

# The Metaphysics of the Lord's Supper, Part 1

Christopher Gibilisco

I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.

---

John 16:7, *ESV*

**C**HRISTIANS ARE DIVIDED on what happens to the bread and the wine during the Lord's Supper. There are three major views:

1. **Physical Presence:** The body and blood of Christ are *physically* present in the bread and the wine.
2. **Spiritual Presence:** The body and blood of Christ are *spiritually* present in the bread and the wine.
3. **Memorialism:** The body and blood of Christ are merely *symbolically* present in the bread and the wine.

In our tradition, our conviction is that the body and blood of Christ are spiritually, but *not* physically, present in the bread and the wine. Therefore, we reject the physical presence view. Further, this spiritual presence of Christ's body and blood is not merely symbolic, but real. Therefore, we reject the memorialist view. As a result, we hold the spiritual presence view. So, to fully understand why we accept the spiritual presence view, we have to understand why we reject the other two views.

But the debate is complex, as there is considerable agreement between the different views. It would be easier to understand if we attached some names to the different views to see how the debate works. Martin Luther believed in physical presence, John Calvin believed in spiritual presence, and Ulrich Zwingli believed in memorialism. Calvin and Zwingli *agreed* that Christ was not physically present in the bread and wine, and so they used very similar arguments to attack Luther's position. In a way, then, Calvin and Zwingli formed a temporary alliance to overturn the physical presence view. But once Calvin and Zwingli had made their arguments against Luther, they had to face one another on a separate battlefield – whether Christ's presence was real, or merely symbolic. This essay will use a similar structure. In part 1 of this essay, I shall argue against the physical presence view, and then, in part 2, I will argue that Christ's presence is more than symbolic. Those two arguments add up to an argument for the spiritual presence view.

Before we begin, a disclaimer: some of the arguments considered in this essay are not based in scripture, but in metaphysics.<sup>1</sup> This is not by choice: I would argue basing theology on philosophy is a dangerous mistake. However, the physical presence view, if it is to be at all plausible, must give a philosophical account of how Christ could be

---

1. Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy dedicated to the study of the fundamental nature of reality.

physically present in the bread and wine. Since the supporters of physical presence use philosophical theories to explain their view, we are free to use philosophical arguments to *attack* those philosophical explanations. But I will not present a metaphysical theory of how spiritual presence works. For I agree with Pierre Bayle's claim that philosophy is a double-edged sword:

Philosophy can be compared to some powders that are so corrosive that, after they have eaten away the infected flesh of a wound, they then devour the living flesh, rot the bones, and penetrate to the very marrow. Philosophy at first refutes errors. But if it is not stopped at this point, it goes on to attack truths. And when it is left on its own, it goes so far that it no longer knows where it is and can find no stopping place.

That being said, let us examine physical presence views.

### **Physical Presence**

To begin, let's get clear on what the physical presence view actually says. According to the physical presence view, during the Lord's Supper, Christ's physical body becomes present in the bread, and his physical blood in the wine. That is, the very same body that lived, was crucified, and was raised from the dead; and the very same blood that was spilled on the cross. But how could Christ's body and blood become present in the elements of communion? And if Christ's body and blood really are present, why do the bread and wine appear to undergo no physical change?

Proponents of the physical presence view disagree on how to answer these questions. On the one hand, some Christians say Christ's physical presence in the bread and wine is simply a mystery – it happens one way or another, and the details are unimportant. However, some proponents of the physical presence view try to explain Christ's physical presence in the bread and wine. There are two such explanations on offer: transubstantiation and consubstantiation. Each of these explanations presents a mechanism by which Christ becomes physically present in the bread and wine. And, as it turns out, such explanations require a metaphysical account of the nature of physical objects. So, in order to understand transubstantiation and consubstantiation, we have to understand the metaphysical theory that underlies the proposed explanations of Christ's physical presence – the substratum view of physical things.

