

# *Individual Natures in the Christology of Leontius of Byzantium*

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According to the teaching of Leontius of Byzantium in *Contra Eutychianos et Nestorianos*, Christ's human nature is a universal. In his late work, the *Epilyseis*, however, Leontius affirms that Christ's human nature is an individual (a unique collection of universals), and argues that such a nature fails to be a subsistent on the grounds that it exists in the person of the Word. Thus, the interpretation of Leontius' teaching offered by Loofs is substantially correct, even though (as is well-known, and contrary to Loofs) Leontius does not use the term *enhypostatos* to talk about his theory of the nature's nonsubsistence.

## 1. STATUS QUAESTIONIS

As the recent researches of B. E. Daley and others have shown, the interpretation proposed by F. Loofs of *enhypostatos* in Leontius of Byzantium, as in-subsistent, is false.<sup>1</sup> While Loofs's reading cannot be supported by the texts, it might be held to have strong *theoretical* advantages over the more accurate proposal, namely "hypostatic" or "having a

1. See in particular Daley, "'A Richer Union': Leontius of Byzantium and the Relationship of Human and Divine in Christ," *SP* 24 (1993): 239–65 (241–43), and the summaries of his unpublished work found in Aloys Grillmeier and Theresia Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2: *From the Council of Chalcedon (451) to Gregory the Great (590–604)*, part 2: *The Church of Constantinople in the Sixth Century*, tr. Pauline Allen and John Cawte (London: Mowbray, 1995), 194–95, and U. M. Lang, "Anhypostatos-Enhypostatos: Church Fathers, Protestant Orthodoxy and Karl Barth," *JTS* n.s. 49 (1998): 630–57 (633–34). For Loofs's original proposal, see his *Leontius von Byzanz und die gleichnamigen Schriftsteller der griechischen Kirche*, *TU* 3.1–2 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1887), 65–68.

concrete existence.” On Loofs’s proposal, *enhypostatos* can be used to distinguish a subsistent from a nonsubsistent: the human nature of Christ, despite its concrete individuality, is not a person because it exists *in* another—and presumably is thus not marked off from all other individuals in the way that persons are held to be. The revised interpretation of Leontius is on the face of it therefore theoretically disadvantageous: Leontius’ christology is ultimately aporetic, lacking any way of denying the subsistence of Christ’s human nature, and thus leaves him vulnerable to the monophysite’s charge that a Chalcedonian two-natures formula does indeed lead to Nestorianism. Aloys Grillmeier expresses the difficulty nicely, commenting on the argument in Leontius’ *Epilyseis* in contrast to that in *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos*:<sup>2</sup>

Yet here Leontius lands in grave difficulties: the *ratio* of the *hypostasis* coincides with that of the *individuum*. In *CNE* he is not yet conscious of this. Not even once does he ask himself whether or not the human nature of Christ is individualized through the *idia*. Only in the *Epil* does he face up to the criticism of his opponents, which had only increased in the meantime, and against his will allow himself to tackle this question. He has to admit that the human nature of Christ is individual. But nevertheless it is not a *hypostasis*, at least not in relation to the Logos. Must this dilemma not become a stimulus that could not be ignored, to reflect on the concept of *hypostasis* from an utterly new perspective?<sup>3</sup>

Grillmeier argues that Leontius failed to reflect further on the concept of hypostasis, and to this extent Grillmeier finds Leontius’ later christology wanting.

Grillmeier is in my opinion completely correct in claiming, in effect, that the assumption in *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos* is that the human nature is universal (thus, according to Grillmeier, the question of the possible individuation of Christ’s human nature is not raised in this work).<sup>4</sup> But according to Grillmeier, the situation is different in the

2. I use the following abbreviations: Ammonius of Hermeias, *In cat.*=*In Aristotelis categorias commentarius*; Aristotle, *Cat.*=*Categoriae*, *Metaph.*=*Metaphysica*; Boethius, *In isag.*=*In isagogen Porphyrii commentum: editio secunda*; John of Damascus, *Expos.*=*Expositio fidei*, *Haeres.*=*Liber de haeresibus*, *Jacob.*=*Contra Jacobitas*; Leontius of Byzantium, *CNE*=*Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos*, *Epil.*=*Epilyseis*; Leontius of Jerusalem, *AN*=*Adversus Nestorianos*. Chapter numbering for the works of Leontius of Byzantium is taken from Daley’s still-unpublished edition (see Brian E. Daley, “Leontius of Byzantium: A Critical Edition of His Works, with Prolegomena,” unpublished doctoral dissertation [Oxford University, 1978]).

3. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 2.2:193.

4. In *CNE*, Leontius consistently distinguishes person and nature as particular and universal: see e.g. *CNE* α’ (PG 86:1280AB), δ’ (1285D–8A, 1289D). For comments

*Epilyseis*: here Leontius is explicit that the human nature of Christ is an individual. Grillmeier refers to the opening of this work<sup>5</sup> as evidence for this claim, though without offering any analysis of the text,<sup>6</sup> although he cites Marcel Richard in support of his contention.<sup>7</sup> According to Richard, the opening of the *Epilyseis* affirms the individuality of the assumed nature of Christ, though like Grillmeier Richard offers no close analysis of the text. Richard comments (rather unkindly), “Dans l’*Epilyseis* qui est si visiblement une réponse aux critiques soulevées par son premier livre, il est bien obligé d’aborder cette question, de confesser, d’assez mauvaise grâce d’ailleurs que l’humanité assumée par le Verbe était individuelle et d’expliquer pourquoi cette nature individuelle n’est pas une hypostase au moins relativement au Verbe.”<sup>8</sup>

I shall argue below that Grillmeier and Richard are correct when they claim that Leontius changes his mind between *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos* and the *Epilyseis*, but that Leontius, contrary to Grillmeier’s explicit assertion, reflects anew on the concept of hypostasis in such a way as to imply that the individual human nature of Christ fails to be a hypostasis because of its union with the Word. In other words, Loofs was right when he claimed that the notion of (creaturely) hypostasis, in Leontius of Byzantium, ultimately comes to be defined in terms of factual independence from the Word. The only way in which Loofs’s interpretation is inadequate is that Leontius, contrary to Loofs’s assertion, never talks about this using the technical term *enhupostatos*: the teaching, in other words, can be found in Leontius’ *Epilyseis*, but not the terminology. There is no evidence to suggest that Leontius ever means by *enhupostatos*

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on this, see e.g. Daley, “A Richer Union,” 249; Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 2.2:190–91.

