True Contradictions in Theology

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In *The Contradictory Christ*, Jc Beall argues that paraconsistent logic provides a way to show how the central claims of Christology can all be true, despite their paradoxical appearances. For Beall, claims such as "Christ is peccable" and "Christ is impeccable" are both true, with no change of subject matter or ambiguity of meaning of any term involved in each claim. Since to say that Christ is *im*peccable is to say that Christ is not peccable, these two claims are contradictory, and so, for Beall the conjunction "Christ is peccable and Christ is not peccable" is a true contradiction. This is a radical and original view of the incarnation, and a revisionary view of what is permissible for theological reasoning.

Here, I will examine the term "contradiction" that plays such a central role in Beall's account. I will argue that in Beall's own conceptual framework, our everyday concept of contradiction bifurcates into two different senses: *negation*-contradiction and *unsatisfiability*. I will show that a theologian who avails herself of Beall's paraconsistent logic when making theological claims may have cast off the shackles of having to make sure that her commitments avoid negation-contradiction, but the heavy burden of ensuring that her commitments are jointly *satisfiable* remains. Along the way to this conclusion, I will explore some of the connections between concepts from formal logic and the task of theological reflection.

In his groundbreaking monograph, *The Contradictory Christ*, Jc Beall (2021) uses the tools of paraconsistent logic to address central issues in Christology. He argues that the central claims of Christology can all be true, despite their seemingly contradictory surface grammar. We can maintain their truth not by arguing away the seeming contradictions, but rather, by coming to terms with the fact that on occasions, contradictory pairs of sentences can both be true—while at the same time, remaining contradictory. Here is an example of Beall's reasoning. Since Jesus Christ is human, and all humans can sin, "Christ is peccable" is true. On the other hand, since Jesus Christ is divine, and God *cannot* sin, "Christ is impeccable" is also true. According to Beall, instead of wiggling our way out of the contradiction, we should embrace it. Both claims are true, with no change of subject matter or ambiguity of meaning of any term involved. Since to say that Christ is *im*peccable is to say that Christ is not peccable, these two claims are contradictory, and so, for Beall the conjunction "Christ is peccable and Christ is not peccable" is a true contradiction. This is a radical and original view of the incarnation, and a revisionary view of what is permissible for theological reasoning. Of course, like any other view on these issues, it is not without its critics.

In this paper, I attempt to further the discussion of true contradictions in theology, not by considering the merits of the particular theological claims endorsed by Beall, but by attending more closely to the notion of "contradiction" that plays such a central role in the account. I will

argue that in Beall's own logical framework, our everyday concept of contradiction has two distinct, but related, senses. Two claims are *negation*-contradictions if one is (or is equivalent to) the negation of the other. Two claims are *satisfiability*-contradictions if there is no way to for *both* to be true (that is, they are jointly *unsatisfiable*) and no matter how things go, either one or other *is* true.

On the traditional picture of logic, *negation*-contradictory pairs of claims are *satisfiability*-contradictions, and *vice versa*.[1] Beall's conception of logic (and any paraconsistent logic) allows for negation-contradictory pairs of claims that are not satisfiability contradictions, since in any paraconsistent logic, we may have circumstances in which a claim and its negation are both true, and hence, they are jointly satisfiable, and the *negation*-contradictory pair of claims are not *satisfiability*-contradictions.

In the rest of this paper, I will show that while accepting a paraconsistent logic takes the pressure of consistency maintenance, when it comes to *negation*-contradictions, the spectre of *satisfiability*-contradictions remains, and is as much of an issue as before. Along the way, I hope to clarify some of the connections between logical concepts (such as *contradiction*, but also *proposition*, *assertion* and *denial*, *truth* and *untruth*, *entailment* and *theory*) and the task of theological reflection.

Setting the Scene

Jc Beall's contradictory Christology is an exciting and novel intervention in analytic philosophy of religion. Its significance doesn't stop there: Beall's application of paraconsistent logic to questions in Christology is not just a radical departure of the status quo in the philosophy of religion. It is also marks a significant development in philosophical logic logic, by systematically applying the tools of non-classical logic to an area well outside its "home turf." Defenders of paraconsistent logic have spilled much ink considering the logical and semantic paradoxes (see Beall 2009; Priest 2006, among many others), and there is a longstanding literature on applying these concepts to issues in the metaphysics of ultimate reality, especially in Hindu and Buddhist philosophical traditions (see, for example, Matilal 1975; Garfield and Priest 2003; Hoffman 1982; Westerhoff 2006), but the application of these techniques to issues in *Christology* is another thing entirely. Here, Beall takes the time to develop a novel non-classical account of meaningful but contradictory theological claims (backed by his

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[1] On the traditional picture, there is no circumstance in which A and $\neg A$ are both true, so negation-contradictory claims are satisfiability-contradictions. On the other hand, if A and B are satisfiability contradictions, then the claim B is true in all and only the circumstances in which A fails to be true. On the traditional picture, this is exactly what it means for B is equivalent to the negation of A, and so, they are negation-contradictions.

paraconsistent logic), and then he sets himself the task of attempting to account for how this approach compares to the extant range of positions in Christology that attempt to avoid inconsistency. This careful work gives us an opportunity to take a new perspective on the costs and benefits in applying a non-classical logical analysis to profound issues in theology, metaphysics and language.

