Re-examining Cyril of Alexandria's Theory of the Incarnate Union

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Re-examining Cyril of Alexandria's Theory of the Incarnate Union

Sergey Trostyanskiy

In the first half of the 5th century the great Christological controversy broke out, one that concerned the issues of the Incarnate Union in Christ. This controversy had an immense impact on Global Christianity, the works of its main protagonists becoming formative in the process of constructing classical Christian *oikonomia*.[1] The intellectual input of its principal character and the "champion of Orthodoxy," Cyril of Alexandria, in many ways determined the course of the following centuries' Christological speculations. His subtle and nuanced thought initiated a new wave of theologizing about the union of natures in Christ.

One particular notion, however, turned into a stumbling block for many thinkers during the controversy. It concerned the form of the union of natures in Christ and the mode of subsistence of its elements, so to say. How do the humanity and the divinity of Christ come together so as to create the ineffable union? There were present at the time a few theoretical backgrounds associated with this issue, one utilizing the notion of inherence as an explanatory framework capable of laying hold of the subject under investigation. The humanity of the Word was apprehended under this scenario as belonging to the Word, being his own (ἴδιον), and inhering in the subject of the Word. Another approach aimed to conceptualize the union as entailing a dual subjectivity in Christ and thus apprehending it in relational terms (κατὰ σχέσιν). Here, the unity attained at the event of the Incarnation was understood as a relational loose bond that unites the two subjects and gives them a common πρόσωπον or appearance (i.e. external manifestation). Finally, another conceptual thread described the mode of subsistence of natures as entailing unification proper. A mysterious ἕνωσις, according to this view, brought together two essentially different and conceptually distinct entities, namely, humanity and divinity so that they may exist as one. The protagonists of this theory,

[1] I.e. the science of Christ that concerns God *qua* His loving care for the household, i.e. the created universe.

including Cyril of Alexandria, persistently argued that what is properly unified can no longer subsist as "the many." However, at first it was not precisely clear what this may entail. Various ambiguities associated with the idea of unification instantly paved ways to rhetorical contests over its nature. Meantime, some thinkers, including such prominent theologians as Gregory of Nazianzus, had already utilized the notion of mixture in their thought, perhaps thinking of it as capable of elucidating certain aspects of the ineffable union (e.g. by metaphorically delineating the mode of unification of natures). Even more so, this same notion was well featured in the works of Apollinarius of Laodicea, an arch-heretic condemned and anathematized by the ecumenical council of 381.[2] This was perhaps the reason why various theologians, especially those that belonged to the "school" of Antioch, looked at the idea of the ineffable union as entailing mixture and thus presenting a great threat to Christian *theologia*,[3] because its original and most well-known Aristotelian rendering assumed change in the ingredients as a necessary condition for mixture to obtain. The most immediate theological ramification of this assumption was the possibility of predicating change to the Word of God. A set of arguments, linking the ineffable union, mixture, and Apollinarianism was introduced by the Antiochenes. Thus, anyone proclaiming the ineffable union of such a kind was immediately branded as Apollinarian. In general, the notion of mixture played out during the entire course of the great Christological debate.

Meantime, Cyril of Alexandria's conception of unification of the human and the divine natures of Christ was perceived by his contemporaries (especially by such prominent interlocutors of Cyril as Theodore of Cyrrhus and Nestorius of Constantinople) as entailing mixture.[4] He was often charged with mixing the natures in Christ and

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[2] Apollinarius indeed spoke about the unity of a mixed incarnate divine nature. See Apollinaris of Laodicea. Frag. IX. in Hans Lietzmann, ed. *Apollinaris von Laodicea und seine schule: Texte und untersuchungen* (University of California Libraries 1904), 206.

[3] I.e. The science of Christ that concerns God *qua* God.

[4] Theodoret's exclamation regarding Cyril's theory of the Ineffable Union is quite remarkable: "we are wholly ignorant of the union according to hypostasis as being strange and foreign to the divine Scriptures and the Fathers who have interpreted them. And if the author of these statements means by the union according to hypostasis that there was a mixture of flesh and Godhead, we shall oppose his statement with all our might, and shall confute his blasphemy."

thus subverting the basic parameters of Christian *theologia* wherein God the Word, commonly apprehended as sharing all common characteristics with God the Father, including those of immutability, ontological stability, and so on, was now presented as subject to change and mutation. And indeed, if we consider Aristotle's account of mixture as commanding the field of studies in that era, it appears that unification takes place inescapably by means of the mutual alteration of the properties of mixables. Hence, Cyril's creative effort, as some thinkers of the time had suggested, was detrimental for the conception of God.