5. *Epil.* 1 (PG 86:1917A–C).

6. Grillmeier’s discussion of the distinction between individual and universal natures is marred by a certain lack of clarity; thus, according to Grillmeier, Leontius’ uses of the term *phusis* correspond variously to Aristotle’s primary and secondary substance. Grillmeier describes the first of these senses as “the universal in relation to the individuals, [which] receives the denotation of *eidos* (*species*, kind)” (see *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 2.2:190 n. 22). But this can hardly be a description of Aristotle’s primary substance; indeed, it looks to be close to a paradigm description of secondary substance, identified by Aristotle as the genus and species (*eidos*), predicated of the individual (Aristotle, *Cat.* 5 [2<sup>a</sup>14–16]). (At *Metaph.* Z.4 [1032<sup>b</sup>1–2] Aristotle identifies *eidos* as primary substance, but this is hardly a paradigm case of the primary-secondary substance distinction.)

7. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 2.2:193 n. 27.

8. Marcel Richard, “Léonce de Jérusalem et Léonce de Byzance,” *MSR* 1 (1944): 35–88 (60–61)=*Opera Minora*, vol. 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1977), no. 59, 26–27.

anything more than just “real.” (There is one notorious passage in the *Epilyseis* in which Leontius might be understood to affirm that the human nature exists “in” the Word; I will deal with this text below.)

Supposing that my conclusion about Leontius’ teaching in the *Epilyseis* is correct, is there any strong evidence that the *Epilyseis* differs significantly from *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos*? One modern commentator appears to understand Leontius to affirm individual natures even in the earlier work, though not in such a way as to show any deliberate reflection by Leontius on the distinction between nature and hypostasis of the sort just described. Thus, Daley appears to assume that Leontius in *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos* makes a distinction between individual natures and universal natures. He cites one passage from this work that makes it explicit that he understands Leontius to make a distinction between Christ’s humanity and the universal nature of humanity. The relevant distinction, however, is made not by Leontius but in a gloss by Daley himself. Here is Daley’s quotation from Leontius, including material added by Daley in square brackets:

Christ . . . acts towards us and the Father as a connecting link between two extremes, by means of his parts—if we may consider him a whole made up of parts. He is related wholly as a hypostasis to the Father, because of his divinity and along with his humanity, he is related wholly as a hypostasis to us, along with his divinity, because of his humanity. The relationships with respect to distinction and unity, those we know him to have within himself because of his parts and those which he has towards the Father and us, vary because of the relationship of the parts to the extremes [i.e., because of the relationship of *Christ’s* divinity and *Christ’s* humanity to the two opposed universal “natures” of God and humanity].<sup>9</sup>

Daley’s gloss is not unambiguous: it is not, for example, explicitly stated that the relationship between Christ’s humanity and the universal nature of humanity is to be understood as the relationship between an individual and its universal, though this appears very strongly to be the implication.

A little earlier in the same article Daley draws on Leontius’ analogy between body and soul on the one hand, and the Incarnation on the other, in a way that suggests he understands the component parts of Christ—the divinity and the humanity—to be individuals:

The characteristics that mark *this* soul off from *that* soul and allow it to be *counted* as a distinct entity . . . are precisely what unites it to *this* body as a

9. Leontius, *CNE* δ’ (PG 86:1288D–1289A), as translated by Daley, “‘Richer Union,’” 252.

single hypostasis and reveals in them both a common, mutually individualizing being. . . . So too . . . the characteristics or qualities that mark him [viz. Christ] off, within the divine nature, from the Father and the Spirit, along with those that mark him off, within the context of humanity, from all other women and men, are precisely the things that give the two “extremes” . . . of God and human being in him “coherence and unity with himself.”<sup>10</sup>

Daley here appears to suggest that body and soul are individuals, and likewise (by implication) that the humanity and divinity of Christ are individuals: they are mutually individualizing components of the individual hypostasis.

I would not like to defend this interpretation of Daley’s comments unreservedly; a little later in the same passage, he speaks (to my mind far more appropriately, at least in relation to *Contra Nestorianos et Euty-chianos*) in ways that suggest that what is at stake is not the distinction of Christ’s (e.g.) human nature from other human natures, but of the distinction between the hypostasis of the Word and other (e.g.) human hypostases:

The Word’s Incarnation as Mary’s Son, Leontius seems to be saying, forms, in the divine economy, an essential part of the set of characteristics that distinguish him from the other persons in God, just as the historical Jesus’ personal identity with the Word, as Son of God, is one of the essential characteristics that distinguish him as a man from other human beings.<sup>11</sup>

Hypostases, not natures of the same sort, are distinguished from each other by accidents: that is, by properties that might be essential to an individual hypostasis, but which are not essential to the kind of thing the hypostasis is, that is, which are not components of its nature or essence.<sup>12</sup>

Another modern commentator, Matthias Gockel, more or less combines the accounts of Grillmeier, Richard and Daley:

10. Daley, “‘Richer Union,’” 251, quoting *Epil.* 1 (PG 86:1917D). As I shall argue below, this interpretation of the *Epil.* is wholly accurate; my quarrel is with the proposed interpretation of *CNE*.

11. Daley, “‘Richer Union,’” 251.

12. For the individuation of hypostases by accidents, see the discussion in Daley, “‘Richer Union,’” 250 and the texts cited there. This interpretation seems to me utterly uncontroversial, and I shall assume it in what follows. It is worth keeping in mind a point that I will make more in a little more detail below, namely that the claim that hypostases are individuated by accidents is not inconsistent with the claim that natures, too, are individuated by accidents. It is ultimately for this reason that we might be hesitant about being too prescriptive about the interpretation of “nature” in *CNE*.