One of the apparent costs of Beall's contradictory Christology is that it is an account that simply *accepts contradictions*, without apology. Furthermore, it does not do this under dark cover of mystery, or in the veiled half-light of modesty concerning the meanings and significance of the concepts at our disposal. No, Beall's contradictory Christology accepts contradictions under the harsh glare of formal logic, with the sharp edges of precisely defined notions like the logician's *conjunction, negation,* and *entailment* playing a central role. With the friends of mystery and paradox, Beall agrees that there are contradictory pairs of statements—such as *Christ is peccable* and *Christ is impeccable*—for which we should not prefer one side over the other, or attempt to *dissolve* the inconsistency by some strategy that posits some equivocation or metaphysical differentiation in being. The contradictory theologian does not merely say that Christ is peccable *in some sense* and impeccable *in another,* nor to they say that Christ is peccable *qua human nature* and impeccable *qua divine nature.* Beall sits with the contradiction, endorsing both claims, while holding that one claim is indeed the negation of the other.

However, Beall's route to his contradictory conclusion does not go by way of any appeal to epistemic humility ("these matters are beyond our ken, contradicting ourself is the best we can do to approximate truth") or to the idea that our concepts work differently when applied beyond our mundane everyday reality. No, for the project of Beall's *Contradictory Christ,* the inference to a true contradiction is the rational upshot of the *data* of conciliar statements concerning the incarnation. The contradictions of Christology are not hinted at, dimly, in shadows. Instead, they are fully on display, visible to us in the harsh light of formal theories and deductive logic.

This means that there is a clash of style and of method between the conceptual fluidity of the poet theologian who grasps for words to articulate ideas that seem beyond our capacity for description, but who lands at something contradictory and paradoxical to point to what is beyond our grasp, and the precise and clipped vocabulary of the logician in possession of a formal language in which every sentence is given explicitly defined truth conditions. For Beall's contradictory Christology, the language of theological theorising—at least insofar as it is represented in models of his favoured logic, First Degree Entailment—is free from ambiguity and indeterminacy. Notions such as *metaphor* and *analogy* play no role in this particular analysis of how contradictions can play a role in theology, and neither does a richly differentiated ontology in which there is a distinction between different kinds of being, substance or property. Here, Beall's contradictory Christology is a new thing, unlike other approaches in philosophical theology, and so, it deserves sympathetic and critical attention.

For all that difference, I do not think that the alien and innovative character of this work is sufficient to explain the frequency with which it receives incredulous stares[2] and bafflement from its audience. Given the radical nature of the view, it is not surprising that have responded by way of a wholehearted endorsement. However, many struggle to understand the position as Beall has staked it out, let alone see that it is a view worth considering. I will attempt to clarify why this is the case. I will show that while there is a sense in which Beall has explained what it is for a theorist to accept a truly inconsistent theory as *true* and in so doing, he has opened up new options for theology or for any systematic theorising, there is more to be done to make that option truly workable. Adopting a paraconsistent logic to show how these problems of inconsistency need not be *solved* but rather *accepted* does not mean that the underlying problems of consistency and contradiction disappear. Beall has shown us how a contradictory theology is possible for *one* sense of contradiction, but by his own lights, inconsistency in the *other* sense is to be rejected, and furthermore, the task of rendering a Christology that is free from contradiction in *that* sense is a pressing task for Beall, or for any proponent of a truly contradictory Christology. Or so I will attempt to explain. To make this case, I must reintroduce some of the core notions of *The Contradictory Christ*, so we can see how the everyday notion of *contradiction* has two distinct senses in Beall's framework.