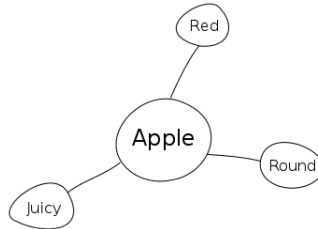
There is no uncontroversial definition of what it means for something to be a physical thing, but we can certainly characterize it with examples. Horses, stars, and stones are all physical objects. Human beings are also physical things (at least in part): our brains, eyes, hands, and so on are all physical. And these things have features: the horse is black, the star is massive, and the stone is round. In olden days philosophers called the features of objects *accidents*, and the antiquated term is unfortunately still used in the debate over the Lord's Supper.<sup>2</sup> The term 'accident' as is used here has nothing to do with the ordinary

---

2. One might ask, if the term is antiquated and confusing, why not simply use a better term? That's a fair question. I have chosen to use the clunky term 'accident' to prepare the reader for reading other sources, nearly all of which use the term 'accident.' The term comes from Aristotelian philosophy, which

usage of ‘accident’ (*i.e.*, a mishap or chance happening). The philosophical etymology of the term ‘accident’ is unimportant for our purposes here. What’s important to remember is that an accident is a feature of a thing. For example, an apple has the features of being red, round, and juicy. These features – redness, roundness, and juiciness – are accidents belonging to the apple.

According to the substratum view of physical things, accidents like redness, roundness, and juiciness don’t just float around on their own. Rather accidents belong to *substances*, which unite accidents into a coherent thing. Like pins in a pin-cushion, accidents are stuck in their substance:



So, on the substratum view, physical things are a union of a substance and its features (physical thing = substance + accidents). So an apple is red, round, and juicy. But the substance of the apple is not the redness, roundness, or juiciness. Rather, the substance is what *is* red, round, and juicy. Further, substances are not directly observable. We can see the *redness* of the apple, taste the *sweetness* of the apple, smell the *fragrance* of the apple, but we cannot directly see, taste, or smell the substance of the apple. Rather we see, taste, and smell the accidents of the apple. As a result, we know things only by their accidents, not by their substances.

So what does this have to do with the Lord’s Supper? Quite a bit: transubstantiation and consubstantiation rely on the substratum view of physical things.<sup>3</sup> Let us break down the meanings of these very long words. ‘Transubstantiation’ means that there is a crossing, swapping, or changing (*trans-*) of substances (*-substantia-*). ‘Consubstantiation’ means that there is a conjoining, merging, or coming alongside (*con-*) of two substances (*-substantia-*). Let’s further characterize these two views, starting with transubstantiation.

## Transubstantiation

According to Pope Paul VI’s *Credo of the People of God*, transubstantiation is the following doctrine:

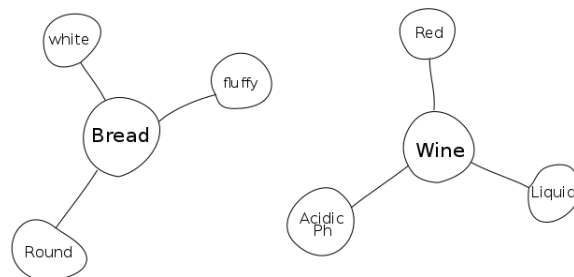
---

forms the basis for much of medieval theology, as well as modern theology in the Catholic Church. Aristotle presented a highly refined theory of substance and accidents, which was developed even further by medieval theologians. The substratum theory presented here is a mere outline of these philosophically rich theories.

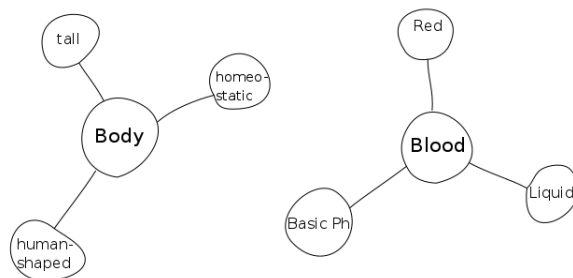
3. However, the substratum view is controversial. Some philosophers think that physical things are merely bundles of accidents, and there is no substance beneath them. We won’t discuss this view here, as transubstantiation and consubstantiation are possible only if the substratum conception of physical things is correct. That is, there is no way to make sense of consubstantiation and transubstantiation without the substratum theory. This obviously puts them at a disadvantage, as it is entirely unsettled whether the substratum theory is true. And since we could never observe a substance *in itself* it’s unclear whether such a debate could ever be settled in favor of the substratum view. But I won’t press this here.