Various modern scholars took up and further pushed this charge by attempting to explicate the proper philosophical underpinnings of Cyril's *oikonomia* by clearly identifying the presence of "mixture in disguise" in Cyril's discourse and pinning down its roots as stemming either from Aristotle, or the Stoics, or Neoplatonists, to name only a few options in the spectrum of choices associated with mixture. Those scholars, including such prominent historians as (1956) Harry Wolfson, (2010) Frances Young[5] and (1965) Aloys Grillmeier, just to name a few, have led astray a generation of students in this domain by reproducing unsupported accusations of Cyril. Their accusations boil down to the following argument: Cyril, having been charged by the Antiochene thinkers with teaching mixture, denied that he thought of the union as taking place by way of mixture. Even then, the actual content of his thought, they asserted, clearly indicated that he either actually taught the union as mixture in disguise, or used similes of mixture to explain the Incarnation. Then, following their fourth century predecessors, these scholars insisted on some rudimentary "Apollinarist" layers of Cyril's thought. Their argument can be presented in the following way: even though we learn from Cyril that the Word of God "is entirely unchangeable and immutable, and in

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Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Counter-statements to Cyril's 12th Anathemas*. in NPNF, 2nd Series, Vol. 3. Ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1892.), 26.

[5] As we learn from Young, " Cyril thought he was appealing to the authority of respected figures of the past; but every one of these treatises came from Apollinarian circles." Frances M. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 2nd. Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2010), 316. Grillmeier, in turn, presents to the reader a similar but more nuanced critical assessment of Cyril's alleged Apollinarianism.

accordance with the scriptures he abides ever the same,"[6] we should not take these words at their face value, taking into account his Apolliarist background, so to say. When we hear from Cyril that the Word of God is immutable and unalterable "always," and that at the event of the Incarnation he remained "what he was" (καὶ οὕτω μεμενηκὼς ὅπερ ἦν), namely, God in nature and truth,[7] we should also keep in mind that the union of divinity and humanity may not be effected without an introduction of a new and different whole endowed with a new set of qualities. If that requirement is not fulfilled, then what is effected instead is some sort of juxtaposition (παράθεσις or συνάφεια). However, Cyril argued, a mere juxtaposition of natures is not expressive of the structure and the constellation of elements of the ineffable union. He shared this contention with various Neoplatonist thinkers of his time. He argued that: "οὔτε μὴν κατὰ παράθεσιν τὸν τῆς συναφείας νοοῦμεν τρόπον (οὐκ ἀπόχρη γὰρ τοῦτο πρὸς ἕνωσιν φυσικήν)."[8] In other words: a mere juxtaposition is no union at all. We can find a similar argument in Porphyry and Proclus.[9] Hence, one may infer, the ineffable union (ἕνωσις) can only be attained through μίξις, since the contrary of παράθεσις is indeed μίξις. How does this affect the argument? Especially in the light of Cyril's earlier strong rejection of mixture wherein he insisted that "mixture" was indeed used by the Greek Fathers when, out of anxiety, they rushed to "declare extreme union" ("τὴν εἰς ἄκρον ἕνωσιν").[10] Cyril's rendering of this and similar passages was to argue that the fathers used the word "mixture" "rather improperly and simply" ("ὡς ἐν καταχρήσει καὶ ἁπλῶς"), following Scripture which made use of such a word.[11] We can infer from Cyril's words that the language of mixture may have, at best, a metaphorical significance and the fathers' conception of "extreme union" of natures (whatever this notion may entail) was incidentally and improperly

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[6] Cyril of Alexandria, *Ep. 3 Nest.* in Edward Schwartz, ed. *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*: Tomus 1, Concilium Universale Ephesenum (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1927–30), 1.1.1, 35. 20. Translated by (2004) John A. McGuckin.

[7] Ibid., ACO 1.1.1, 35. 20.

[8] Ibid., ACO 1.1.1, 36. 16–17.

[9] See Richard Sorabji, *The Philosophy of the Commentators, 200-600AD*. Vol. 2: Physics (Ithaca; NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 297.

[10] Here Cyril was most likely referring to Gregory of Nazianzus' exclamations about the Incarnation: "Ὢ τῆς καινῆς μίξεως! ὢ τῆς παραδόξου κράσεως!" *In Theoph*. PG 36: 325. 33–34, and *In Sanct Pascha*. PG 36: 633. 50–51.