Basic Concepts

To start, we will need to clarify some terms and pay attention to some basic assumptions at work when we use logical concepts in our everyday reflection on the claims we make when we are attempting to give a systematic account of some field, whether that be theology or anything else. Our focus will not be on the world of logic as the *logicians* see it (so I will attempt to keep technicalities to an absolute minimum[3]), but rather, we will look at some of the conceptual landscape around the notion of a *contradiction*, so we can understand its significance. and particularly, the concept of contradiction. Thankfully, we do not need to concern ourselves with most of the technical details necessary for a full account of the logic of first degree entailment and the other concepts that Beall puts to use in his positive proposal. We would do well,

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[2] "Incredulous stare" is how the American philosopher, David Lewis, described reactions to his *modal realism*, the view that each possible world in the vast plurality of possibility *exists* in exactly the same sense that *this* actual world exists (Lewis 1986, 133)

[3] That minimum is not quite *zero*, because some of my audience might know some formal logic, so some formalities will be confined to footnotes, for those who speak that foreign language. The use of *formulas* when talking about issues in logic is both a blessing and a curse. Formality is a blessing when it helps us grasp patterns in our everyday thought and talk that we would otherwise find hard to grasp. (In this way, formulas stand to thought and to talk as musical notation stands to embodied musical performance.) Formality is a curse when it is taken to mean that logical issues are mere *calculation*, or when it leads us to think that our thoughts or our claims have a degree of precision that they do not posses.

however, to attend to some of the key ideas in play, to establish some common ground as we attempt to understand the ramifications of Beall's proposal, and more broadly, we attempt to come to grips with contradiction and paradox in theology, or—for that matter—in any field of inquiry.

Propositions: What kinds of items are the things that are said to be contradictory? One key example in the current discussion is the contradictory pair of claims, "Christ is peccable" and "Christ is impeccable". These two claims contradict one another, and, for Beall, both are true. It is important for the following discussion that we say a little more about what we are talking about here. The *claims* contradict one another, and not just the *sentences*. We do not need to say very much about what distinguishes *claims* from *sentences*, other than to say that we can make different claims by way of the same sentences, and that different sentences can be used to make the same claim. So-called "indexical" vocabulary provides a ready example. If I utter the sentence"I am sitting", I make a claim about *me*, whereas if you utter that very same sentence, you make a different claim, one about *yourself*. If you wanted to echo the claim I make, you need to use a different form of words, such as "Greg is sitting" (in a context in which it's clear that "Greg" means me), or "you are sitting" (if you are addressing me) or "he is sitting" if you are talking about me to someone else. The two sentences "I am sitting" and "I am not sitting" do not necessarily contradict one another, because one could be about me, and the other about you, while the two sentences "I am sitting" and "he is not sitting" may well explicitly contradict one another, if the target of the claims is the same.

Indexicals provide one way that what is *said* by way of a sentence may differ even though the sentence used to express these different claims do not. Ambiguity provides another source of variation: "The bank is down the road" means one thing if talking about a financial institution, and another if it is about the riverbank. Similarly, poetic license, non-literal speech, and other figures of speech can provide examples of forms of words that may say one thing in one given interpretive context, and another thing in some other context.

The important concern for us, when it comes to theological reasoning and matters of consistency and contradiction is that it is the *claims* we can make[4]—rather than merely the sentences used to express those claims—that are the proper target of evaluation for consistency, contradiction and other logical notions. Another word for "claim" is "*proposition*", and occasionally in what follows, I will also use this word, though this is a term of art which comes with a great deal of baggage, and we will not need adopt any particular theory of what

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[4] It is important here to remember that when we talk about *claims* we are not just thinking about the upshot of careful theorising. Claims can be merely *hypothesised, wondered about, questioned* or *pondered*. They can also be held lightly, rather than asserted confidently.

counts as a proposition, beyond the fact that declarative sentences (as used in a given context) express propositions.

Mind and Language: To speak metaphorically for a moment, where are these propositions located? Are they items in the minds of thinkers, or are they to be found "out there" in public view? For the present discussion, it will not help to focus on the individual and to think of propositions as only located in the mind of the individual thinker. The considerations before us, claims like "Christ is fully God" and "Christ is fully human", are public, credal statements, the upshot of argument and debate, and offered up as proper statements to structure not only individual Christian thinking but public communication. These *claims* are essentially the kinds of things that we can *agree* or *disagree* on, that we can *assent* or *dissent* to, that we can *ponder*, *question* and *debate*. Claims—perhaps *all* claims, or perhaps merely *many* of them—are at least potentially public, sharable and communicable. There is a methodological divide in philosophy between whether we should think of these public claims as *externalised* thought, or whether we should think of thought as *internalised* speech. We need not take sides on this debate here, other than to fix our attention on speech and its content, without worrying about what comes *first* in the order of explanation of how it is that human thought and language finds meaning.[5]