In both cases [viz. *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos* and *Epilyseis*] *hypostasis* is somehow related to the individual, but in the *Epilyseis* it is also defined as being characterized by accidents. Even if we add to this Leontius' earlier definition that an accident has its being in another and is no *ousia* but is only perceived in connection with an *ousia*, the relation between nature and *hypostasis* still remains unexplained. . . . Thus, the dilemma that Christ's human nature is individual, while in relation to the Logos it is not a hypostasis, persists.<sup>13</sup>

Contrary to Daley and Gockel, I do not believe that it is possible to demonstrate that Leontius accepts the existence of individual natures in *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos*—indeed, at one point Leontius appears explicitly to deny that natures can be particulars. I shall counsel a certain degree of caution, however, in interpreting *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos*, for reasons that will become clear. It seems to me most likely that in this earlier work Leontius simply assumes that we should think of the human nature as a universal. He is thus fundamentally committed, in *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos*, to an understanding of Christ's human nature as a universal. In this, he merely reflects the standard Chalcedonian assumption that the Cappadocian solution to the Trinitarian dilemma—nature as universal, hypostasis as particular—can be straightforwardly applied in the christological context.<sup>14</sup>

I shall argue that Leontius comes to alter this position in the *Epilyseis*, in the light of monophysite criticism of his position. It is not clear precisely what motivates this change. There is no reason for Leontius to suppose that his universal natures are less “real” than individual natures; Leontius was and remained a convinced realist on the question of universals. I suspect that his opponent's questioning simply forced him to reflect more closely on what he wanted to say about Christ's human nature and its relation to human accidents, and to accept the consequences of his modified account. As we will see below, there is every reason to suppose that part of the problem was simply the failure of Leontius and his Severan opponent to understand each other's position fully.

My strategy will be to consider the salient passages of the *Epilyseis*, assuming with Grillmeier that *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos* offers

13. Matthias Gockel, “A Dubious Christological Formula? Leontius of Byzantium and the *Anhypostasis-Enhypostasis* Theory, JTS n.s. 51 (2000): 515–32 (522–23).

14. In effect, the Cappadocian solution can be applied to christology simply by understanding the christological term *phusis* as “essence” (*ousia*), and then making the realist assumption—derived from a philosophical analysis of creaturely existence—that *ousia* is universal. The universality of *ousia* thus straightforwardly entails that *phusis* is universal too. I discuss the Cappadocian view briefly below.

no evidence in favor of individual natures. I will, however, offer in addition two important pieces of evidence from *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos*: first a passage where Leontius explicitly rejects particular natures, and in the light of this, secondly, an interpretation of the passage that Daley quotes (quoted above), merely to show that an alternative and more attractive reading is available than the one that Daley appears to assume. But before I undertake an analysis of these texts, I want to clarify a conceptual matter that will enable us to see more precisely what it is that Leontius might want to affirm in the *Epilyseis*, and why ultimately we should resist being too strongly committed to the criticism found in Grillmeier.

## 2. INDIVIDUAL NATURES VS. PARTICULAR NATURES

In order to facilitate discussion I shall introduce some terminology from later debates that will enable us to be clear about two possible different interpretations of the relevant passages in the *Epilyseis*. It is important to understand that this terminology is not found in Leontius—partly for the reason that, with the exception of the crucial passage in the *Epilyseis* that I discuss below, he does not explicitly accept the existence of natures other than universal natures. But if we do not employ a distinction like the one I will propose, Leontius' view in the *Epilyseis* becomes implausibly incoherent. The distinction that I want to import here is between *particular* natures and *individual* natures.

Monophysites such as Leontius' rough contemporary John Philoponus use "particular natures" (*merikai phuseis*)<sup>15</sup> to refer to instances of a common nature considered *in abstraction from their accidents*. The crucial feature of such particular natures is that there are as many of them as there are hypostases. Thus, famously, for John Philoponus there are as many particular divine substances or natures as there are divine persons. Hypostases on this view are particular natures + accidents.<sup>16</sup> This sort of

15. For "particular natures," see Philoponus, *Diaitetes* 7, Greek text in John of Damascus, *Haeres.* 83 addit. (*Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. 4: *Liber de haeresibus. Opera polemica*, ed. Bonifatius Kotter, Patristische Texte und Studien 22 [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1981], 55.187–89). Philoponus' preferred term is not "particular" but "individual" (*atomon*). I use his less frequent "particular" to avoid confusion with the individual natures that John of Damascus talks about, and which I shall argue we can find in Leontius too.

16. See Philoponus, *Diaitetes* 7, Greek text in John of Damascus, *Haeres.* 83 addit. (*Schriften*, 4:51.34–39, and especially 53.92–95), where Philoponus makes it clear that it is the presence of accidents that distinguishes a particular nature from a hypostasis.

view is perfectly compatible with an affirmation of the existence of common natures too, though it is probable that John himself was a nominalist.<sup>17</sup>

Later Chalcedonians such as John of Damascus reject particular natures in this sense,<sup>18</sup> but are happy to talk about individual natures (the nature “in the individual” [*en atomō*]), collections of universals, essential and accidental, that together constitute an individual; on this sort of view, a universal nature is in some sense a *part* of the individual nature. An individual nature is a universal nature considered *along with a (unique) collection of universal accidents*. (Contrast the case of particular natures, which are the instances of a universal in abstraction from their accidents.) According to John, Christ’s human nature, in so far as it includes accidents, is an individual. John’s idea is that common human nature is a component of a human nature that includes accidents and as such is an individual. His usage of “nature” is thus equivocal: a human nature that includes accidents—an individual nature, a nature *en atomō*—also includes common human nature as a part.<sup>19</sup>

17. On the ambiguity in John Philoponus’ presentation, see section 1 of my “Perichoresis, Deification, and Christological Predication in John of Damascus,” *Mediaeval Studies* 62 (2000): 69–124. If we take a realist understanding of John Philoponus, then the background is the sort of theory that we find defended in Alexander of Aphrodisias, according to which being one or more particular nature is a *property* of the universal (see e.g. Boethius’ summary of Alexander of Aphrodisias’ theory at *In isag.* 1.11 [ed. Samuel Brandt, CSEL 48: 167.4–7]; for a discussion of the extant fragments of Alexander, see Martin M. Tweedale, “Alexander of Aphrodisias’ Views on Universals,” *Phronesis* 29 [1984]: 279–303). Understood in this way, a universal nature and a particular nature that is an instance of it are not exactly the same thing. The particular nature is distinct from the universal by at least one property: the particular nature is the universal nature + the property of particularity or unrepeatability. Ammonius uses *ousia merikē* to refer to primary substances (as opposed to universal secondary substances): see *In cat.* (ed. Adolf Busse, *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graece*, 4.4 [Berlin: Georgius Reimer, 1995], 25.6–17), and in so far as Ammonius in this passage is explicit that universal natures—of a kind appropriate to explain predication—exist, his account might be a more obvious descendant of Alexander’s than Philoponus’ is. But Ammonius never makes clear precisely how he understands the relation between universal and particular, so his use of *ousia merikē* cannot be taken as unequivocal evidence for his acceptance of the sort of particular natures I am discussing here.