We believe that as the bread and wine consecrated by the Lord at the Last Supper were changed into His body and His blood which were to be offered for us on the cross, likewise the bread and wine consecrated by the priest are changed into the body and blood of Christ enthroned gloriously in heaven, and we believe that the mysterious presence of the Lord, under what continues to appear to our senses as before, is a true, real and substantial presence. . . . Every theological explanation which seeks some understanding of this mystery must, in order to be in accord with Catholic faith, maintain that in the reality itself, independently of our mind, the bread and wine have ceased to exist after the Consecration, so that it is the adorable body and blood of the Lord Jesus that from then on are really before us under the sacramental species [*i.e.*, the accidents] of bread and wine, as the Lord willed it, in order to give Himself to us as food and to associate us with the unity of His Mystical Body. (25–6)

So, in a nutshell, transubstantiation says that during the Lord's Supper the bread's substance is replaced by the substance of Christ's body, the wine's substance is replaced by the substance of Christ's blood, while the accidents of the bread and wine are preserved. Let's break this down. The proponent of transubstantiation claims first that the substratum view of physical things is correct: physical things are a union of a substance and its accidents. So, the bread and wine are each a union of a substance and its accidents. We can diagram them like so:



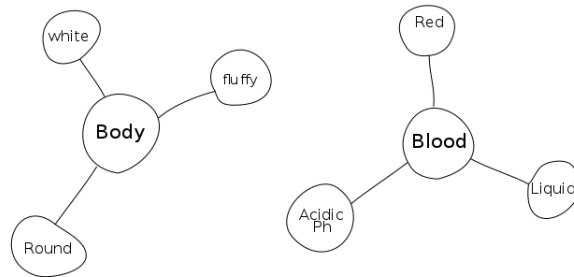
Similarly, Christ's body and blood are a union of substance and accidents, diagrammed below:



During the Lord's Supper, the substance of the bread and wine are *destroyed* and are replaced by the substance of Christ's body and Christ's blood. There is no bread and wine

on the communion table, as they have been destroyed. Rather, it is the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

Yet the appearances of bread and wine remain. This is because, despite the fact that the change in substances, the bread and wine's accidents are unchanged. We can diagram this like so:



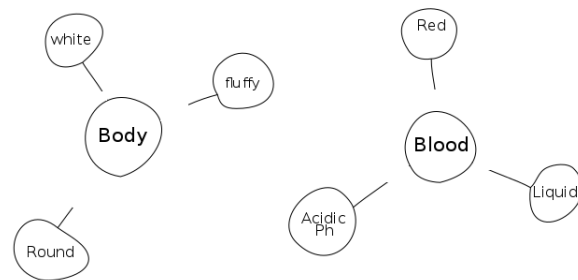
So transubstantiation answers an obvious question for the physical presence view – how can flesh and blood appear to be bread and wine? According to the proponents of transubstantiation, the *substances* of the bread and wine are destroyed, while their *accidents* remain. As a result, the physical body and blood of Christ are fully and really present during the Lord's Supper, yet the body and blood appear to be bread and wine.

But how can this be? If the accidents of the bread are stuck in Christ's substance, then Christ's body *itself* has the accidents of the bread (similarly for his blood and the wine). But Christ's body bearing the accidents of bread is bizarre – Christ's body gains the texture, shape, flavor, and fragrance of bread? Christ's blood becomes alcoholic?<sup>4</sup> The way medieval philosophers dealt with this problem was to say that, although the accidents of the bread remain, they aren't stuck in the substance of Christ. As Calvin puts it (somewhat derisively), "the bread is nothing but a mask which conceals the view of

---

4. Moreover, this version of transubstantiation leads to logical absurdities. For Christ has a physical body in heaven, which is seated at the right hand of the Father. Christ's physical body in heaven has accidents: his body has a certain shape, size and coloring. But if the accidents of the bread inhere in the substance of Christ, then Christ also has the accidents of the bread. Christ simultaneously has the bread's shape, size, and coloring, *and* his human shape, size and coloring. But nothing can have contrary shapes, sizes, or colorings at the same time. As a result, transubstantiation (at least in this form) seems absurd. And even if we suppose that Christ *can* have the accidents of a man and bread at the same time, this leads to bizarre consequences. As Pierre Bayle points out, if one thing can be in different places and have totally different appearance in each of those different places, our very understanding of what makes two things the same or different is undermined: "[When] we judge that John and Peter are two men, it is only because we see them in different places and because one does not have all the [accidents] of the other. But the basis for this distinction is destroyed by the doctrine of the Eucharist. Perhaps there is only one creature in the whole universe, produced many times in several places and with a diversity of [accidents]" (*Dictionary*, "Pyrrho," remark B, p. 201). In other words, the way we tell that two people aren't the same person is that they are in different places and they appear differently from one another. But if a human being can be in multiple places and have totally different appearances at each, then we can't *know* whether Peter and John are two people or one person. For all we know, Peter and Paul are the same person who is in two places at once, with a different appearance at each (like Christ in heaven and Christ in the bread). Of course, there's many things we can't know, but it would certainly be strange if we lived in a world where such inferences aren't safe.