Assertion and Denial: If we think of language as a communicative practice, one way to begin to see some of the *force* of claims is to consider how our claims relate to each other. When we make a claim, whether it is a prosaic one, such as "the maximum temperature in Dundee was 5°C today" or a profound one, like "Jesus is Lord", we are putting something "out there", which has a public significance, however tenuous, or significant. To make a claim is to represent "how things are" in some way or other, and to do so in such a way that others can join in (by agreeing with what has been said) or not. We make claims as to how things are in all sorts of forms of communication in different ways. Of course, we can do so sincerely, by presenting how we take things to really be, or insincerely, making claims we take to be untrue in order to *deceive* others, or in a hopeful manner, saying what we would *like* to be true, but fear may not be the case. Religious communities may recite creeds, in which many claims are asserted by the group in an act of worship and community formation. We can also assert by answering yes/no questions. If I ask "was the maximum temperature in Dundee 5°C today?" and you answer "yes", then can count as you making the claim that the maximum temperature in Dundee was indeed 5°C today.

Since asserting is putting something out there for public consumption, that invitation may sometimes be refused. What can be asserted may also be *denied*. To *deny* a claim is to take the opposite stand on the issue it raises. If someone else had said "no" when I had asked the

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[5] The first chapter of Robert Brandom's *Articulating Reasons* (2000) gives a good introduction to many of the conceptual issues arising for how we might understand the relationship between thought and talk.

question concerning the maximum temperature, then you and that person *disagree,* by taking opposite stands on the issue of the tempereature at Dundee.[6] You would be advising me to go in two different, opposing ways. Whatever a proposition is, it presents an issue upon which one can, at least potentially, take different sides.[7] The important issue for us as we inch toward understanding the significance of contradictions is that if two people take opposing sides on the one issue, there is no *shared position* incorporating both answers. Whenever we say "yes *and* no" to a "yes/no" question, we are at least implicitly pointing to there being two different issues, on that can be answered in the affirmative, and another, in the negative.

What happens in the public world of speech and language when we assert and deny has parallels in the internal world of the mind. What we assert in public, we can *accept* in private. What we deny in words, we can *reject* in our thoughts.

Truth and Untruth: But beyond our thought and our talk, what we think and say points to something in some sense beyond us us. When I accept a claim, I am thereby taking that claim to be *true*. (Of course, just as we can tentatively assert something without confidence, we can accept something for the sake of the argument, or merely as an hypothesis to consider. In either case, we thereby consider some state *of the world*.) To accept the proposition *Jesus is Lord* is to take it that Jesus is Lord. For a claim to be true is something concerning whatever it is that the proposition is *about*. Truth, for a proposition, is a kind of standard of endorsement. And just as propositions can meet that standard, they can also *fail* to meet it. A proposition is *untrue* if it fails to be true.[8] If I assert *p*, then in an important sense, I *succeed* when *p* turns out to be true. In

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[6] That is, you disagree provided you are giving *yes* and *no* answers to the same issue. If it turns out that one of you is talking about Dundee, Scotland, and the other is talking about the locality of Dundee in rural New South Wales (Australia), in which the maximum temperature is almost always *much* higher than 5°C, then you are not disagreeing, but merely talking past one another.

[7] It is important to distinguish *denial* in this strong sense with weaker kinds of denial. A famous case goes as follows: On election day, I assert "Candidate 1 will win", and you respond—thinking that I've misjudged the closeness of the race and that I should be more circumspect—"No: either Candidate 1 or Candidate 2 will win." Here, you and I are not taking *opposing* sides on the issue of whether Candidate 1 will win. (If that were the case, you'd simply conclude that Candidate 2 will win, if you thought Candidate 1 won't.) You are opposing my confidence in making the claim, and offering a more prudent substitute, not taking an opposing stand on the issue of Candidate 1's prospects. See Laurence Horn's extended discussion (Horn 2001, sec. 6.2.2 and 6.5.2) for more detail.

[8] The word "untruth" is ugly, and you might wonder why I use this word instead of the simpler "falsity". In this context, where true contradictions are on the table, to identify falsity with untruth would be to beg the question against Beall, since Beall identifies the *falsity* of a proposition *p* with the truth of its negation, ¬*p*, and he takes it that some propositions *p* are such that *p* and ¬*p* are both true, and hence, *p* is both true and false. He does *not,* however take it that in this case *p* is both true and untrue, where untruth is mere failure of

some sense, assertion aims at truth. This is not to say that assertion doesn't also aim elsewhere. Perhaps, when I assert something, I aim to convince you, or even to deceive you, if I lie. Similarly, this is not to say that an assertion of *p* might in some sense be inappropriate, even when *p* turns out to be true. For example, I might make a lucky guess that a particular horse will win the next race, and confidently assert this. If you ask me for the basis of my hunch, I won't be able to supply any, and you would be well within your rights to discount my guess as an unfounded speculation. Be that as it may, if my guess is vindicated, there is a clear sense in which we would be well within our rights to say that my original claim was *correct*, even though it was unfounded.

