On Contradictory Christology:
A Reply to Pawl's 'Explosive Theology'

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1. Introduction

Pawl advances one principal claim: namely, that even if – as I hold – logic doesn't validate the explosion of (formal) contradictions (i.e., even if there is no logical entailment from the logical conjunction of an arbitrary sentence and its logical negation to any arbitrary sentence) Contradictory Christology, as I advance it, is still not viable because 'explosions' of contradictions come from quarters other than logic. This is a fundamental claim, reaching to the very roots of any would-be Contradictory Christology – and any would-be contradictory Christian theology generally. Accordingly, my chief aim is to rebut the two arguments Pawl gives for his principal claim.

Despite their not being his principal concerns, Pawl also raises a handful of other very interesting and equally important but nonetheless ancillary issues – ancillary to his purposes in his paper, not ancillary to the broader project of Contradictory Christology. Full responses to these (and, alas, even to his principal claim) are left to a bigger project (viz., a monograph tentatively entitled *The Contradictory Christ*); however, initial responses to the ancillary issues are given in §3.

2. Pawl's principal objection

Pawl's principal claim can be viewed as a dilemma: either Contradictory Christology entails the trivial theology or it results in a trivial scientific theory. Put just so, Pawl's dilemma looks like nothing more than a question-begging one; but it's not – at all. Pawl gives two arguments for his principal claim, one (for the first horn) concerning the salient practice of theologians in the face of contradictions, the other concerning cross-disciplinary – inter-theoretical – truths common to both theology and (in his example) biology. If either of the two supporting arguments is successful, then Contradictory Christology – and, generally, any contradictory theology – should be rejected. But neither of Pawl's given arguments supports his principal claim, as I argue below.

Throughout his discussion, so as not to beg the question against Contradictory Christology, Pawl grants – for discussion – that logical consequence (i.e., logic itself) recognizes the possibility of gluts (true contradictions), and hence that logic itself

doesn't treat contradictions as explosive sentences. While logic doesn't demand that true theories treat contradictions as explosive sentences (nor does it demand that they don't), many true theories rule out the logical possibility of gluts (true contradictions) by treating them as theoretical impossibilities. It is just such theory-specific 'explosion' from contradictions that Pawl's principal objection concerns. His first horn is the claim that true theology itself rules out gluts as theoretically impossible.

2.1. From theological practice?

Pawl's argument for the claim that contradictions are explosive sentences in true theology points to theological practice itself. Why point to theological practice? Pawl does this in response to a prior question in the face of logic's treating contradictions one way (viz., as not explosive sentences) and yet many other consequence relations involved in our true theories treating them differently (viz., as explosive). Pawl puts matters this way:

> Here's a question at this junction: how do we determine which theory-specific consequence relations preclude true contradictions or build in explosion, and which do not?
>   Whatever our answer to that question is, it shouldn't require us to become experts in every theory to check for ourselves whether it requires explosion. Rather, we should trust the judgement of the expert theorists. (445)

There seem to be two questions here:

Q1:   How do we tell whether a theory's consequence relation validates explosion for contradictions (i.e., validates the entailment from arbitrary contradiction !*A* to arbitrary sentence *B*)?

Q2:   How do we determine whether theorists implicitly assume that the true theory of their theory's consequence relation – whenever it is explicitly recorded – validates explosion for contradictions?

(Q1) has an easy-to-state answer: we look at the true theory of the given theory's consequence relation. Such a theory will tell us whether the given consequence relation validates explosion for contradictions. Pawl assumes (correctly, I think) that theologians have not formulated the true theory of theology's consequence relation, at least not in full; and so Pawl's pointing to theological practice is intended to answer not (Q1) but (Q2), and do so in the affirmative, not surprisingly:

> By my lights, the overwhelming majority of theologians employ inference rules that would preclude true contradictions in their theological work. (445)

I agree with Pawl on this: namely, that theologians seem to work on the assumption that contradictions are explosive – that they are not in the space of theological possibilities. But that's not the important question.

We're assuming – Pawl is conceding (at least for debate) – that logic itself doesn't underwrite the given assumption of 'the overwhelming majority'. The pressing question, then, is: why – in the face of the strongly apparent contradiction of Christ – should theologians rule out the possibility of gluts? Why, in the face of the central apparent contradiction, should theologians assume that the consequence relation in true theology validates explosion for contradictions? It is this question to which 'expert opinion' is directly relevant – and directly required.