[Christ's] flesh from our eye" (Calvin, *Instit.* 4.17.13). So the transformation looks more like this:



As a result, Christ's body and blood don't take on the accidents of the bread and wine. His body does not become flour-based, nor does his blood become intoxicating. So the accidents merely surround his substance on the communion table. Yet this seems to contradict substratum theory! For accidents are not supposed to float around on their own according to substratum theory. Rather, they are always united in a substance. What could it mean for whiteness to exist out in the world and yet not be the whiteness of anything? What could it mean for sweetness to exist out in the world and yet not be the sweetness of anything? Size, shape, flavor, color, and so on are features of things, not things in themselves (Pasnau 2011, 187). But if transubstantiation occurs at the communion table, we would have a bunch of loose accidents floating around without a substance. So this version of transubstantiation seems to undermine the very theory on which it relies.

Believers in transubstantiation usually amend traditional substratum theory, saying something like "yes, accidents *usually* need to be tied to a substance, but, by a miracle, God sustains and unites the accidents without a substance."<sup>5</sup> Admittedly, the idea of accidents floating around seems fishy, whether or not sustained by God. But for the sake of argument, let's say that God *can* make transubstantiation occur. Does it immediately follow that transubstantiation occurs at the communion table? No – just because God can do something doesn't mean that he in fact does it. As Calvin puts it, "The question here is not, What could God do? but, What has he been pleased to do?" (*Instit.* 4.17.24). I shall argue that scripture strongly suggests that Christ is not physically present in the Lord's Supper. But first, we much consider the other theory of physical presence, consubstantiation.

## Consubstantiation

Consubstantiation says that Christ is physically present in the Lord's Supper, but not in the same way as the proponents of transubstantiation claim. Rather than the substance

---

5. This is the official view of the Roman Catholic Church. It is worth quoting Thomas at length here: "Therefore it follows that the accidents continue in this sacrament without a subject. This can be done by Divine power: for since an effect depends more upon the first cause than on the second, God Who is the first cause both of substance and accident, can by His unlimited power preserve an accident in existence when the substance is withdrawn whereby it was preserved in existence as by its proper cause, just as without natural causes. He can produce other effects of natural causes, even as He formed a human body in the Virgin's womb, 'without the seed of man'" (Aquinas, *Sum.* III, Q. 77, Art. 1).

of Christ's body *replacing* the substance of the bread and wine, Christ is present in, with, and under the bread and wine. But before we look at what it means for Christ to be "in, with and under" the elements of the sacrament, we should first look at why proponents of consubstantiation reject transubstantiation.

Luther rejected transubstantiation, as he argued that it ignored the plain language of scripture, saying:

the Evangelists plainly write that Christ took bread (Matt. 26:26, Mark 14:22, Luke 22:19) and blessed it, and when the Book of Acts and the Apostle Paul in turn calls it bread (Acts 2:46; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:23, 26–28), we have to think of real bread and real wine, just as we do of a real cup (for even they do not say that the cup was transubstantiated). (Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," *Works* AE, 36:31)

What I take Luther to be saying here is that the Evangelists and Paul all refer to the Lord's Supper as being bread and wine. But according to transubstantiation, there is no bread or wine being distributed during communion. Rather, the bread and wine have been destroyed and have been completely replaced by Christ's body and blood. So, Luther asks, what do they refer to when they speak of bread and wine? There is no bread and wine, *only* the body and blood of Christ. They might be speaking figuratively, calling the body 'bread,' and the blood 'wine.' But this is particularly difficult to understand in the case of the wine, I think, as Christ says "I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." (Matt. 26:29). What fruit of the vine? He has blessed the cup and said "this is my blood of the covenant." If transubstantiation is true, the cup does not contain the fruit of the vine, but blood alone. So what is it that he will not drink of again until I drink it new with us in his Father's kingdom? Presumably it is not his blood that he will be drinking, but wine.

So, the believer in transubstantiation has some explaining to do, as they can't say that 'bread' and 'wine' refer to the substances of bread and wine in these passages, because, according to transubstantiation, those substances are gone during the Lord's Supper. Nor does it make much sense that the Evangelists and Paul are using the terms 'bread' and 'wine' figuratively, as they seem to be used literally, especially (I think) in the case of Christ drinking wine in the Kingdom. Therefore, what are the Evangelists and Paul referring to with the words 'bread' and 'wine'? According to the proponents of transubstantiation, they must refer to the accidents of the bread and wine which now cover the body and blood. So, when the Evangelists and Paul say 'bread' and 'wine,' they are referring to the accidents of bread and wine, not to the body and blood. Is this a plausible way to interpret the Evangelists' and Paul's words? Luther does not think so:

Therefore it is an absurd and unheard-of juggling with words to understand "bread" to mean "the form or accidents of bread," and "wine" to mean "the form or accidents of wine." Why do they not also understand all other things to mean their "forms or accidents"?