Just as assertion aims at truth, denial (in the strong sense, described above) aims at untruth. To strongly deny some claim is to answer the corresponding yes/no question with a *no*, and it is to rule the truth of the proposition out. It can only succeed if that claim fails to be true (since if the claim were true, the "yes" answer would have been apt). On the other hand, if claim does fail to be true (that is, if it is *untrue*), then denying it, in the sense of ruling out its assertion, does succeed in at least the analogous sense that asserting a truth succeeds.

All of these claims I take to be platitudinous, but they are worth repeating, to find enough shared logical vocabulary, even when true contradictions are on the table. For nothing I have said so far is incompatible with Beall's dialetheism, according to which some statements are neither true nor false (truth-value *gaps*) and others are both true and false (truth-value *gluts*). If some statement, such as "this colour patch is red" (describing some borderline case of the colour red) is neither true nor false, then since it is not true, the correct answer to the question "is this colour patch red?" is *no*, since the claim is *fails to be true*. Of course, given that the claim is neither true nor false, if falsity is the *negation* of truth, the correct answer to the question "is this colour patch *not* red?" is *also* a *no*, since that claim is also untrue. Similarly, when we take some statement like "Christ is peccable", which for Beall is both true and false, the correct answer to the question "is Christ peccable?" is *yes*, since for Beall the claim is, indeed, *true*. The paradoxicality of the claim arises because the correct answer to the corresponding question about its negation "is Christ *im*peccable?" is also *yes*, since the negation of the claim is also true. The dialetheist does not *deny* the claim "Christ is peccable" when they assert its negation "Christ is impeccable". To *deny* a claim is to call for it to be rejected, to present it as untrue, and the dialetheist claims that there is some propositions where they and their negations are both true. They assert the claim and its negation, they accept both, and reject neither, and deny neither.

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truth. Untruth describes whatever propositions is left over when we have set aside all the true propositions, including those paradoxical ones that are both true and false. To use the terminology of *The Contradictory Christ,* the untruths are those statements that bear the value *f* (just-false) or *n* (neither true-nor-false).

It is important, not merely *logically*, but also *theologically* to find a place for both *assertion* and *denial,* for the theological task is not only to find ways to coherently understand how particular claims can be true. It is also important to understand how other claims might *fail* to be true. The Athanasian Creed provides a very stark stark statement of this:

> Thus the Father is God, the Son God, the Holy Spirit God; and yet there are not three Gods, but there is one God. Thus the Father is Lord, the Son, Lord, the Holy Spirit, Lord; and yet there are not three Lords, but there is one Lord. Because just as we are obliged by Christian truth to acknowledge each person separately both God and Lord, so we are forbidden by the Catholic religion to speak of three Gods or Lords. (Leith 1973, 705)

This creed does not only supply us with things to *accept* or to *assert*. It also enjoins us to *reject* and to *deny* other claims. If one asserts that there are three Gods, this is, according to the Athanasian Creed, places one outside the bounds of orthodoxy. It is not enough to assert the negative claim "there are not three Gods". We must reject the claim "there are three Gods." On this understanding of Christian orthodoxy, some claims are ruled *in*, while others are ruled *out*.

Logical Consequence *or* **Entailment**: Standard, *classical* logic is founded on the idea that truth and falsity are mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories, and one might think that if we were to go around asserting contradictory pairs of statements, logical anarchy would be loosed on the world. Not quite. As Beall carefully shows, there is a well-behaved notion of *logical consequence* that can still govern propositions if we think of the space of propositions as governed by *truth* and *falsity* which allows for truth and falsity to overlap (at truth value *gluts*) or for some propositions to fail to receive either value (at truth value *gaps*). We do not need to rehearse the details of the notion of logical consequence known as first degree entailment (FDE),[9] since a very high-level overview of just a couple of details will suffice to isolate the key notions for understanding the different ways to understand the key notion of *contradiction*.

The key notion of *logical consequence*, or, more generally, *entailment,* codifies a very general sense of how claims relate to each other. The two claims:

> *Sócrates is a footballer*
>
> *All footballers are bipeds*

together bear a very significant relationship to the claim

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[9] For the details of first degree entailment, Chapter 2 of *The Contradictory Christ* (Beall 2021) is admirably brisk. For more details, the canonical exposition is Graham Priest's *An Introduction to Non-Classical Logic*, Chapter 8 (Priest 2008).