[11] Cyril of Alexandria, *Contra Nest.* ACO 1.1.6, 22. 9–12.

designated as mixture; albeit, in another place Cyril would use some analogies of mixture and would further argue that a mere juxtaposition of natures is no union at all. May we, then, think that Cyril indeed taught mixture in disguise and his rejection of mixture represents a mere self-defense against the charges pressed against him by his adversaries?

In the eyes of Cyril's accusers, the notion of mixture introduced into discourse may have jeopardized the integrity of Christian thought as far as it concerns God. Hence, they feared, the Word of God may be mistakenly understood as subject to change (i.e. alteration). However, as we will see shortly, a variety of theories of mixture circulated within philosophical circles at the time, including those that did not assume Aristotle's premisses. Some of those theories perhaps could have allowed Cyril to apprehend the union of natures in Christ as taking place immutably, so to say, at least not entailing change in the category of quality. In this light how should we understand Cyril's very subtle discourse on the Incarnation?

My hypothesis is rooted in the assumption that Cyril had introduced to Christian discourse on the Incarnation a set of conditions established for "true affirmations" about Christ. I shall call Cyril's conditions—*I*-conditions.[12] These, I take, to be clearly expounded by the Alexandrian as the following: (a) divinity and humanity differ in kind; even so, in Christ they are unified; (b) the Word of God, the single subject of Christ, is "one and the same" before and after the Incarnation; (c) in the Incarnate state he is "out of both"—divinity and humanity; (d) the union of natures does not effect mutation or change in the Word of God (thus, the Word of God "becomes" Incarnate without altering his properties or undergoing any kind of change); (e) the human "nature" of the Word of God in his incarnate state is neither separate nor separable from the Word of God; (f) the ineffable union of natures is indivisible; (g) the union is indissoluble. These conditions constituted an axiomatic core of Cyril's theory of the Incarnation setting out the boundaries that distinguish true affirmations about the subject from erroneous ones and thus allowing Cyril to judge any particular Christological hypothesis as either representing a genuine "science of Christ," or as a deceptive mockery of Christian sophists. These *I*-conditions, in my understanding of Cyril's thought, stemmed from his soteriology and not from any philosophical concerns, taking the truth

[12] "*I* " here standing for the Incarnation.

of the Church's faith in salvation and not the issues of theoretical coherence and consistency as the end point of discourse. I should now note that there was no single theory of mixture, to my knowledge, in that era that would satisfy all these conditions. However, some theories may approximate to them to a greater or lesser degree and thus be potential candidates for pinning down the conceptual roots of Cyril's thought.

A few notable conjectures introduced by scholars of our time should be mentioned here. For instance, H. Wolfson thought of "mixture with predominance," a concept that he found in Aristotle, as an underlying theoretical framework of Cyril's oikonomic thought.[13] Indeed, Wolfson noted, Cyril should not be charged as teaching mixture *per se*. Rather, his conceptual approach relied on analogies of mixture. He argued that Cyril aimed to find a right analogy for the Incarnation that could function as an explanatory framework for the subject in hand. Now, if the structure of one object is discernible and isomorphic to the structure of a less well known object, analogical reasoning can help us arrive at the knowledge of the latter object whose discernibility is in some ways restricted. This lack of transparency of an object, therefore, does not immediately signify its complete ineffability. It can still be known and described analogically. And, as far as Cyril's conception is concerned, the analogy of mixture with predominance was, according to Wolfson, a proper theoretical framework that sustained Cyril's speculations about the Incarnate Union. Wolfson argued that while objecting to the use of such terms as "confusion," "mixture," etc., as inappropriate for the subject matter, Cyril still allowed the use of the term "composition" (σύνθεσις).[14] He then concluded that Cyril's "composition" was simply union or mixture with "predominance" in disguise.

Another conjecture was to tie Cyril's thought to Stoic conceptions. A passage concerning the suffering of Christ in his *Quod Unus Sit Christus* apparently supports this contention. There Cyril argued that the suffering of God the Word Incarnate:

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[13] He noted that: "[n]o special name is given by Aristotle to this kind of union." Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, Vol 1. *Faith, Trinity, Incarnation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 379. As a matter of fact, Aristotle discussed untypical mixtures in his *On Generation and Corruption*. However, he neither named them, nor discussed them in depth. See Aristotle, *De Gen*, 238b.1-14.