Instead, Luther argues that the only way to understand these passages properly is to say that Christ's body and blood are physically present in the Lord's Supper, but that the

bread and wine remain. That is, Luther agrees with the believer in transubstantiation that Christ is physically present in the bread and the wine, yet he thinks that sound scriptural interpretation demands that the bread and wine remain after the change. Otherwise, the Evangelists and Paul's statements about bread and wine are unintelligible.

So, what Luther suggests is that the body and blood of Christ are in, with, and under the bread and wine:

why could not Christ include his body *in* the substance of the bread just as well as in the accidents? In red-hot iron, for instance, the two substances, fire and iron, are so mingled that every part is both iron and fire. Why is it not even more possible that the body of Christ be contained in every part of the substance of the bread? ("Babylonian," *Works* AE, 36:32)

So, Christ's body and the bread are fully intermingled – every part of the sacramental element is both bread and body. The same goes for the wine and his blood. So, Christ's body and blood are in, with, and under the bread and wine, just as the fire is in, with, and under the red-hot iron.

So, how do we translate Luther's general idea into a philosophical theory? The view known as 'consubstantiation' puts Luther's ideas on the Lord's Supper in terms of substance and accidents. Essentially the idea is that the substance of Christ's body is in, with, and under the substance of the bread; and that the substance of Christ's blood is in, with, and under the substance of the wine. That is, the whole substance of Christ's body is in every part of the substance of the bread, and the whole substance of Christ's blood is in every part of the substance of the wine. And the reason why the bread and wine appear unchanged is simple: the bread and wine still exist with their accidents intact. Despite the appearances, however, the bread really is changed. Namely, Christ becomes present in the elements of the sacrament, yet the substances of his body and blood do not displace the substances of the bread and wine. Further, the accidents of the bread and the wine inhere in the bread and wine, and not in the body of Christ, avoiding the absurdities of Christ himself becoming bready, having contrary accidents, and so on. This, then, is consubstantiation.<sup>6</sup>

Now that we understand consubstantiation, we can begin to evaluate it. The primary philosophical question concerning consubstantiation is whether two substances can overlap. That is, can two distinct substances simultaneously occupy the same location? If they can't, then consubstantiation is false, as it says that two distinct substances *can* occupy the same location (namely, the body and the bread, and the blood and the wine). So, is it possible for two distinct substances to be at the same place at the same time?

This question is difficult to answer, as substances are not objects of our experience. Rather, substances are theoretical entities that (some) philosophers posit in hopes of solving philosophical problems.<sup>7</sup> The exact puzzles that led philosophers to posit substances need not worry us here. What is important to know, however, is that substances are a

---

6. Did Luther believe in consubstantiation as presented here? I agree with the majority of Lutherans that the answer is clearly 'No.' See Appendix A for the argument in favor of this interpretation.

7. To explain what it means to posit an entity to solve a philosophical entity, I present some background on philosophical practice in Appendix B.



philosophical construct that may or may not correspond to reality. Unfortunately, there is no consensus among philosophers whether the substratum theory is true, and there are rarely conclusive arguments in these kinds of philosophical debates. As a result, even if substances exist, we cannot say much about their nature. As a result, who can say whether two substances can occupy the same location?<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, we can grant for the sake of argument that two distinct substances can occupy the same location at the same time, and that God could make consubstantiation occur. But the crucial question, again, is this: what does God actually please with respect to Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper? Does it please God to make Christ physically present in the bread, whether it be by transubstantiation, consubstantiation, or some other means we have not discussed? I shall now argue that scripture indicates that he is not pleased to make Christ physically present in the bread and the wine.

### Where is Christ?

Jesus Christ is a human being with a definite location. Namely, he sits at the right hand of the Father. Christ, in turn, sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in us. To repeat the quote at the beginning of this essay, Christ told his disciples, "it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7). And the Holy Spirit has come to dwell in us (Acts 2:1–13) and Christ has departed (Luke 24:51). And in what sense did Christ leave us? He certainly has not left us *spiritually*, as the Holy Spirit lives in us and he is with us always (Matt. 28:20). Rather, when he ascended into heaven, he physically left us. And he will remain physically separated from us until he returns at the end of the age. Therefore, Christ is not physically present at the communion table, let alone anywhere else in this world. He is in heaven.