Sócrates is a biped

We can cast this connection in the language of *truth*: if it is true that Sócrates is a footballer (it is) and it were also true that all footballers are bipeds (it isn't, but let's imagine that it were, for the moment), then it would *also*, invariably, be true that Sócrates is a biped.[10] Or, we could state the same connection in the language of assertion and denial. If someone were to *assert* that Sócrates is a footballer and assert that all footballers are bipeds, but then to *deny* that Sócrates is a biped, then they would be digging the ground out from under themselves, in just the same way that they would be double minded if they were to both *assert* and *deny* the one claim. A collection of *premises* (here, *Sócrates is a footballer* and *all footballers are bipeds*) entails a conclusion (here, *Sócrates is a biped*) when and only when, in any possibility at all in which the premises are true, so is the conclusion. This corresponds to saying that there is no coherent position in which the premises are accepted and the conclusion is rejected.[11] For Beall's first degree entailment, a *possibility* is given by assigning each basic proposition a value from among t (true only), f (false only), b (both true and false), n (neither true nor false)[12] and then each complex proposition is given one of these four truth values using a system of rules determined by the meanings of the concepts use to construct those propositions. The details need not concern us, except for noting that for Beall, if a proposition either has the value t or the value b according to this possibility, it counts as (at least) *true*, otherwise, it is *untrue* (either f or n), and if a proposition receives the value b its negation *also* receives the value b. These are the claims that the possibility takes to be both true and false. For Beall, given a system of possibilities like this, an set of premises *entails* a conclusion if and only if, in every possibility in which the premises are all (at least) *true*, so is the

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[10] Of course, we must state the standard disclaimer that there is no equivocation between concepts used in the three claims. We are talking about the same Sócrates, and "footballer" and "biped" is used in the same sense in each case.

[11] There is a deep conceptual connection between this two ways of understanding the underlying notion of entailment. You can start with the norms governing accepting and rejecting (or assertion and denial) and then conceive of the *possibilities* as reifications of available positions. Or you could start by treating the space of possibilities as given, and treat the availability of combinations of assertions and denials in terms of whether there are any possibilities (antecedently given) which they describe. The paper "Truth Values and Proof Theory" (Restall 2009) makes this conceptual connection precise for a few different notions of logical consequence. Furthermore, this connection should make clear that there are different ways to understand the notion of *possibility* in play here. They do *not* need to be understood as metaphysically possible worlds. If they are reifications of all the different consistent positions, there may be "possibilities" in this broad conceptual sense, in which the metaphysical possibilities are different.

[12] This assignment of truth values might need to satisfy some other constraints, given the meaning rules for the terminology in the theory being modelled. The details need not concern us here.

conclusion. That is, there is no possibility in which the premises are *true* and the conclusion is *untrue*.

If we have two propositions such that the first entails the second, and *vice versa*, it follows that they are (at least) *true* in exactly the same possibilities. If the *negation* of the first entails the *negation* of the second, then it follows that they are (at least) *false* in exactly the same possibilities, too. If both hold, we say that the two propositions are *equivalent*, because as far as the possibilities go, there is no way to distinguish them.[13]

Now that we have reached *entailment* and *equivalence* we have enough basic concepts to be going on with, to distinguish two kinds of contradiction, so it is to this that we turn.

From True Contradictions to Two Kinds of Contradiction

As Beall characterises matters in *The Contradictory Christ*, we can think of a theological *theory*, like any other theory, as specifying a family of possibilities—the ways things would be if things were as the theory describes. A claim is ruled *in* according to the theory if and only if in each of these possibilities, that claim is (at least) *true*. Something is ruled *out* according to that theory if and only if in none of these possibilities is the proposition (at least) *true*.

Negation contradictories: Two claims are said to be *negation contradictories* if one is (equivalent to) the negation of the other.

So, the statements "Christ is peccable" and "Christ is impeccable" are negation contradictories, since "Christ is impeccable" is equivalent to "It's not the case that Christ is peccable."

Now, on the classical picture of logic, two statements are negation contradictories if and only if they are *satisfiability contradictories*.

Satisfiability contradictories: Two claims are said to be *satisfiability contradictories* if and only if in every possibility *either* one *or* the other is true, but not *both*.