[14] Wolfson, *The Philosophy*, 374–5.

is like iron, or other such material, when it is put in contact with a raging fire. It receives the fire into itself, and when it is in the very heart of the fire, if someone should beat it, then the material itself takes the battering but the nature of the fire is in no way injured by the one who strikes. This is how you should understand the way in which the Son is said both to suffer in the flesh and not to suffer in the Godhead.[15]

From this we learn that iron receives fire into itself. While being affected by fire the iron loses its density (or hardness) and thus can be easily molded by the hammer, whereas the fire that is in the iron is in no way affected. The notion of one thing receiving "another" in this context can indeed be interpreted as a case of Stoic co-extension. Thus, the fire is "in" the iron not in the sense of being "in the receptacle," nor is it "in the subject" of the iron, being "added" to the iron as a new accident. Rather the fire simply passes through the iron being co-extended with it. It is affected neither by the iron nor by the hammer. Thus, it acts without being acted upon. It preserves its substantial form without altering its properties. There is no change in the active ingredient.

Alexander of Aphrodisias' report about Stoic mixture fully supports this inference. "Fire passes completely through iron with each of them preserving its own substance."[16] Cyril then continued by saying that: "it is true that fire has conversed with materials which in their own natures are not hot, and yet, renders them hot since it so abundantly introduces to them the inherent energy of its own power."[17] This transaction is indeed asymmetrical; no reciprocation takes place in this case. This appears very much similar to what we learned from the Stoics. Cyril then draws a parallel between fire and iron and the Incarnation claiming that: "surely, in an even greater degree the Word who is God can introduce the life-giving power and energy of his own

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[15] Cyril of Alexandria, *Quod Unus*. in G.M. de Durand, *Cyrille d'Alexandrie. Deux Dialogues Christologiques*. SC 97 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1964), 776. 12–18. Translated by (1995) John A. McGuckin.

[16] "ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ πῦρ ὅλον δι' ὅλου χωρεῖν τοῦ σιδήρου λέγουσι, σώζοντος αὐτῶν ἑκατέρου τὴν οἰκείαν οὐσίαν." Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Mix*. 218. 1–2. Translated by (1976) Robert B. Todd.

[17] "εἰ γάρ ἐστιν ἀληθὲς ὅτι ταῖς ὕλαις ὁμιλῆσαν τὸ πῦρ, καίτοι θερμὰς οὐκ οὔσας αὐτὰς κατ' ἰδίαν φύσιν, ἀποφαίνει θερμάς· ἐνίησι γὰρ καὶ μάλα πλουσίως αὐταῖς τῆς ἐνούσης αὐτῷ δυνάμεως τὴν ἐνέργειαν." Cyril of Alexandria, *Quod Unus.* 177. 30–34.

self into his very own flesh."[18] One can then make an analogical inference and say that as the fire unites un-confusedly and unchangeably with iron, so does the Word and the flesh unite in the Incarnation. We may then conclude that this analogy was most likely associated with the Stoic theory of mixture (κρᾶσις). More significant is the fact that this Stoic conception of mixture did not entail change or destruction of the ingredients in the mixture. And indeed the ingredients fully preserved their actual status in the mixture.

Other contemporary scholars, in turn, have argued that, though Cyril explicitly repudiated the conception of mixture in regards to the natures in Christ, he nevertheless allowed the qualities of natures to intermingle. And indeed, we have one passage in Cyril that apparently supports this conjecture. The context in which the passage is found is Cyril's example of a mother who gives birth to a child. Cyril argued that the child is a compounded creature made of soul and body. The mother, properly speaking, gives birth to the flesh, the soul being supplied by God. Nevertheless, she is said to be a mother of the child rather than the "flesh-mother." The meaning of the passage is that the child is one thing out of two diverse factors that are: "concurring, as it were, into a natural unity, and each mingling its specific and proper characteristics with the other."[19] John McGuckin's rendering of this passage apparently ties Cyril's thought to some thinkers of whom we learn from Plotinus, namely those who insisted that mixture entails the union of the *propria* of natures but not natures *per se*. McGuckin noted that: "the Antiochenes accused Cyril on this point of mixing up the natures indiscriminately." However, he argued, ἀνακίρναμαι: "refers to the *propria*: he [Cyril] is not teaching a mixed nature but rather shared characteristics: the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* or exchange of properties."[20] It is interesting to note that this conjecture may not appear immediately cogent, as one may indeed ask about the possibility of the natures remaining what they are if their qualities experience some kind of mutual alteration. They then must, using

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[18] "Πῶς οὐ μᾶλλον ἐνίησι Θεὸς ὢν ο Λόγος τῇ ἰδίᾳ σαρκὶ τὴν ζωοποιὸν ἑαυτοῦ δύναμιν καὶ ἐνέργειαν, ἑνωθεὶς αὐτῇ καὶ ἰδίαν αὐτὴν ἀποφήνας, ἀσυγχύτως καὶ ἀτρέπτως καὶ καθ' ὃν οἶδε τρόπον αὐτός." Ibid., 777. 34–37.