Pawl explicitly discusses the work of Gabriel Biel. Biel is plainly aware of the apparent contradiction of Christ (i.e., aware of 'the fundamental problem'). His solution to the fundamental problem, a predecessor of Pawl's own, rejects the standard satisfaction conditions of predicates like 'mutable' and 'immutable' (etc.) in favor of a nonstandard usage (explained at length in Pawl's 2016 monograph on Conciliar Christology). Why reject the standard usage? Biel's answer (as quoted by Pawl, 445) is plain:

> because [the standard conditions] imply contradictories of the same thing [viz., Christ].

My response: right, that's the apparent contradiction of Christ; and that's the fundamental problem at issue. But the question is: why reject that the apparent contradiction of Christ is veridical? Why reject that there are contradictories true of Christ?

Biel simply doesn't answer the question, at least not as far as Pawl's discussion goes.[1] The first-cab-off-the-block answer, of course, is that Biel rejects the possibility of a contradictory Christ – indeed, a contradictory anything – because *logic* itself rules out such 'possibilities'. My conjecture is that that's the answer that Biel would give were anyone to actually put the current question to him: namely, that logic rules out such a 'possibility', and hence our true theory of Christ – and true theology generally – has no such 'possibility' to entertain. Whether Biel would say as much is something I leave to a study of his work. For present purposes, saying as much is unavailable; for, as above, Pawl assumes (at least for debate) that logic itself does not rule out the possibility of gluts – does not rule out an entity of which/whom contradictories are true.

What, then, for present purposes, is the lesson we should draw from Biel's plain and firm rejection of contradictions in theology – and, indeed, from the vast majority of theologians whose careful work reflects a rejection of gluts in theology? Pending explicit discussion of their reasons for doing so, I do not see a clearly relevant

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[1] I do not know the work of Gabriel Biel except for what Pawl has conveyed. (I am told that Richard Cross is writing a book that covers Biel's work. I look forward to such a book.) What is clear is that Biel is a careful theologian whose work may well contain an answer to the question on the table, one which demands evaluation by any would-be glut-theoretic approach to Christology (or to theology, generally). For now, I go only on what Pawl's essay discusses.

lesson to draw (i.e., relevant to the issue of whether the true theology rules out gluts). The widespread rejection of gluts in theology is not itself good reason to think that the true theology is glut-free.

The need for some account of why contradictions are taken to be explosive in theology is especially pressing given the historical and conceptual oddity of the central fact in the Christian worldview: namely, the incarnation of God – the walking, talking union of 'transcendence and immanence' – who is not many but one person, 'fully divine' and 'fully human', with all that those natures entail. To many a sympathetic mind, even within committed realms of traditional monotheism, such an alleged fact appears to be nonsense, its nonsensicality falling freely from its prima facie logical impossibility. Of course, if true contradictions really were logically impossible, then mainstream theological practice would be right to sing as much, proceeding in turn to explain why the screamingly apparent contradiction of Christ is not after all contradictory (despite the appearances). But in the present context, per Pawl's (for-purposes-of-debate) assumption, the apparent contradiction is not a logical impossibility; and so some explanation is required as to why true contradictions should be treated as impossible in theology. And we don't get that from Biel or, as far as I know, from any of the other mainstream (or even side-stream) theologians to which Pawl's argument points.

The first horn of Pawl's principal objection is that even if logic doesn't rule out true contradictory theories, true theology's own extra-logical consequence relation rules them out. Pawl's argument from theological practice – qua practice of the relevant experts – fails to establish his first horn. The argument fails to show that true theology has a consequence relation that treats contradictions as explosive sentences.

2.2. From mixing domains?

The second horn of Pawl's dilemma is that would-be contradictions in theology find their way into scientific theories that are governed by contradiction-exploding consequence relations. Pawl's second horn rests on the claim, which I endorse, that at least some of our true scientific theories rule out the theoretical possibility of gluts; their consequence relations $\vdash_T$ validate explosion for contradictions: $!A \vdash_T B$. In particular, biology, I say in 'Christ – A Contradiction', appears to be one such example; and Pawl relies on this example in the second argument for his principal claim.[2]

How does Pawl support his second horn? Pawl's strategy, if I understand it correctly, is to derive, from the contradictory case of Christ, a 'purely biological truth' which contradicts claims in (contradiction-exploding) biology; but since said derived truth is 'purely biological' it needs to be in the complete-as-possible true biology. But, then, true (and complete-as-possible) biology contains a contradiction; and true biology explodes in the face of contradictions. Hence, true biology is the trivial biology (viz., the theory containing all sentences in the language of biology). But we should reject the trivial biology and reject the root that led us to it – namely, Contradictory Christology.

