Detachment Issues: A Dilemma for Beall's Contradictory Christology

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Abstract: Jc Beall offers a novel resolution to worries about Christ's contradictory nature by introducing an account of logical consequence that allows for true contradictions. However, to prevent his view from exploding into heresy, Beall must deny that conditionals detach. But without detachment, the language fails to capture other true entailments which must be included in a complete account of Christ. Beall faces a dilemma, then, between heresy and inadequacy.

In a reply to Tim Pawl's "Explosive Theology," Jc Beall defends Contradictory Christology against Pawl's allegation that it is committed to heresies, such as the claim that Christ is not divine.[1] To explain why, he discusses the following argument:

1. That Christ is divine entails that Christ is impassible.
2. If A entails B then $\neg B$ entails $\neg A$
3. So, that Christ is passible entails that Christ is not divine.

Beall is committed to Christ's passibility so (3) would be a dire result. However, on Beall's view, the argument fails because (2) is false. The entailment at work in (1) is theological entailment ($\vdash_\theta$) which, unlike logical entailment ($\vdash$), does not contrapose.

But even if Beall's reply works, this won't fully insulate Contradictory Christology from sentences like (3). Once we grant the truth of A, that Christ is in fact divine, we can still generate a problematic sentence similar to (3). Let D stand for the sentence "Christ is Divine" and I stand for the sentence "Christ is Impassible."[2] Then:

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[1] The full exchange between Pawl and Beall can be found in (Beall *et al.* 2019). For this particular reply by Beall, see (Beall 2019b, 457-459).

[2] A few comments on the validity of the following proof. Moves 4 and 5 are permitted given their inclusion in FDE, Beall's preferred account of logic (Beall 2019a, 437). See (Omori and Hansing 2019, 1025) for further discussion on the use these rules in FDE. Additionally, Beall explicitly includes the material conditional, as defined here, in his logical vocabulary (see (Beall 2019b, 435, footnote 2).)

1. $D \vdash_\theta I$ Tautology of Theology
2. *D*   Tautology of Theology
3. *I*   1,2 Definition of $\vdash_\theta$
4. $I \lor \neg D$ 3, Addition
5. $\neg \neg I \lor \neg D$ 4, Double Negation
6. $\neg I \to \neg D$ 5, Definition of $\to$

Even if $\vdash_\theta$ does not contrapose, we can still generate the true material conditional "If Christ is not impassible, then Christ is not divine" by means of logical entailment. Because Beall is committed to Christ's passibility, it seems to follow that Beall denies Christ's divinity—a heresy. However, this latter inference requires the application of *modus ponens* to $\neg I \to \neg D$, but this classical move (and detachment more generally) is restricted in Contradictory Christology—and a common problem in glutty logics.[3] To understand why, from a semantic point of view, it's helpful to think about the classical semantic relationship between $\lor$ and $\to$. In classical logic, $\lor$ can be interpreted as "at least one of these is true" while $\to$ might be interpreted as "given a true disjunction, if one disjunct is false the other must be true." Consider the following classical proof:

1. $B \lor \neg A$ Assumption
2. $|A$ Assumption for Conditional Proof
3. $| \neg\neg A$ 2, Double Negation
4. $| B$ 1,3 Disjunctive Syllogism
5. $A \to B$ 2-4 Conditional Proof

However, in a logic with gluts, disjunctive syllogism won't always work. That's because, if *A* is glutty, even if *A* is true, $\neg A$ might also be true. If that's right, $\neg\neg A$ together with $\neg A \lor B$ need not imply *B*, because the $\lor$ in (1) may well be satisfied by the truth of $\neg A$. For this reason, in a glutty logic, detachment is logically invalid.[4]

Although Beall is committed to the material conditional "If Christ is not impassible, then Christ is not divine" and the proposition "Christ is not impassible," he can avoid the relevant heresy by denying that conditionals detach. But if no true conditionals detach, Beall's Contradictory Christology is far more radical than he suggests. Consider, for example, the conditional "If you believe, you shall be saved." If we prohibit detachment, satisfying the antecedent of this conditional does not guarantee the truth of the consequent. Beall, therefore, faces a dilemma. Either material conditionals detach or they don't. If they do detach, Beall faces the threat of

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[3] Glutty logics are logics that include sentences which are both true and false. For a detailed discussion by Beall on why he finds restrictions on detachment unproblematic for glutty logics see Beall (2013).

[4] At least it is logically invalid in the family of logics to which Beall's target view is committed. You might think the straightforward solution is to add an additional premise to disjunctive syllogism that rules out gluts, such as $\neg(A \& \neg A)$. However, note that this sentence may be true even if *A* is glutty!

heresy. If they don't detach, Contradictory Christology is far too restrictive. After all, why avoid heresies if it doesn't guarantee our salvation?[5]

One response is to suggest that the conditional "if you believe, you shall be saved" is not a material conditional but a matter of theological entailment, formally a turnstile claim ($B \vdash_\theta S$).[6] This permits a move analogous to detachment by the definition of theological consequence. But even if we grant, just for the sake of argument, the rather strong assumption that all conditionals with theological terms are actually consequence claims, Beall's theory will still be plagued by matters of the flesh. Contradictory Christology is not merely concerned with true theological claims about Christ, but the complete story of Christ that includes both divine and mundane facts. It must also include, for example, true claims such as:

1. If Jesus stood on the hill while teaching, he had a sunburn.
2. If Jesus stood under a tree while teaching, he may not have had a sunburn.

These sorts of truths are essentially conditional, and while they are not central theological truths, they are still a part of the true story of Christ. Moreover, if that true story also contains

3. Jesus stood on the hill while teaching.

it should further include

4. Jesus had a sunburn.

from (1), (3) and detachment. But on the restricted version of Contradictory Christology, (1) doesn't detach. That Jesus stood on the hill while he taught doesn't entail (theologically or otherwise) that he became sunburned, so it can't be that (4) follows from theological consequence. Therefore, Beall's language requires some kind of consequence relation at the propositional level that allows for detachment without exploding into heresy. Only if such an operator is introduced will Contradictory Christology be truly divine.

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[5] Restricted detachment doesn't imply that those who believe are not saved, but it will fail to model salvation as a consequence of belief. This failure is critical. The goal of Contradictory Christology is not just to accommodate all of the true atomic sentences, but to model the consequence relations by which those sentences are linked. If the model fails to capture the relevant consequence relations, it becomes like a city map that doesn't contain roads: it reveals where things are, but it won't help you get from point A to point B. Thanks to Kyla Ebels-Duggan and Sean Ebels-Duggan for pressing this worry.

[6] Thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting this response, and to Jc Beall for a helpful correspondence in developing the reply.

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