[19] "συνδεδραμηκότων δὲ ὥσπερ εἰς ἑνότητα φυσικὴν καὶ οἷον ἀνακρινάντων ἀλλήλοιν ὅπερ ἂν ὡς ἴδιον ἑκατέρωι προσῆι." *Ep. ad Monachos*. ACO 1.1.1, 15. 32–3. Translated by (2004) John A. McGuckin.

[20] John A. McGuckin, *Saint Cyril of Alexandria and the Christological Controversy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004), fn. 3, 252.

Aristotle's metaphor, "corrupt each other's excess,"[21] while a new shared quality is being introduced. Even so, this rendering of mixture was historically significant and influential at the time. Thus, we may assume, Cyril might have been acquainted with this theory. In any case, we may not immediately rule it out.

We can see from the above examples that a crucial theological point associated with the use of the notion of mixture was to preserve divine immutability and ontological stability. If we phrase it in theological terms we may say that Christian oikonomic thought should correlate with, and be supportive of, Christian *theologia*. Indeed, the Word of God (*qua* God) should not be thought of as subject to change and serial order, even after the event of the Incarnation. This also entails that the Word of God should not lose his omniscience and the efficacy of His power should not be quenched. His divine nature must not be understood as subsisting in the union in a merely potential state. Finally, we should not be dismissive of Cyril's continuous insistence on preserving the unity of the subject of Christ. The Word of God is the sole subject (both for existence and of predication) of Christ. Therefore, a new *tertium quid* resulting from the alleged mixture must be instantly ruled out as totally impermissible. How is it then possible for two natures to come-to-be-one without effecting a new set of qualities, suffering alteration, and – ultimately – introducing a new subject? What kind of mixture would it be? A more general question in this context concerns the nature of mixables. What kind of things mix in the first place and what is mixture in general?

According to Aristotle, the subject of mixture proper concerns the physics of our sublunar region. When exploring the most foundational features of sublunar natures he attempted to elucidate the ways certain material ingredients of this region enter into a relation and combine so as to create a new "like-parted" (ὁμοιομερές) or uniform material entity. Aristotle's account of mixture was premised upon the assumption that in the physical world bodies join one another in a way that allows for the product of such a "joint venture" to be a new material entity with a new set of properties. This "joint venture" implied a mutual contact and change of bodies, or of their properties, or of both.

According to Aristotle, only like-parted bodies of our sublunar realm mix. He insisted that "the mixture ought to be uniform (ὁμοιομερές)

[21] Aristotle, *De Gen.* 334b.10-11.

throughout."[22] Thus, any part of water is water since any part of the mixture is the same as the whole or total sum. Aristotle denies the possibility of mixing non-uniform things. For instance, "like-parted" material things (i.e. flesh, bones, blood, etc.) cannot mix with "unlike-parted" things (e.g. a bone cannot mix with an eye). Neither will "unlike-parted" things mix with each other. We also learn from Aristotle that the ingredients of mixture reciprocate (ἀντιστρέφει) by both acting and being acted upon to effect a mutual alteration of the properties of the ingredients. This, by implication, requires the ingredients to have the same matter (ὕλη).