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[2] He could use other sciences, except maybe mathematics; but biology is a good one.

What 'purely biological truth' is derivable from the contradictory case of Christ? Pawl gestures at many candidates but explicitly focuses on one:[3] namely,

1.   It is false that all humans have bodily parts.[4]

The argument for (1)? Here:

2.   It's true that Christ is divine. [axiomatic in theology]
3.   It's true that Christ is immaterial. [2; divinity entails immateriality]
4.   It's false that Christ has a bodily part. [3; immateriality entails so]
5.   It's true that Christ is human. [axiomatic in theology]
1.   It's false that all humans have bodily parts. [4, 5; logic (quantification)]

(1) is certainly a striking claim in the face of contemporary biological theory, but the argument for it – notwithstanding potential questions about divinity entailing immateriality – is solid. And this, Pawl argues, is the downfall of Contradictory Christology.

An immediate question: where does (1) come from? As Pawl's discussion makes clear, the argument towards (1) is constructed 'in the theology building' (so to speak). This isn't to say that 'in the theology building' the true theories of other (non-theological) phenomena aren't invoked; they are – of course. For example, true theology contains at least some facts from true biology about humans, and at least some facts from true arithmetic, and at least some facts from true physics. These truths are developed and recorded in separate theories (viz., true biology, true arithmetic, true physics); but the truths from such theories are often lifted – as underived, ancillary truths – in theology. (And the same goes for biology lifting from physics, physics from analysis, etc.) All such inter-disciplinary lifting is common and uncontroversial. The showstopper that Pawl advances is that theology doesn't just contain – via lifting – truths from biology; theology itself is a source for biological truth! Theology itself, according to Pawl's argument, derives 'purely biological truths' that couldn't be derived 'in the biology building' alone.

I think that Pawl's argument is very important and equally interesting but ultimately fails to establish its target. The reason, in short, is that (1) is 'purely biological' only if all of the entities over which it quantifies are 'purely biological', and in particular only if divine entities count as 'purely biological entities'. Granted, according to true theology, there is a divine entity who, in virtue of exemplifying

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[3] Actually, I'm not sure whether Pawl's example of immateriality (see below) is a good one; I'm not sure whether divinity entails immateriality (i.e., that x is divine entails that x is immaterial). I don't doubt it; I don't yet believe it either. But I am sure that there are plenty of examples that Pawl's given strategy can invoke even if the immateriality one fails. (To repeat: I don't doubt that divinity entails immateriality; it's just that I need more time to think harder about it.)

[4] I change Pawl's example slightly to make plain that by 'has a body' Pawl means only 'has some bodily part'. (I also change to make the quantificational aspect of his example clear, and I drop the 'living adult human beings' to just 'humans', leaving any necessary tweaks – including potentially necessary reference to *actual* humans etc. – to be implicit. None of these changes affect his example or his overall strategy.)

human nature, is also a biological entity (as biological as you and me); but to call that entity 'purely biological' is misleading at best, incorrect at worst. Since Pawl's argument requires that (1) be 'purely biological' – to motivate its insertion into the true but (we're assuming) contradiction-exploding biology – the argument thereby fails due to a faulty premise, namely, that (1) is purely biological.

Another reply, which is viable but I think is unnecessary (in light of the sufficient reply above), is to distinguish 'normal biology' from 'abnormal biology' (and similarly for other theoretical domains), where the domain of the former is devoid of gods, and the domain of the latter includes the domain of the former but also contains some divine entities. With distinction in hand the background assumption about true biological theory – which is central to Pawl's running argument – is to be rephrased: true normal biology is explosive with respect to contradictions, but true abnormal biology is no more explosive with respect to contradictions than true theology. In turn, Pawl's derivation of (1) is a derivation common to both true theology and true abnormal biology; but the contradiction isn't explosive in abnormal biology, and so the case does not play the intended role against Contradictory Christology (and its alleged effect on true biology).