Given what we have seen so far, we can quickly see that these must be different notions for Beall and for any paraconsistent logician. For him, we can have two negation inconsistent claims which nonetheless jointly hold, and hence, *are* jointly satisfiable: there is a possibility in which both are true. On the classical perspective, to be negation contradictory just is to be satisfiability contradictory. That—on the classical perspective—is the problem with contradictory pairs of statements: they cannot both be true. The nonclassical perspective of first

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[13] Here is an example of equivalence, in first degree entailment: Any proposition p is equivalent to the negation of its negation, $\neg\neg p$. For a slightly more complex equivalence, the negation of a *disjunction* $\neg(p \lor q)$ is equivalent to the *conjunction* of negations $\neg p \, \& \, \neg q$.

degree entailment liberates negation so as to no longer form satisfiability contradictories, in the presence of gluts or gaps. In the rest of this chapter, though, I will explain why the concept of *satisfiability* contradiction has been left behind untouched, and it is as problematic as it ever was.

For the argument we will embark upon, it will help to stand back from the notion of *contradictories* (for which, one or other but not both are true) to the weaker notion of *contraries* (for which we cannot have both true, but can have both false).

Satisfiability contraries: Two claims are said to be *satisfiability contraries* if and only if in every possibility at most one or other holds true, but never *both*.

With satisfiability contraries, so comes *negation* contraries.

Negation contraries: Two claims are said to be *negation contradictories* if one entails the negation of the other.

Here is why these notions are particularly salient. Consider the canonical case of a Christological contradiction, for Beall. "Christ is peccable" and its negation, "Christ is impeccable". There are some grounds, some *background commitments* which have led us to the claim that Christ is impeccable. When I rehearsed this, above, it was the general reasoning that Christ is divine, and God cannot sin. Whatever these background commitments are that lead us to the claim that Christ is impeccable, call these our *premises*. The idea is that the premises together entail the claim that Christ is impeccable. That is, in all *possibilities* in which the premises hold true, the conclusion "Christ is impeccable" also holds true. In other words, the claim that *Christ is peccable* (the negation of which is "Christ is impeccable") is a negation contrary of our premises.

However, when we consider the reasons we might have for concluding that Christ is impeccable, we see, on reflection, that these seem perilously close to reasons for thinking that the claim "Christ is peccable" is a *satisfiability* contrary to our background premises. Our reasons for asserting that Christ is impeccable, incapable of sinning, because he is God, are not merely reasons for asserting the sentence "Christ cannot sin" in isolation. It surely must have *some* bearing on the truth of the claim it negates: "Christ can sin". In particular, any reason for thinking that Christ can sin seems to be very good reason for ruling out the idea that Christ cannot sin. This connection is what is split apart in accepting contradictions: we do not treat the evidence of the claim "Christ can sin" as in any way decisive evidence *against* the claim "Christ cannot sin", or *vice versa*. In other words, in holding to the joint claims "Christ can sin" and "Christ cannot sin", the dialetheist is thereby committed to saying that these claims are *not* satisfiability contraries. Impeccability, whatever it is, does not clash with peccability enough to rule peccability out. If impeccability is jointly satisfiable with peccability, then it is very difficult to understand what we have gained when we learn that something is impeccable, if we later

learn that this is compatible with peccability. This, I take it, is where the stare in response to true contradictions is its most incredulous.

The issue, in a nutshell, is that we have—at least until we have been convinced to take true contradictions seriously—taken contradictoriness and contrariness to involve joint unsatisfiability, once we split negation-contradiction from satisfiability contradictions, we become unmoored and we are no longer quite so sure about what this concept of negation (or of *falsity*) might *mean* if it no longer plays the role of exclusion. In the remaining sections, I will spell out how this results in not only an incredulous stare, but also some unfinished business for the proponent of any contradictory Christology.

How to resolve the satisfiability contradictions?

Let's shift from the discussion of peccability and impeccability to another pair of concepts, mutability and immutability. Since any human is mutable, Christ is mutable. Since divinity entails *im*mutability, Christ is immutable. This is another true Christological contradiction for the dialetheist (Beall 2021, 3). Let's grant that the tension between mutability and immutability, understood as negation contradictions is lessened by accepting the treatment of negation in first degree entailment. Consider what this does to the tension concerning mutability, divinity and humanity when re-cast in the key of *satisfiability* contraries. After all, in our reasoning, we have granted this:

> Divinity entails immutability.

That is, *mutability* is a negation contrary of divinity. Why have we granted this? (For too many reasons to rehearse here, let us take it as read, for the sake of the argument.) Consider, though, is there *any* reason for the claim that divinity entails immutability that is not *also* a reason for the claim according to which divinity and mutability are *satisfiability* contraries? That is, suppose we—for the sake of the argument—grant that there is *some* possibility in which God is mutable. This seems very much to be a reason to reject the claim that divinity entails *immutability*, because in this circumstance, God is, contrary to our conception, *mutable*.