In another place, Aristotle speaks of the ingredients as being of the same kind (τοιούτῳ μικτόν) so that they can be both agent and patient and thus act on each other reciprocally.[23] Hence, again only material entities can be acted upon for an effect (πάσχειν). On the contrary, immaterial things cannot mix with material ones. For instance, intellectual entities that are ἄνυλα cannot mix with bones. When the ingredients of mixture reciprocate, showing the balance between their active powers (i.e. equilibrium): "each changes from its own nature into the predominant ingredient (τότε μεταβάλλει μὲν ἑκάτερον εἰς τὸ κρατοῦν ἐκ τῆς αὐτοῦ φύσεως), without, however, becoming the other but something between the two with common properties (ἀλλὰ μεταξὺ καὶ κοινόν)."[24] The result of mixture is, therefore, a genuine *tertium quid* with a new set of properties. Hence, the mutual alteration of properties is required for mixables. Their change results "in a dominant state that is 'in between and common to both'."[25] In another place Aristotle also argued, as we have mentioned above, that the ingredients: "mix and destroy one another's excess."[26] Hence, a certain proportion or ratio of qualities is achieved in the process of mixing through the alteration of qualities of the constitutive ingredients. In addition, he argued that: "those agents are capable of admixture which

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[22] Ibid., 328a.10–11.

[23] Ibid., 328b.21.

[24] Ibid., 328a.29-31.

[25] An excellent exegesis of Aristotle's passage can be found in Dorothea Frede, "On Generation and Corruption I.10: On Mixture and Mixables." in Frans de Haas and Jaap Mansfeld, *Aristotle's On Generation and Corruption I*, SA XV (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 295.

[26] "διὰ τὸ μιγνύμενα φθείρειν τὰς ὑπεροχὰς ἀλλήλων." Aristotle, *De Gen.* 334b.10–11.

show contrariety, for these can be acted upon one another."[27] Thus, they must be of the same in genus and differ from each other in species. But the product of mixture is uniform through and through. It has a single form which marks it off. The conclusion he arrived at was that: "divisible and susceptible materials whose form is easily modified are capable of mixture."[28] He, moreover, argued, that the ingredients exist in the mixture potentially and can be recovered upon the dissolution of the mixture.

Aristotle's theory of mixture in its pure form, as we may infer, can barely function as the simile of the Incarnate union, at least as far as Cyril's theory is concerned. The scope of its application concerns material entities; it entails homogeneity of the ingredients and involves change and potentiality. Hence, there is a low degree of isomorphism between Aristotle's mixture and Cyril's ineffable union. This is perhaps the reason why Wolfson had to retract mixture *per se* and, instead, used some dubious cases of predominance as formative for Cyril's doctrine. Even so, we should keep in mind that in Cyril's lifetime Aristotle's theory for the most part commanded the field of studies. All theories of mixture were in some ways measured against Aristotle's pattern.

Nevertheless, this conjecture of Aristotle about the nature and fate (upon the dissolution of mixture) of mixables did not find full support in all philosophical quarters. Soon the Stoics would lift up Aristotle's restrictions for mixables and argue that all entities are material, including God. They inferred from this that, more or less, everything can mix with everything, with the exclusion of things that do not exist (or have a material being) but subsist (i.e. time, place, void and sayables).[29] Those subsisting things indeed cannot mix with material things or each other. Moreover, the Stoics disagreed with Aristotle's classification of beings. According to Aristotle, only primary substances can subsist on their own. These substances include bodies. On the contrary, all other things that are either "of the subject" or "in the subject," all things that are either predicated of or subsist in the subject cannot exist on their own. They are inseparable from the subject. And only material subsisting things can mix with material

[27] Ibid., 328a.31–3.

[28] Ibid., 328a.35–328b.1.

[29] See John Sellars, *Stoicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 62–5.

subsisting things. In other words, properties of subjects cannot mix with material being or each other. The new schema of the Stoics reclassified things that, according to Aristotle, do not exist on their own right, into existing material entities, including such things as heat or odor and other inherent properties of the subject. For instance, if iron is classified as body and heat as quality by Aristotle, this classification loses its significance in Chrysippus as both iron and heat are material things that can enter into a relation with each other. Κρᾶσις occurs in this case just between these things that indeed can exist on their own and can be mutually coextended. Hence, the iron can mix with the heat, soul with body, God with body, etc.

The Stoics, moreover, argued that two bodies can achieve mutual co-extension and thus mix while preserving themselves and their qualities in the mixture. This concerns even the cases of bodies that are unequal in bulk. This is indeed quite interesting for our research. Alexander of Aphrodisias' report provided us with some examples used by the Stoics. For instance, of an incense: "which, though attenuated when incinerated, preserves its own quality over a very large expanse,"[30] and of gold which, being mixed with other chemicals, is spread and cannot be reached by a hammer. They evoked the notion of mutual help to explain how the ingredients facilitate mutual co-extension and presumably remain what they are, their qualities being also unaltered. "For in this way also the cup of wine is mixed with a large amount of water and helped by it to such a great extension."[31] As Robert B. Todd noted, this "cooperative causation" explains how bodies of unequal bulk extend through one another.[32]

All mixtures represent the case in which an active ingredient pervades (διήκειν) or passes through (χωρεῖν) the passive ingredient thereby mixing with it and giving it a degree of cohesion (though being unequal to the passive ingredient in bulk). Hence, there is no mutual alteration of properties involved, the interaction between the ingredients being asymmetrical: an active ingredient pervades the passive one and gives it a degree of unity and cohesion. Even so, the passive ingredient does not change its nature at the result of being shaped by the active ingredient. It remains what it was but receives a

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[30] Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Mixt.* 217. 16–17.