**Objection:** Why would it be impossible for Christ to be wholly present in heaven *and* wholly present at the communion table?

**I reply:** Christ is a human being, and human beings are physical entities. Physical entities cannot be *wholly present* in two locations at once. For a thing is 'wholly present at a location' if and only if every part of that thing is present at said location. Christ is wholly present in heaven, since every part of him is present at that location. So how can he be anywhere else, let alone the communion table? For we typically think that if something is in two places at once, it must be spread out with different parts in different places – some here and some there – like a blanket spread on the ground. But you say *all* of Christ is in heaven and *all* of Christ is in the sacrament. How can this be?

**Objection:** This is an unfair characterization. Just because something is *wholly present* somewhere doesn't mean that it is *exclusively present* there. In other words, just because

---

8. Physics does tell us that there are a class of particles, bosons, which can fully overlap each other in this way. That is, two bosons can occupy the exact same location under certain conditions. Does the nature of bosons show that Christ and bread can exist at the very same place? Supposing bosons are the way we think they are, and that they are substances, bosons demonstrate that it is possible for two substances to overlap. But that does not mean that *any* two substances can overlap, as the reasons that bosons can sometimes overlap does not apply to other kinds of things. To use bosons as evidence for the possibility of consubstantiation, then, would require further argument.

all of something is in one place “does not mean that it is present at that place and no other” (Bigelow 1988, 21). There is no logical contradiction in something being wholly present in multiple locations.

**I reply:** I will grant you for the sake of argument that there is no *logical* contradiction in something being wholly present in two different locations. But such multi-location seems contrary to Christ’s *human nature*, as human beings can only be in one place.<sup>9</sup>

**Objection:** Your reply assumes that Christ is not almighty, as an almighty being could certainly be wholly present in two locations at the same time, even if that being is human.

**I reply:** That is a tricky line of argument, but I will set that to the side.<sup>10</sup> I will grant that Christ *can* be wholly physically present at every communion table in the world while remaining wholly present in heaven, by whatever fancy metaphysical account of sacramental presence you can cook up. Even so, your whole line of argument misses the point. Christ *could* physically return on the communion table if that were God’s will. But scripture shows that God has willed otherwise.

**Objection:** But scripture is the basis for the physical presence view! Christ told us “This is my body” and “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.” On a straightforward reading, Christ is identifying the bread and wine with his physical body and blood. That is, Christ is saying that the bread he is physically present in the bread and wine.

**I reply:** We must interpret Christ’s statement in light of other scriptural evidence. Namely, Christ told his apostles “you will not always have me” (Matt. 26:11).<sup>11</sup> And after he suffered, died, and rose from the dead, he *ascended* into heaven (Luke 24:51), where he sits at the right hand of the Father *above* (Col. 3:1). And he will appear a *second* time (Heb. 9:28), returning in *the same way* that he left us (Acts 1:11). So either Christ lied, and he is physically present in this world (in the Lord’s Supper), or he is not physically present in this world (including the Lord’s Supper). Since the former is absurd, the latter must be true, making the physical presence view false.

**Objection:** No, Christ told the truth despite being physically present in the Lord’s Supper. He left the world in the sense that he will not return in his full form until the Second Coming. That is what Christ meant when he said that he would be leaving us to join his Father in heaven. Nothing prevents him in the meantime from being physically present in the Lord’s Supper without the accidents that he bears in heaven.

**I reply:** This is a particularly tortured interpretation of scripture, but I cannot prove it is wrong. However, it seems to me that this is a high price to pay to interpret the Lord’s Supper in favor of the physical presence view. Your interpretation would make Christ’s words “This is my body” and “This is my blood” literally true, but at the cost of a dozen other verses being bludgeoned to death. And why is it so important that Christ be physically present in the Lord’s Supper? I agree that Christ is really present, but I fail to see why his spiritual presence is not enough to imbue the sacrament with its full meaning. For on the spiritual presence view, Christ’s body and blood are truly present in the bread and the wine. Why would the fact that his presence is spiritually mediated demean the

---

9. Zwingli, “An Account of the Faith of Huldreich Zwingli,” *Latin Works*, 2:49–50.

10. See Appendix C for issues concerning God’s almightiness.

11. See Zwingli, “Account,” *Latin Works*, 2:49; Calvin, *Instit.*, 4.17.26.

sacrament? Is the spirit lower than the flesh? That is absurd. Therefore, I conclude that Christ is not physically present in the bread and the wine, and that we are no worse off for it.