18. John of Damascus, *Jacob.* 9–10 (*Schriften* 4:113.4[9]–9[10]).

19. See John of Damascus, *Expos.* 55 (*Schriften* 2: *Expositio fidei*, ed. Kotter, *Patristische Texte und Studien* 12 [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1973], 131.4–11). I discuss John’s view in more detail in my “Perichoresis, Deification, and Christological Predication in John of Damascus.” The background here is the Cappadocian position on the Trinity. It is clear to me that the Cappadocian analysis does not involve an affirmation of particular natures/essences. Thus in e.g. *Ad Ablabium* Gregory makes it clear that a universal is one universal object repeated in each of the particulars that



In what follows, I shall test Leontius' texts against both of these possible understandings, and I shall from now on use the terminology established in this section to distinguish the two possible ways of understanding the existence of natures other than universal natures. While I am very aware of the danger of anachronism, I hope it will become clear that something like the distinction I am making has to be accepted in order to understand some of the things Leontius says in the *Epilyseis*. We can at any rate be confident that at least one of the ways in which a nature can fail to be universal is more or less contemporary with Leontius, namely Philoponus' particular natures (my terminology); and I think that Leontius is explicit in one passage of the *Epilyseis* in his affirmation of what I am calling individual natures—the sort of nature that we later find in John of Damascus. In the next section, I shall analyze the relevant texts from the *Epilyseis*, beginning with a text that clearly affirms the existence of what I am calling individual natures, and then trying to show how other problematic passages from the *Epilyseis* can be made consistent with this text. In the light of my reading of the *Epilyseis*, I shall offer some interpretative comment on a well-known passage of this work in which Leontius affirms that the human nature exists *in* the Word.

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exhibit it: “the nature <of three men> is one, at union in itself, and an absolutely indivisible unit, not capable of increase by addition, or of decrease by subtraction, but in its essence being and remaining one. . . . Man <is> said to be one, even though those who are exhibited to us in the same nature make up a plurality” (Gregory of Nyssa, *Opera Dogmatica Minora* 1, ed. Fridericus Mueller [=Opera, 3.1] [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958], 41.2–5, 10–12; translation in NPNF 5:332<sup>a</sup>). So Gregory explicitly denies that there are particular natures—indeed, so strongly is Gregory committed to the universality of the divine nature that he appears to claim that the nature is *numerically* one, or something analogous to this sort of unity, a metaphysical realism more extreme than that taken by later Chalcedonians, as we will see below in reference to Leontius. I discuss the Cappadocian theory in detail in my “Gregory of Nyssa on Universals,” *Vigiliae Christianae*, forthcoming. Severus of Antioch understands *ousia* in the strongly realist sense found in *Ad Ablabium*: see the material discussed in Joseph Lebon, “La christologie du monophysisme syrien,” in A. Grillmeier and H. Bacht, eds., *Das Konzil von Chalkedon: Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3 vols (Echter-Verlag: Würzburg, 1954), 425–580 (esp. 458–59 and n. 19). Lebon is still by far the best account of monophysite christology in the sixth century. As we will see below, Leontius' Severan opponent refuses to understand the christological term *phusis* in this way: he refuses, in other words, to regard this philosophical clarification of the sense of *ousia* as relevant for an understanding of the term *phusis*, a term which on the basis of earlier patristic authority he persistently identifies with *hypostasis*.

3. *EPILYSEIS**Epilyseis 1 (PG 86:1916D.4–1917D.9)*

I begin with the crucial text—the opening of the *Epilyseis*—referred to by Richard and Grillmeier as evidence in support of the contention that Leontius comes to accept that Christ’s human nature is an individual. Leontius begins with a discussion of the basic distinction between nature and hypostasis as universal and individual—a distinction that Leontius will modify in the course of the discussion. “Acephalus,” Leontius’ opponent and (as the full title of the work suggests)<sup>20</sup> a placeholder for Severus, wants to know whether the Word assumed human nature considered as a species or human nature considered in an individual (*en atomō*).<sup>21</sup> The point of the strategy, as we see a little later in the discussion, is to get Leontius to admit that the Word assumed a nature in a sense of “nature” other than universal or common nature. Acephalus holds that persons are just natures (where “nature” is not to be understood in the philosophical sense of [universal] essence; persons are nonuniversal natures),<sup>22</sup> and thus wants to infer that Leontius’ position amounts to Nestorianism. Leontius’ reply is to ask what Acephalus understands the distinction between the two senses of nature to be,<sup>23</sup> and he is not satisfied with Acephalus’ simplistic response that nature in the first sense is seen “in a multitude” whereas nature in the second is seen “in what is numerically one.”<sup>24</sup> Leontius feels short-changed by this response because it is clear to him that there is in fact no distinction between the two cases. He concedes immediately Acephalus’ uninformative claim<sup>25</sup> that we can consider a nature in just one instance or in more than one instance,<sup>25</sup> but argues that there is no distinction between two different “brands” of nature here (e.g. particular and universal): seeing a nature in one or in more than one instance is just a way of distinguishing not natures but the *subjects* of these natures<sup>26</sup>—the objects of which such universal natures are parts (i.e., standardly, hypostases,<sup>27</sup> but also, as we shall see, individual natures in my sense). Leontius insists that the nature in the species and the nature

20. *Epilyseis tōn hupo Sevērou probēlēmēnōn sullogismōn*.

21. *Epil.* 1 (PG 86:1917A.1–2; I give line numbers for ease of reference in this close discussion of the text).