[31] Ibid., 217. 31–32.

[32] Todd, *Alexander of Aphrodisias On Stoic Physics: A Study of the De Mixione* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 39.

degree of cohesion (whatever this may signify). Moreover, it is said that "mixture" or "blending" requires both ingredients to exist on their own and allows for mixture to be dissolved. Since the Stoics did not recognize Aristotle's dichotomy of actuality and potentiality (ἐνέργεια and δύναμις), they allowed ingredients to remain in the state of actuality in the mixture, thus preserving their nature and qualities.

It should be noted again in this context that, according to the Stoics, all material entities are homogenous, at least on the grounds of their materiality. Thus, though mixables may have different status in the schema of beings, they, nevertheless, preserve a certain homogeneity. This homogeneity, ultimately, sets out a necessary and sufficient condition for mixture to be effected. What about things that are totally heterogenous? What about the possibility of mixing material and intellectual entities? This possibility will soon be fully substantiated by some of the Neoplatonic philosophers. The creative input of Plotinus should especially be noted in this context.

Plotinus took the major problematic associated with mixture from the Stoics. He targeted their main contention associated with the notion of co-extension. In Plotinus' view the major issue associated with the mixture of bodies through co-extension was connected with the possibility of their division and thus disintegration.[33] He, moreover, argued that an interpenetration and co-extension of bodies cannot account for the increase in magnitude of the combined product since a body that goes through another body does not occupy any additional space.[34] Plotinus then aimed to explain the possibility of the complete transfusion of bodies (τῆς δι'ὅλων τῶν σωμάτων κράσεως) that does not result in disintegration of its ingredients, and accounts for the increase of magnitude. He posited the following dilemma: if there is no interpenetration or going through and through, the bodies must occupy two different places. Hence, the bodies are juxtaposed and no new like-parted body is produced. Therefore, no mixture is effected. On the contrary, if two bodies go through and through, the result is division at every point and thus a mutual destruction (i.e. confusion). Again, no mixture is effected in this case. His solution to the dilemma was that if a quality of one body penetrates the other body, it does not effect division, mixture proper is effected, and the ingredients of mixture are fully preserved in the new whole. However, apparently no increase of

[33] Plotinus, *Enn.* 2.7.2, 32–33.

[34] Ibid., 2.7.1, 17–20.

magnitude results from such an interpenetration since a quality is immaterial and, therefore, has no extension and occupies no space.

But, as we know, Plotinus argued that mixture takes place via bodily interaction, and through what is communicated to the substance (he used the example of papyrus soaked with water) there comes about a qualitative increment (as papyrus "comes-to-be wet"), the increase of magnitude is also somehow effected (i.e. the papyrus becomes larger in bulk). The result is indeed κρᾶσις δι' ὅλων that allows for the increase of magnitude without division and disintegration. But how is this possible? To answer that question Plotinus reframed the conceptions of matter and bulk and suggested that since both matter and qualities are immaterial, that which is added to the substance by means of the mixture must be a quantitative increment.[35] As a result, a change in the category of quantity is effected. The body of papyrus is penetrated by, and coextended with, the quality of wetness. However, a new quantitative increment is also acquired (i.e. the body of papyrus extending in bulk). Plotinus thinks of it as just another quality (something like that of being extended in space), which is again immaterial. Therefore, both qualities (i.e. of wetness and of being extended and having a bulk) penetrate the body of the papyrus.[36]

Now, how is it that an immaterial "quality" coextends with bodies? Does "co-extension" in this context have a merely metaphorical significance since that which is immaterial and has no extension cannot be said to "extend" over something? In Plotinus' metaphysics this question is really about the possibility of an intellectual entity being present to the compounded entities of this sublunar realm. Indeed, intellectual entities are omnipresent but their presence is limited by the capacity of the participants to receive them. As we can see, here the language of mixture is extended to certain properties of bodies or to immaterial entities. Even so, the sphere of application of the conception of mixture is still restricted to our sublunar realm.