### **Conclusion to Part 1**

I have argued that Christ is not physically present in the bread and the wine. However, even if my arguments against physical presence succeeds, it does not immediately follow that Christ is spiritually present in the bread and the wine. The argument in §4 established, at best, that *if* Christ is really present in the bread and wine, *then* he is spiritually present. So, before we can conclude that Christ is spiritually present, we must first show that Christ is really present in the bread and wine. This, however, is a difficult task that I don't currently have the time to undertake. I hope to write a sequel to this essay, where I will explain why the Lord's Supper is not a mere symbol, but a true participation in the body and blood of Christ, which is a means of grace.

# Appendices

## Luther and Consubstantiation

Luther deeply mistrusted metaphysics, even referring to the metaphysical doctrine of transubstantiation as a “monstrosity,” and Aristotle as “the monster himself” (“Babylonian,” *Works* AE, 36:33). He continues, on the same page, to say

What shall we say when Aristotle and the doctrines of men are made to be the arbiters of such lofty and divine matters? Why do we not put aside such curiosity and cling simply to the words of Christ, willing to remain in ignorance of what takes place here and content that the real body of Christ is present by virtue of the words? Or is it necessary to comprehend the manner of the divine working in every detail?’

The doctrine of consubstantiation makes use of the same monstrous philosophical concepts of ‘substance’ and ‘accident,’ and so he would reject this account also. Luther admittedly makes use of the substance-accident framework when it suits him, like in the aforementioned red-hot iron analogy (“Babylonian,” *Works* AE, 36:32), and in a (highly questionable!) passage about the Lord’s Supper and Christ’s dual nature (“Babylonian,” *Works* AE, 36:35). Nonetheless, he insists his faith is simple:

For my part, if I cannot fathom how the bread is the body of Christ, yet I will take my reason captive to the obedience of Christ, and clinging simply to his words, firmly believe not only that the body of Christ is in the bread, but that the bread is the body of Christ. (“Babylonian,” 36:34)

Of course, in holding himself to this standard, he implies that the reader should do the same (see also “Babylonian,” 36:35). The view that Lutherans hold to, given these strictures, is known as ‘Sacramental Union,’ which bears a strong resemblance to the *descriptive* component of consubstantiation, without the *explanatory component*. In other words, Sacramental Union proponents agree with consubstantiation insofar as they think *that* Christ’s body and blood are in, with, and under the bread and wine; but they decry any specific explanation of *how* this union occurs and is sustained – including the explanation provided by consubstantiation. In this essay, I do not argue against Sacramental Union directly, but my criticism of physical presence views in §4 applies to the Sacramental Union view as well, as it is a physical presence view.

## Philosophical Practice

Philosophical investigation has two main components. First, philosophers discover philosophical puzzles that need solving. This involves identifying explanatory gaps in our understanding of the world, clarifying the exact nature of the resulting puzzle, and determining what a successful solution to that puzzle would look like. Second, philosophers attempt to solve philosophical puzzles using a variety of methods. Take the following philosophical puzzle about human beings:

You have undergone a number of physical changes since birth. Most strikingly, through a process of eating and excreting, you are made up of totally different matter than you were as a baby. You have nothing physical in common with your infant self. Yet you are the same person as you were as an infant. How can this be?

One way philosophers have tried to solve this problem is by positing a theoretical entity – an immaterial soul. Your soul is an immaterial part of you that survives all the physical changes you have undergone throughout your life. On this view, you are the same person throughout your life in virtue of your having the same soul throughout. However, what is a soul? Why can't a person have two souls? What makes my soul different from your soul? Is there anyway to distinguish them? Why don't rocks have souls? These questions are very difficult to answer, because an immaterial soul is not an object of our experience. Rather, souls (in the philosophical sense) are theoretical entities that (some) philosophers posit in the hopes of solving philosophical puzzles about the persistence of human beings over time. This is a special application of a general philosophical method that is perennially popular among philosophers, where one posits a theoretical entity or entities that would, if real, solve the philosophical puzzle. Since these entities can solve puzzles, the philosophers argue that we should believe in such entities even though we have no direct experience with them. These hypothetical entities might seem like figments of philosophers' imaginations, but supporters of this method say that it is analogous to scientific theorizing. For example, they say, we do not have any direct experience with subatomic particles. However, scientists accept the existence of these unobservable particles because the standard model does a remarkable job explaining the physical phenomena we *can* observe in the laboratory. So, we believe that these particles exist, because they explain physical phenomena better than anything else. This same kind of reasoning can be used to solve philosophical puzzles, and thereby give us reason to believe in theoretical philosophical entities. So, the philosophers who posit souls argue, we should believe that souls exist, because souls explain the persistence of human beings better than anything else. However, this appeal to science is faulty, I believe, and so we have no reason to think that this method is reliable in philosophy as it (supposedly) is in science. But I do not have the space to explain why here.<sup>12</sup>