22. On this, see Lebon, “Christologie,” 454–67.

23. *Epil.* 1 (PG 86:1917A.3–4).

24. *Epil.* 1 (PG 86:1917A.5–6).

25. *Epil.* 1 (PG 86:1917A.7–9).

26. *Epil.* 1 (PG 86:1917A.11–13).

27. *Epil.* 1 (PG 86:1917B.11–13).

in the individual are identical; they are in some sense simply the same thing. Thus the distinction that Leontius wants to reject is the distinction between universal natures and particular natures:

The same formula of the nature is given in both many and one: whatever formula you give for nature unqualifiedly, this is given to you for nature considered in one <subject>, and neither does the fact that many participate in the nature make the one <nature> many natures.<sup>28</sup>

Note that Leontius here clearly asserts not just the identity of the formula of the nature but of the nature itself. I take it, then, that Leontius holds that the nature that exists in the individual is just the same as the nature itself, and that the nature of, say, Socrates is just as universal as the nature of man considered in itself. It is hypostases, not natures, that are particulars. There is for Leontius no sense in which there are many particular natures of the same sort.<sup>29</sup>

It is worth noting that Leontius' position here is not inconsistent with the positing of individual natures in my sense—natures that include common natures and accidents as parts. I will return to this in a moment. It is also worth noting that the passage contains an unequivocal assertion that accidents as much as nonaccidental natures are universals. One of Leontius' examples of a universal is whiteness, which he treats in a manner that

28. *Epil.* 1 (PG 86:1917B.1–6).

29. I think that there is every reason to suppose that Leontius and Acephalus have failed to understand each other here. Severus was a strong realist on the question of universal essences (*ousiai*), as we have seen (see n. 19 above), but, as Leontius was well aware, refused to understand the christological term *phusis* as essence (*ousia*), and thus to apply the Cappadocian understanding of Trinitarian terminology (fundamentally a philosophical matter, the relation of universal to individual) to the Incarnation (see *Epil.* 3 [PG 86:1922B]). For Severus, a nature (*phusis*) is a hypostasis: hence Leontius' view would amount to Nestorianism (for Severus; see the material from Lebon cited at n. 22 above). But Acephalus' victory—an admission from Leontius that Leontius accepts individual *phuseis*—is irrelevant to Severus, because Leontius supposes that *phusis* is synonymous with *ousia*; hence Acephalus has forced Leontius to admit not that the assumed nature is a *phusis* in the sense in which Severus understands *phusis* (i.e. a hypostasis), but merely that the assumed nature is an individual *ousia*—something to which Severus would have had philosophical but not necessarily theological objections. The whole discussion in this part of the *Epilyseis* is essentially philosophical—a correct understanding of the relation between universal and individual. But Acephalus would need to do much more work to show that this debate has a bearing on the theology at stake, not least because Severus' explicit claim is that these philosophical distinctions, about the correct understanding of *ousia*, have no bearing on the correct understanding of the relevant christological term *phusis*.

exactly parallels his treatment of humanity.<sup>30</sup> In so far as a hypostasis is a nature individuated by accidents, the claim that accidents are universals amounts to the claim that a hypostasis is a collection or bundle (my terms) of universals. If Leontius accepts some sense of “nature” which would allow for individual natures (in my sense), then such a nature would itself be a collection of universals. Clearly, on this view, the subsistence problem—explaining how it is that Christ’s individual human nature is not itself a hypostasis—becomes a real issue for Leontius, and his failure to use *enhypostatos* in the sense pioneered by his immediate successors will be a problem for him unless he has some alternative strategy to hand. Still, the discussion thus far is neutral on the question of individual natures; there is nothing about the discussion that would signal either that Leontius accepts such natures, or that he rejects such natures.

At this point, however, Leontius’ discussion takes a rather different turn. Having rejected what I am calling particular natures, Leontius implicitly introduces a sense of nature other than universal nature. I shall argue that this sense corresponds closely to what John of Damascus will later refer to as the nature in the individual—my individual natures. I will continue to follow the discussion closely, if only to take maximum care over the perhaps controversial reading I would like to propose.

Acephalus continues to push Leontius into accepting that the Word assumed a certain (*tina*) human nature;<sup>31</sup> Leontius accepts this formulation, but insists that it should be understood to designate something that is the same as the nature in the species (*tō eidō*): presumably, that this “certain” nature is not a particular nature.<sup>32</sup> And when asked how *hypostasis* differs from nature taken in this sense (i.e. as a certain human nature),<sup>33</sup> Leontius replies that participating in such a singular nature makes the hypostasis numerically distinct from other hypostases (though not necessarily of a different kind from other hypostases).<sup>34</sup> Now, as we have seen, Leontius holds that accidents individuate; his point here is that

30. *Epil.* 1 (PG 86:1917A.13–15).

31. *Epil.* 1 (PG 86:1917B.9).

32. *Epil.* 1 (PG 86:1917B.10). As I defined “particular nature” above, a particular nature is distinct from a universal by at least one property, namely particularity. See above, n. 17.

33. *Epil.* 1 (PG 86:1917B.11).

34. *Epil.* 1 (PG 86:1917B.12–13). The text is ambiguous; the most natural reading would be that the nature’s participating in the hypostasis is responsible for individuation; but I find it hard to make much sense of the notion of a nature’s participating in a hypostasis. In any case, I hope that the remarks that immediately follow will confirm the reading I am proposing.

the nature individuates the hypostasis. This individuation claim strongly suggests that he understands a “certain” nature to be an individual nature: a bundle of universal nature and universal accidents. And it is this sort of nature that the divine hypostasis in the Incarnation is said to participate in. The accidents, presumably, are responsible for the individuation of the individual nature; this individual nature is then responsible for the individuation of the hypostasis. That this is the correct understanding is confirmed by the material that follows.

Acephalus immediately spots a problem with Leontius’ position. Surely, he reasons, such an individual nature will be distinct from the hypostasis of the Word, and thus, as an individual nature including both universal nature and accidents (which are standardly the sign of a hypostasis), will be another hypostasis. Leontius’ reply states the Loofsian principle that for an individual nature to be a hypostasis there is required not just accidents but independent existence:

ACEPHALUS: Is <the nature> not one <hypostasis distinct> from another?