However, other thinkers extended an application of the conception of mixture so as to include other levels, including those of the fixed start ascending all the way to the super-cosmic level. For instance, Plato spoke of the world soul as being a mixture of divisible and indivisible kinds of being, of sameness and difference.[37] The talk about mixture

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[35] Ibid., 2.7.2, 30.

[36] Ibid., 2.7.2, 12-15.

[37] Plato, *Tim.* 34b10.

was also typical of the Neoplatonist commentators when they tried to exegete Plato's *Timaeus*. Ultimately, any compounded or internally differentiated being could have been expressed through the language of mixture. That was to juxtapose them with simple and pure entities, designated as "unmixed" and uniform.

Another parallel discourse that involved compounded things utilized the notion of unification and spoke of all beings as participating in the One and thus receiving their portion of unity. Meantime, unification was assumed to take place on both the intellectual and material plains. In other words, intellectual things may partake in the One, while material things may participate in the One and in things unified and situated in the super-cosmic planes so as to share in them while being enclosed in the material body. Thus, the language of unity (ἑνὸς), unification (ἕνωσις), and of things unified (τὸ ἡνωμένον), extensively utilized by various Neoplatonic thinkers, was also expressive of unity and unification. I think this Neoplatonic discourse was formative for Cyril's theory of the union of natures. I suggest that, if we aim to shed light on Cyril's foundations so as to explicate the philosophical underpinnings of his thought, especially as far as it concerns the ineffable union, we must look in this direction.

Let us sum up the argument so far. If we follow Aristotle's conjectures we may assume that only certain material entities can mix. However, a brief review of post-Aristotelian developments of the theories of mixture leads us to a different conclusion. From the time of Aristotle and up to the 5th century different thinkers representing competing schools of philosophy, moved on to remove Aristotle's restrictions for mixables. What is more, the entire scope of the notion's applicability was extended way beyond its original boundaries. It is my contention that by the 5th century AD the notion of mixture had turned into a trope capable of expressing unification. It thus had departed far from the original Aristotelian source. Even so, Aristotle's theory was still considered capable of explaining the unity of material things. However, in its more general application, the notion of mixture was thought of as also unifying bodies with qualities, qualities with qualities, soul with body, god with body, god with soul, etc., thus allowing mixture to take place at various levels. There is an ascending level of complexity for mixtures starting with the simple bodies, proceeding to the level of like-parted material compounds, unlike-parted bodies, living organisms, souls, and ending with celestial beings, and allowing of mixture between these different levels. What

was left of Aristotle's theory of mixture in all of this is the mere "notion of unification." It thus seems likely that the notion of mixture had eventually become a trope, and simply the means of expressing unity. It could, therefore, have been considered analogically as isomorphic to various types of union. Indeed, it was used rhetorically in different contexts. The message thus communicated was that when a union between two or more things is achieved, a sort of mixture takes place.

We can also assume that Cyril was perhaps acquainted with some of the accounts of mixture circulating in the philosophical manuals of his time. The question is whether he actually used any of them. In his treatises Cyril spoke extensively about unification. It would be enough to point to the Neoplatonic theory of unification to spell out the intended significance of Cyril's discourse on the union of natures in Christ. However, the language of unification had also absorbed certain semantic aspects from that of mixture. For instance, as we learn from Cyril, that which is not properly unified is merely juxtaposed. The language of juxtaposition belongs to mixture (it was understood by Aristotle as a weak mixture). Hence, the two discourses may have been easily confused. This possible confusion was perceived as detrimental for the theory of the Incarnation. However, to charge Cyril with teaching mixture is mistakenly to confuse two conceptually distinct trains of thought, a procedure that appears illegitimate to any careful historian or theologian. So why was Cyril then charged with teaching mixture in the first place? I assume that the original charges were leveled against Cyril by his adversaries in order to invalidate his arguments rhetorically. In reality there are no sufficient grounds to prove the legitimacy of their evaluation of Cyril's discourse. At most, one may argue that mixture could have been at the back of Cyril's mind when he discussed the ineffable union. However, again, we should note that the potential role of mixture in Cyril's thought should amounts to no more than a passing rhetorical trope. It should by no means be classified as the philosophical foundation of his theory of the union of natures in Christ, as certain modern critics have argued.

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