## Omnipotence

Consider three kinds of almightiness that could describe God's power, as they were presented by Peter Geach (1973, 9). First, some philosophers and theologians (most notably Descartes) think that God is *absolutely omnipotent*: God is completely unrestrained by his nature and the laws of logic. He could make ' $2+2=5$ ' true (where ' $2$ ', ' $5$ ', ' $+$ ', and ' $=$ ' mean what we usually take them to mean) *and* he could do things like break his promises. (Note well that this view says that he *can* do these things, not that he *does* or *would* do those things.) However, given our convictions, this cannot be true. We believe that God cannot break his promises. But there are other definitions of almightiness available.

First, some philosophers and theologians believe that God is *logically omnipotent*: God can do anything *except* bring about contradictions – even God couldn't make it true that

---

12. See chap. 4 of Gibilisco, 2016.

' $2+2=5$ ,' or create a stone so heavy that he couldn't lift it, and so on. Going down the path of *absolute* omnipotence leads to paradoxes, and so we should reject absolute omnipotence. Yet on the logical omnipotence definition of almightiness, it seems that God could still bring about things contrary to his nature. For there is no *logical* contradiction in God breaking a promise, for example, at least not in the sense that ' $2+2=5$ ' is a contradiction. Again, we cannot accept this, given our convictions. God cannot break a promise – he is steadfast and faithful by his very nature. So we need a different definition of almightiness that takes this into account.

In response, I think we should accept the *divine omnipotence* definition of God's almightiness: God can do anything that is logically possible *and* is consistent with his nature. This is obviously a souped-up version of logical omnipotence. It says that God can do anything except break the laws of logic or go against his nature. And we shouldn't think this limits God's power in any way, as it seems odd to say that God isn't almighty because he can't make contradictions true or break his promises. These are impossibilities, and so even God can't bring them about – *they are flatly impossible*. As a result, I argue, we should accept divine omnipotence: that God cannot do the impossible: he can't make contradictions true (else we run into paradoxes), nor can he act against his nature (else he could renege on his promises, undermining our hope). As a result, since Christ is human by nature, he cannot be in two places at once as the supporter of physical presence argues above (§4. This is no mark against Christ's almightiness, as he really can do anything, so long as it is consistent with his nature (including his humanity). This, of course, is something rational, well-meaning, and fully informed Christians can disagree about, and my conclusion may be false. Nonetheless, I think arguments that appeal to God being absolutely omnipotent are on shaky ground.

## Bibliography

- Aquinas, Thomas. 1920. *Summa Theologiæ*. 2nd ed. Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province. <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/>.
- Bayle, Pierre. 1991. *Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections*. Trans. Richard H. Popkin. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.
- Bigelow, John. 1988. *The Reality of Numbers*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Calvin, John. 1990. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Trans. Henry Beveridge. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Geach, P. T. "Omnipotence." *Philosophy* 48 (1973): 7–20.
- Gibilisco, Christopher. 2016. "Theories of Properties and Ontological Theory-Choice: An Essay in Metaontology." PhD diss. University of Nebraska-Lincoln. <http://cjkibilisco.org/documents/diss-final.pdf>.
- Luther, Martin. 1955-86. *Luther's Works*. 55 vols. Eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman. Philadelphia: Muehlenberg and Fortress, and St. Louis: Concordia.
- Pasnau, Robert. 2011. *Metaphysical Themes, 1274–1671*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Paul VI. 1968. *Credo of the People of God*. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/motu\\_proprio/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_motu-proprio\\_19680630\\_credo.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_p-vi_motu-proprio_19680630_credo.html).
- Zwingli, Huldreich. 1912–1929. *The Latin Works and the Correspondence of Huldreich Zwingli, Together with Selections from his German Works*. Eds. Samuel Macauley Jackson, William John Hinke, Clarence Nevin Heller. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, and Philadelphia: The Heidelberg Press.