ORTHODOX: Not at all, if it is neither *homoousios* with nor separate from that which subsists and is composite; for these things make hypostases.<sup>35</sup>

So, in addition to being composite (of nature and accidents?) being a hypostasis requires being *homoousios* (identical?) with a subsistent and separate from any (other) subsistent. And this is a reasonably clear statement of the new account of subsistence that Loofs claimed (rightly, on the strength of this evidence, though admittedly on the basis of different passages, and thus for the wrong reasons) to have been pioneered by Leontius.

Acephalus misunderstands this response to amount to a rejection of individual natures, but Leontius corrects him:

ACEPHALUS: Did the humanity of Christ not divide—by properties that separate—what is proper to it (*to idion autou*) from what is common?

ORTHODOX: No doubt, but not in relation to [*pros* + accusative] the Word, but in relation to the genus of human beings, from which it existed in a bodily manner.<sup>36</sup>

Again, Leontius’ reply makes it clear that what is fundamentally at issue is the distinction between Christ’s human nature and the genus of human beings (all other human natures). The addition of “properties that separate”—accidents, in other words, since what is at issue is intraspecific

35. *Epil.* 1 (PG 86:1917C.1–4).

36. *Epil.* 1 (PG 86:1917C.5–10).

individuation—is what marks off one nature from another. So Christ’s human nature includes accidents, and is thus an individual nature in my sense. And the rejection of particular natures confirms that the human nature that is a component of this individual nature is universal or common, and Christ’s human nature is thus a bundle of universal nature + universal accidents.

Equally, as the passage also reiterates, positing that Christ’s human nature is individual does not entail accepting that it is divided from the Word: it does not, in other words, entail accepting that Christ’s human nature is itself a hypostasis. Again, we see Leontius consciously using his new insight to avoid Nestorianism. He reaffirms this at least one more time in the first chapter of the *Epilyseis*,<sup>37</sup> and adds that, in virtue of “the properties that separate” the human nature from all other human natures, the hypostasis of the Word is separated from all other human persons.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the claim that accidents individuate natures is not inconsistent with the claim that accidents are also (ultimately) responsible for individuating hypostases.<sup>39</sup>

The whole discussion makes it clear that Leontius’ position in the *Epilyseis* involves the affirmation of individual natures in my sense, and that in addition to affirming the individuality of Christ’s human nature, Leontius develops a corresponding theory of subsistence. This, I think, is sufficient to show that the assessments offered by Grillmeier, Richard, and Gockel, fail to do justice to Leontius’ christological insight in this later work. And this—that Leontius sees his way to a principled affirmation both of the individuality of Christ’s human nature and its non-subsistence—is the main point that I hope to make in this short paper. The discussion leaves it unclear precisely why Leontius is unwilling to affirm particular natures in my sense. The next text that I examine makes this clear.

#### *Epilyseis 2 (PG 86:1920D.9–1921A.4)*

While, as I have shown, Leontius in the *Epilyseis* accepts individual natures, he rejects particular natures on the grounds that affirming such

37. *Epil.* 1 (PG 86:1917C.12–13).

38. *Epil.* 1 (PG 86:1917C.15–D.1). This is the material from *Epil.* that Daley refers to in “Richer Union,” 251, quoted in section 1 above.

39. I suspect that this discussion is sufficient to disprove another contention of Loofs’s, namely that the human nature’s being *enhypostatos* in the Word is what individuates the human nature: see Loofs, *Leontius von Byzanz*, 68. The explanatory order in Leontius is precisely the reverse: accidents individuate the human nature, and these same accidents individuate the Word as man—they mark off the Word from all other human hypostases.

natures entails Arianism. His reason for this is that he cannot see how there can be numerically many natures of the same kind: numerically distinct natures must be different in kind from each other (what else could distinguish them?).<sup>40</sup> We count natures only in so far as we identify different species within a genus, and not different individuals within a species. Thus, using Leontius' examples, horse, man, and bull are three natures, but Peter, Paul, and John are not. The Arian worry is circumvented by claiming that, although the three divine persons are not natures or essences, none is *anousios*—each divine person has the one divine nature.<sup>41</sup>

Although Leontius does not make explicit the distinction I am drawing between particular natures and individual natures, I think it is clear that this passage can only be understood if we take it to be rejecting particular natures. My reason for thinking this is not only that the first passage I examined above is so explicit about the existence of individual natures; thinkers, even great thinkers (greater than Leontius), sometimes contradict themselves. The clear anti-Arian move is that there can be no distinctions between the sorts of nature that Leontius is thinking about other than distinction in kind. Individual natures are distinguished by their accidents, but particular natures are natures considered precisely in abstraction from their accidents. Leontius's claim—wholly consistent with his general account of individuation by accidents—is that nothing can distinguish *these* natures from each other.

Leontius is certainly arguing at cross-purposes here. After all, as we have seen (nn. 19 and 29 above), Severus understands the Trinity in much the same way as Leontius does; he simply refuses to use the term *phusis* in the way suggested by the Trinitarian schema. And in any case, Acephalus (here the [fictitious?] Severan opponent of Leontius' who wants to apply the christological sense of *phusis*—particular nature—to the Trinity)<sup>42</sup> will presumably have a way of distinguishing the case of numerically many natures of the same species from the case of distinction in species, and his method would doubtless include appealing to definitional identity in just the sort of way that Leontius considers. (Perhaps like the nominalist Chalcedonian Leontius of Jerusalem a few years later, Acephalus could distinguish the two cases—numerical diversity between natures of the same kind and specific difference between different kinds of nature—by

40. *Epil.* 2 (PG 86:1920D.9–1921A.4).

41. *Epil.* 2 (PG 86:1920D.1–9).