That is not a knock-down objection to the dialetheist Christology, of course, because according to first degree entailment, the move from granting that in some possibility God is mutable does not clash with maintaining that divinity entails immutability, since they have already granted that immutability is compatible with mutability. However, the dialectical tension remains. When the contradictory theologian said that they were giving equal time to both horns of the seeming contradiction between mutability and immutability, that claim is *correct* when it comes to the negation contradictory terms "mutability" and "immutability" (and similarly "peccable" and "impeccable"), but is is not correct for what we thought to be *satisfiability* contraries. We had thought, before this logical revision, that mutability and immutability were incompatible, and we learned that they were not. So, "immutability" is a weaker notion, for the dialetheist

theologian than it is according to a traditional logical conception. They have traded in a concept that was taken to *rule out* mutability for a weaker one, which does not.

Once we realise that negation works in this more relaxed way, however, we must revisit our original reasoning. If Christ is divine and Christ is mutable, then it turns out that divinity is not (as we might have otherwise thought) *incompatible* with mutability. Mutability and divinity are meet in the person of Jesus Christ. The theologian who wishes to accept true contradictions must at least grant this. So, the sense in which divinity entails *im*mutability must thereby be weakened, at least to the degree that here, immutability does not clash with mutability. But what, then, remains of immutability? In what sense does divinity entail immutability? Given that the original reasons to adopt the entailment from divinity to immutability were reasons to take divinity and mutability to be jointly unsatisfiable, it seems that the more reasonable course of action is to concede that despite our first thoughts, divinity does not entail immutability, since divinity is compatible with mutability.

To make the point sharper still, let's not talk of *immutability* (a negative term) but let's introduce the term of art *constancy* (a positive one, not defined in terms of negation). *Constancy* is here understood as a not merely contingent feature, but a necessary one. That 2+2=4 is constant since it not only happens to be always true, but is necessarily so. On the traditional picture, divinity entails constancy, but humanity entails mutability, and constancy and mutability are *jointly unsatisfiable*. Any circumstance where something is mutable is one where it fails to be constant, and any possibility in which something is constant, it fails to be mutable. To assert that something is constant is thereby (at least implicitly) to *deny* that it is mutable. To assert that something is mutable is thereby (at least implicitly) to *deny* that it is constant. Or so the traditional idea goes. Now, we have a trilemma, in that we cannot grant all three claims, if Christ is both divine and human.

- Divinity entails constancy.
- Humanity entails mutability.
- Constancy and mutability are jointly unsatisfiable.

If Christ is both divine and human, one of these three must be rejected. This has nothing to do with negation as such, and the tension must somewhere be resolved. Either constancy and mutability are jointly satisfiable (in the person of Jesus Christ), contrary to prior appearances, or if not, given that Christ is both divine and human, one of the entailments must be rejected. Any reasoning we give here will at last *in part* involve revisiting the concepts of constancy and mutability, and their relationship with divinity and humanity. The parallel response to the case of Beall's explicitly contradictory Christology would be to reject the last claim, to say that constancy and mutability might nonetheless be compatible. But to say this in and of itself is not enough to direct our understanding of what suffices for constancy (in the light of the possibility of change) or what counts as mutability (if whatever it is that might mutate is nonetheless

constant). More work must be done, whether this work involves distinguishing natures (Christ is mutable in his humanity, and constant in his divinity) or the predicates (Christ—the one undivided Christ—is mutable-*qua*-human, and constant-*qua*-divine), or in some other way which gives sense to the notions of constancy and mutability which were previously given sense in terms of their joint unsatisfiability. Whatever move we make, *some* conceptual revisions are required in order to make sense of what we are saying.

What goes here for this rendering of the argument without negation also goes for the original arguments, involving negation. In the light of this example, we see that the same issues arise when we might assert that Christ is *impeccable* as well as *peccable*. What counts as peccability for one who is at the same time *im*peccable? What does it mean for one to be *im*peccable, who we have granted at the same time to be *peccable*? Given that in this case we have shifted the concept of negation around to make room for true contradictions, we deserve some further explanation for how to marshall the concepts of peccability and impeccability, or mutability and immutability, so as to grasp their significance. To understand how a concept applies, we need not only to know how it represents the world, but also what it *rules out*. What are we ruling out when we say that something is *im*peccable, if not ruling out its peccability?

I cannot imagine any way of spelling out the contradictory concepts of peccability and impeccability, and mutability and immutability, in such a way as to help us understand how they might each apply in the case of Jesus Christ, that does not at least begin to look much more like the standard Christological moves, even though the theory might be couched in the more radical language of a theologian who is prepared to contradict themselves. However, this is, no doubt, a failure of my imagination, and the defenders of contradictory Christology will have more options to explore, to further articulate their position, and help us make sense of their contradictory Christ.[14]

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