable body would seem to be entailed. Jesus's perishable body, then, is not to the end of healing perishability as such, but serves an ulterior motive, the forgiveness of sins. The perishability of Jesus's body looks like the means by which our own bodies are healed. Furthermore, Paul does not think Jesus's body is perishable in the same sense as our own. Paul conceives of human bodies as perishable in a way that connotes a living toward death, even a proclivity toward death: All die in Adam. But in the one who died for our sins, "all will be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:3–5, 22 NASB). Jesus dies and destroys death in the process; when Jesus and death trade blows, Jesus comes out on top (1 Cor. 15:26). Therefore it is not the case that the Son

²⁹ Healed *of* demon possession and healed *to* freedom (or what have you). In healing the man *o* of demon possession, Jesus removes properties *F* such as *residing in the tombs*; Jesus heals the man *to* well-being and adds properties *F'* like *residing in the town*.

³⁰ And then, *posse peccare* will belong to another state of affairs with which I have not presently concerned myself.

assumes perishability in order to heal it, on the one hand, as he does the human body; but neither does it seem quite right to suggest the Son assumes perishability at all on the other.³¹

The trajectory of the argument should here be apparent: If (and only if) fallenness is essential to human nature θ , Gregory's axiom entails that the Son will have to assume fallenness in the same way he assumes creatureliness or finitude in order to heal it, otherwise human nature is not itself fully healed.³² If not, fallenness can either be assumed or not assumed (like ethnicity, hair color, bodily sex, or height), and can belong or not belong to F , those things lost in humanity's being healed, but whether or not fallenness is assumed will not tell us whether or not it belongs to F . But recall that Gregory's axiom only applies to θ , what is essential to humanity; it therefore seems to me that on any definition of fallenness, it is not a suitable candidate, since it minimally picks out the condition of humanity after Eden. The fact that humanity can (and did!) exist without fallenness is sufficient to demonstrate that fallenness is not essential to it. But if fallenness is not included in θ , it is not even the kind of thing that can be healed. It is rather a property or set of properties *of which* humanity might be healed.

The next questions to ask are whether the Son might assume it as he does other accidents, and second whether it belongs to those properties F that are lost in humanity's being healed. The second question is the easier to answer. However we view fallenness, it is very difficult to see what place it has in glory. However we view it, fallenness appears to be a consequence of humanity's sin in Eden. It is strange (though not impossible) to conceive of this kind of consequence as persisting into glory.³³ On any definition, intuitively fallenness seems to fit well with those properties Paul gives, which I lumped into F just above. Weakness, proclivity to sin, corruption, and guilt are all the sorts of things I have to imagine are removed from humanity when it is healed. A thinker more creative than I could probably work out a definition of fallenness that makes sense on both sides of glory, but I cannot conceive of any theological advantage to such an effort.³⁴ In the Last Days *all* things will be made new and every tear wiped away (Rev. 21:1–5). Paul tells us that present sufferings “are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” And again, not just us, but *all* of creation groans in wait of restoration (Rom. 8:18–23 NASB). Fallenness does not seem to fit well into this image of restoration.

On the first question, we have already seen if the Son does assume fallenness, it can only be as an accidental property, akin to his *having ten fingers* or *having brown hair*, and that it bears no connection to Jesus's capacity to heal human nature. This does not *preclude* his taking on a

³¹ Again, where perishability means something like a proclivity toward death. It is worth asking the further question of whether death and perishability bear the same weight for Paul. The dead have perished if and only if Christ has not been raised; otherwise, they have only fallen asleep (1 Cor. 15:16–18 NASB).

³² McFarland makes the same observation: “[O]ne cannot defend the claim that Christ assumed a fallen nature by appealing to the soteriological axiom of Gregory of Nazianzus; for if the effects of the fall are a *mater [sic]* of human nature, they are by definition not constitutive of that nature and thus do not need to be assumed in order to redeem it” (2008, 406).

³³ A good argument might observe that Augustine thinks it possible the martyrs' scars will survive into heaven. See *City of God against the Pagans*, (2003, 1020). Certainly these scars are consequences of *some* kind of sin, for there would be no martyrs if there were no sin in the world. (See also sec. 6 on structural sin in Timpe 2021.) In response, it should be pointed out first that Augustine is speculating on the survival of the martyrs' scars in terms of some overriding good. In the scars there “is no deformity, but only dignity.” I do not think the same can be said for fallenness. Second, very plainly, Augustine could just be wrong on this point. It is not obvious to me (or Augustine, for that matter) that the martyrs' scars really must persist into glory. The only metric Augustine offers is, “if it will be right” for those scars to remain, then they will. For the argument to work, then, it will have to be shown that there is some kind of fittingness to fallen, glorified humanity.

³⁴ Therefore, perhaps a better description of “fallenness” will be one that leans into its chronological aspect more deeply, such that it distinguishes humanity's present condition from both that in Eden and that in heaven.

fallen human nature outright, but any argument that the Son does take on a fallen nature will have to justify their case in light of wider concerns of a connection between fallenness and sinfulness. It will have to be shown that no such connection obtains in the first place, and then it will have to additionally be shown *why* the Son assumes a fallen nature at all, if it has no bearing on the efficaciousness of his work. McFarland's argument rests on this kind of idea, that the fallenness view might be defended on the basis of Thomistic "fittingness" (2008, 407–408).

Conclusion

I have above surveyed and appraised some of the material on the fallenness view of Jesus. I began by attempting to discern whether fallenness could be meaningfully distinguished from sinfulness and suggested that such a distinction was feasible. I then suggested the fallenness view is not the only way by which to understand how Jesus can be tempted in light of Hebrews 4. From here, I considered the argument from Gregory's axiom and argued that it cannot be used to bolster the fallenness view, since fallenness is not essential to humanity.

As I see it, the concern undergirding the question of whether Jesus's humanity is fallen or not is rooted in a kind of zeal for the truth of the incarnation, coupled with the pressures felt in the simple fact that humanity is variable in scope. The Son took on flesh and dwelt among us (Jn. 1:14). The Son became "like his brethren" (Heb. 2:17). But what is the extent of that likeness? Who are his brethren? Does he more closely resemble you than he does me? These sorts of questions have cropped up in countless ways since the church's inception, from the early icons depicting Jesus's humanity, to the ongoing issue of religious indigenization, to the later working-class appropriation of "Jesus the Carpenter."³⁵ This essay begins to posit a "mere" incarnation. Jesus's taking on a human nature and whatever is essential to it is sufficient to heal humanity; Jesus need not fulfill the additional requirements of whatever accidents obtain in his members; his incarnation does not require further baggage. But again, neither does his exemplifying some accidents and not others exclude certain persons from his healing work. That Jesus was Jewish does not exclude us Gentiles from the gospel.

If my treatment has been successful, the fallenness view is at least permissible within the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy, but proponents will have to adopt a view of sin that seems too narrow to explain how sin can exist in (or very near) a divine person. I have attempted to be optimistic with regards to this task and maintain that this view is still feasible. However, if the fallenness view is not required to make sense of biblical witness on Jesus's temptation, it is not clear to me why anyone is obligated to adopt or defend it. In light of the charges raised against it, then, the unfallenness view appears to be the best way to understand the human nature of Jesus.

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³⁵ On indigenization, John S Mbiti's treatment is classic (1974). The carpenter motif is drawn from W. D. P. Bliss (1890, 4). For a broader account, see Bevir (1999).

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