42. This is, of course, precisely the move made by Philoponus a few years later: on Philoponus' Trinitarian theory, see briefly above.

appealing to the presence of relations of similarity in the one case but not in the other.)<sup>43</sup> But the point is that Leontius does not even consider making these sorts of move himself, and his very silence is strong evidence that he is far removed from the sort of ontology that allows for the possibility of particular natures of the same kind.<sup>44</sup>

*Epilyseis 5 (PG 86:1927B.1–D.3)*

A further passage confirms Leontius' strong rejection of particular natures. Again, the passage argues in such a way as to be consistent with the affirmation of individual natures, although Leontius does not make the point explicitly. Acephalus attempts to force Leontius into accepting the existence of particular natures in at least those cases where there can be only one instance of a species, as the ancients held to be the case for the heavenly bodies—Acephalus' examples are the sun and the heavens. The argument relies on an insight, perhaps derived from Alexander of Aphrodisias, that commonness or universality requires the possibility of more than one instance.<sup>45</sup> This is admittedly a strategy born of desperation, since there would be no reason for Leontius to accept the relevance of the analogy in the case of natures such as the divine and human that do allow of more than one instance. But Leontius' response is surprising, and again shows how reluctant he is to allow that there could be particular natures. Leontius makes the unexpected move of denying that the sun, or the heavens, are specifically unique. We can give definite descriptions of these heavenly bodies, but these definite descriptions are not definitions of

43. See e.g. Leontius of Jerusalem, AN 22 (PG 86:1488D–1489A).

44. Loofs proposes, interestingly, that if Leontius had applied his christological understanding of the individuality of natures to the Trinity, he would have ended up affirming Tritheism: see *Leontius von Byzanz*, 63. This seems to me to rest on a fundamental misunderstanding of the way in which Leontius understands the individuality of Christ's nature. As I have tried to make clear, Leontius never abandons his belief that natures are universals; his point about Christ's human nature is that it has the universal human nature as a part. Affirming particular natures might more plausibly lead to the charge of Tritheism, just as occurred in the case of Philoponus.

45. On this, see the comments in Tweedale, "Alexander of Aphrodisias' Views on Universals," 293. The reason that the argument is relevant only to the question of particular natures is that the Aphrodisian position here is that when there is only one instance of a nature, there is no need to think of particularity as a property of it; it just *is* particular. The question is unrelated to the issue of the relation between a common nature and its accidents; in the case at hand, the nature simply is not common at all. Hence the text has no bearing on Leontius' attitude toward individual natures in my sense. See too my comments at the end of this subsection.



the natures of such bodies, but merely descriptions of their hypostases;<sup>46</sup> and terms such as “sun” and “moon” are proper names of hypostases in just the way that Paul and Peter are.<sup>47</sup> Definitions of the natures of such bodies would in fact reveal that their natures are shared with other bodies, or at any rate such definitions would include only those parts of such bodies that are irreducibly common.<sup>48</sup> (Someone accepting individual natures in my sense accepts that all components of such natures are irreducibly common; someone accepting particular natures denies this, holding instead that any instance of a universal nature is or includes a nature that is irreducibly particular.)

*Epilyseis 8 (PG 86:1944C.1–11)*

One notorious passage in the *Epilyseis* argues that the human nature of Christ subsists *in* the Word.<sup>49</sup> As commentators have pointed out, we should not take this as supporting Loofs’s interpretation of *enhypostatos*; indeed, the now standard reading points out, quite rightly, that the relevant passage is part of a summary of a (Chalcedonian?) christology rather different from Leontius’, with which he only partly agrees.<sup>50</sup>

It is quite right to claim that the passage will not support Loofs’s reading of *enhypostatos*, for the simple reason that Leontius does not use this term in the way that Loofs suggests. But I see no reason to suppose that the claim that the human nature subsists *in* the Word is not an accurate summary of the position that Leontius himself comes to hold in the *Epilyseis*. While it is true that the statement appears as part of an account of an opponent’s christology, it is not a part that Leontius explicitly disagrees with. And the claim that the human nature subsists *in* the Word is not very far distant from the claim made in *Epilyseis 1*, discussed above, that the human nature is not divided or separated from the Word. But I would not want to insist on this reading, since it is certainly not required for my general argument to stand.

*Epilyseis 8 (PG 86:1945B.3–C.5)*

My final passage is one that might be taken as creating some difficulties for my proposed reading of the *Epilyseis*. At the very end of the *Epilyseis* Leontius sums up his Chalcedonian alternative to the monophysite

46. *Epil.* 5 (PG 86:1928B.11–C.1).

47. *Epil.* 5 (PG 86:1928C.13–15).

48. *Epil.* 5 (PG 86:1928B.5–9, C.2–8).

49. *Epil.* 8 (PG 86:1944C.4).

50. See e.g. Lang, “Anhypostatos-Enhypostatos,” 641.

christology of Acephalus. Leontius identifies nature as essence (*ousia*), a term that he always uses in the sense of secondary substance (thus, the question at issue in my paper here is not the sense of *ousia* but the sense of “nature”—*phusis*).<sup>51</sup> And Leontius makes it clear that the distinguishing features of hypostases are accidents.<sup>52</sup> Still, I do not think we need read the passage as excluding the possibility of a sense of nature other than (universal) essence, or as excluding the possibility of accidents having a role in the individuation of objects other than hypostases. The passage constitutes an argument against my reading of *Epilyseis* 1 only from silence; and an argument from silence need not be given undue weight, not least if it is an argument against a view (Leontius’ acceptance of individual natures) for which there is elsewhere unequivocal evidence.

#### 4. CONTRA NESTORIANOS ET EUTYCHIANOS

In this section, I will argue that in this earlier work Leontius explicitly rejects particular natures, just as in the *Epilyseis*, but note too that he is silent on the possibility of individual natures. My argument that Leontius came at least to modify his position in the later work is thus an argument from silence. But Leontius’ assertion of the universality of the assumed nature is insistent, and there is no evidence that the possibility of individual natures has yet occurred to him. Still, an argument from silence has its risks, so I do not wish to be too insistent on my support for the thesis defended by Grillmeier (namely that Leontius changed his mind about the existence of individual natures), even though I believe that it is likely to be true. Supposing that this thesis is correct, I show in the second part of this section how the passage appealed to by Daley in support of a distinction between Christ’s human nature and the universal human nature might more appropriately be interpreted.

Let me begin with a very brief but unequivocal rejection of particular natures: “It is not necessary for one nature to be one in number, especially because otherwise there would be many <natures>—and just as many numerically as there are hypostases that complete <the nature>.”<sup>53</sup> In the *Epilyseis*, part of Leontius’ problem in arguing against the monophysites is to see how natures could be counted: if we can say that Christ has two natures, we must be able to count natures, and if we can count natures they must be particulars. The solution in the *Epilyseis* is to deny the

51. *Epil.* 8 (PG 86:1945B.3–4).

52. *Epil.* 8 (PG 86:1945B.4–7, 12–C.1).

53. *CNE* ε' (PG 86:1292C).

second claim here, namely that countability entails particularity. Clearly there is some sense in which we can count universals too: dog and cow are two species even though neither species is numerically one.<sup>54</sup> In the passage just quoted, Leontius makes it explicit that no species is itself numerically many either—in other words, there are no particular natures. (The consequent of the argument—“there would be many natures, and just as many numerically as there are hypostases”—is clearly intended to be counterfactual, allowing us to infer that one nature is not one in number.) The argument, however, is not entirely clear. Leontius claims that there is no sense in which a universal is numerically one: if there were, then each instance of that universal would be a numerically singular nature, and thus—on the supposition that the universal nature is numerically one—there would be numerically many particular natures. Presumably Leontius is thinking that if we allow into the realm of natures the sort of counting that belongs to hypostases, namely counting of particular objects, then we will have to affirm both that a universal nature is numerically one object, and that the nature in the particular is numerically one too: and thus numerically many in numerically many hypostases.

Why should I not be more confident here and take the passage as evidence against Leontius’ acceptance of individual natures too? My reason is that it would be hard to see in this case what the relevance of the appeal to the numerical singularity of the universal would be. Particular natures are numerically distinct repetitions of one and the same object, and the argument is that if the repetitions are countable (as many objects), so too the universal is countable (as one object). The individual natures that Leontius comes to accept have universal natures as parts, and such universal natures are not countable in the way that hypostases are. In itself a universal is not numerically one, and in the individuals it is not numerically many. So the nature in the individual is not countable in the way that particular natures would be, and thus the existence of individual natures is compatible with the argument Leontius suggests in the passage I am discussing.

So the material in *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos*, while excluding particular natures, is consistent with Leontius’ acceptance in this text of individual natures. But it seems to me that his silence about individual natures should make us wary of ascribing to Leontius a theory of individual natures in this work. In this case, how should we interpret the very first passage from Leontius cited above (in Daley’s translation)? The

54. *Epil.* 1 (PG 86:1919D.1–3).

express purpose of the passage is to outline the relations between Father and Son (and Son and Father) on the one hand, and the Son and human beings (and human beings and the Son) on the other. On Daley's reading, these various relationships are distinguished from each other in virtue of the different relations between Christ's divine nature to divinity as such, on the one hand, and Christ's human nature to humanity as such, on the other. But it is far more plausible as a reading of this text (setting aside any further question of Leontius' affirmation of individual natures) to suppose that the extremes that Leontius is talking about are, respectively, divine and human *hypostases*. The relations, according to the passage, are between the parts of Christ (divine and human nature) and, respectively, the Father and us, i.e. human beings. But the Father and human beings are hypostases. So Leontius identifies as hypostases the extremes he is talking about. There is no mention of individual natures, and the parts of Christ that Leontius is talking about are universal natures, divinity and humanity respectively. The correct gloss is this (quoting too the passage that is being glossed, and placing the gloss in angle brackets):

The relationships with respect to distinction and unity . . . which he has towards the Father and us, vary because of the relationship of the parts to the extremes <i.e. because of the relationship of the universal natures of God and humanity to the divine hypostases and to human hypostases>.

Thus, Christ is one in nature with the Father, though distinct in hypostasis; and one in nature with us, though distinct in hypostasis. These relations are explained by the relations between Christ's divine nature and the other persons of the Trinity, on the one hand, and Christ's human nature and us, on the other. Christ connects the Father and us by sharing in the two universal natures of divinity and humanity: the universal divinity is shared in too by the Father, the universal humanity is shared in too by us. There is thus no need to interpret the passage in a way that commits Leontius to individual natures; indeed, I would contend that this is contrary to the obvious intent of the text.<sup>55</sup>

If I am right, Leontius' christology is by no means as unsatisfactory as some commentators have supposed. While not using the language of the

55. It is impossible to tell from Daley's account how he understands the distinction between humanity as such and Christ's human nature (whether, in other words, he ascribes to Leontius an acceptance of individual natures or of particular natures). So I do not mean to suggest necessarily that Daley has a universal-individual relationship in mind here. But I would suggest that the universal-particular relationship is explicitly excluded by Leontius' statements in *CNE*.

enhypostasia to express his theory, he clearly comes to believe that Christ's human nature is individual, and that it fails to subsist in itself because of its relation to the hypostasis of the Word. It seems to me that the account of individual natures that Leontius comes to accept is very close indeed to that which we later find in John of Damascus: so close, indeed, that it is easy to see the later Leontius as a source for John's teaching (even the terminology is the same: a nature *en atomō*, though the parallel is not spotted in Kotter's extremely thorough apparatus of sources in his edition of John of Damascus).

If this hypothesis is correct, it arguably makes Leontius even more important in the subsequent history of christology than Loofs's analysis might have suggested. While it is certainly true that the Protestant scholastics explained the human nature's lack of subsistence in terms of its being *enhypostatos* in the Word, this whole way of looking at the matter depends on a prior assumption that the human nature is an individual. (If it is merely a universal, there is no reason to explain why it does not subsist, because mere universals, unless [minimally] bundled in the right way, simply are not the right sort of things to subsist.) The Protestant assumption that Christ's human nature is an individual clearly derives in the first instance from the medieval Schoolmen; and their acceptance of this can be traced straightforwardly to the passage from John of Damascus that I referred to above. Thus, it is rare to find arguments in the Schoolmen that Christ's human nature is individual, but almost every writer appeals to the authority of John of Damascus in support of this claim. The same, incidentally, is also true of the Protestant writers, though I think we can assume that their position ultimately simply continues to make the assumption always made by the Schoolmen about the individuality of the assumed nature. If I am right, John's teaching derives from Leontius. It is thus Leontius who—as Loofs (albeit for the wrong reason) suggested over a hundred years ago—ultimately set the scene for almost all later christological speculation about the nature of subsistence.

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