3. Additional issues and (gestures at) replies

Pawl raises important issues that are ancillary to the main aim of his paper. Because of their importance to Contradictory Christology (and any viable contradictory theology, generally) I briefly discuss them here, gesturing in the direction of responses to the issues. I expect to address all of the issues (and more) in a larger book-length project (tentatively entitled *The Contradictory Christ*).

In what follows I do not attempt to stay true to the exact letter of Pawl's discussion; my aim is simply to highlight (and very briefly respond to) important issues that his discussion flags.

3.1. Contraposition of consequence

This is an issue addressed in my 'Christ – A Contradiction' (see §5, objection O7) but Pawl's expressed unclarity highlights the inadequacy of my given discussion. My aim here is to elaborate on the key ideas.

The background issue is whether Contradictory Christology is committed to the falsity of Christ's divinity (similarly, falsity of humanity), and the resulting heresies involved therein.[5] The argument towards the heretical position is this:

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[5] Note that 'Christ – A Contradiction' (§5 reply to O7) distinguishes two types of heresy: a theory is H1-heretical if it contains (for example) the negation of 'Christ is divine' (i.e., claims that 'Christ is divine' is false), and is H2-heretical if it omits the nullation of 'Christ is divine' (equivalently, omits 'Christ is divine' from the theory). One avenue for Contradictory Christology to take is the H1-heretical one, maintaining the truth of Christ's divinity but also maintaining its falsity. I believe that this option is worthy of very careful consideration; however, my official position in 'Christ – A Contradiction' steers

1. That Christ is divine entails that Christ is impassible.
2. If *A* entails *B* then ¬*B* entails ¬*A*.
3. That Christ is passible entails that Christ is not divine.

(3) is supposed to follow from (1) and (2), where (1) is an instance of (2)'s antecedent and (3) is an instance of (2)'s consequent (with suitable fiddling with negations in the background).[6] The problem with (3) is that, when conjoined with the truth of Christ's passibility (something to which Contradictory Christology is committed), it entails the negation of *Christ is divine*; and so it looks as if Contradictory Christology is committed to the (H1-) heresy in question.

But, as per the reply to O7 in §5 of 'Christ – A Contradiction', the argument above fails to soundly support its target (3). The failure is due to equivocation on 'entails'. If sound, the argument needs to invoke the same relation of entailment throughout its premises. In the context, there are two salient relations of entailment: namely, logical and (let me say) theological (i.e., the target consequence relation in true theology). If the former (viz., logical) relation is in play, then while (2) is true, (1) itself isn't (because the entailment is not a logical one), and so the argument fails to be sound. If the latter (i.e., the target entailment relation is theological consequence), (1) is true but (2) isn't – as the official response in the paper goes on to say.

Pawl highlights some remaining questions around my claim that theological consequence (i.e., true theology's consequence relation) doesn't contrapose even though logical consequence – which is universal and involved in the consequence relations of all true theories – does contrapose. Pawl writes:[7]

> Beall does say in response to an objection which attempts to deduce something problematic for his Christology [viz., that Christ is not divine, per the argument rehearsed above] that the correct Christology-specific consequence relation does not contrapose. . . . [Begin Pawl's fn 8:] I'm not sure how this works. Beall goes on to say that 'It is true that *logical* entailment . . . contraposes' . . . and that 'logical consequence governs *all cases whatsoever*; logic is topic-neutral, universal, and is not at all subject to a particular corner of reality'. . . . He also says . . . that logical consequence 'is part of *every* consequence relation involved in any of our theories'. . . . *So, it looks to me as if logical consequence is part of the consequence relation of theology. But then since logical consequence contraposes, it looks to me as if the theology-specific consequence relation should contrapose too, contra what Beall says.* (449, fn 8, italics mine)

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clear of both sorts of heresies, and indeed treats the negation of 'Christ is divine' (similarly, the negation of 'Christ is human') as absurd sentences according to the true theology.

[6] With no fiddling, (3) looks like this: *that it's false that Christ impassible entails that it's false that Christ is divine.*

[7] Here, I thread Pawl's initial main-body text with his footnote 8 in which his concern arises. Pawl's paper is very clear that the following issue is not directly related to Pawl's principal dialectical aims, which is why he puts the highlighted unclarity in a footnote. But, again, the unclarity that Pawl highlights is important to address even if only ancillary to his direct dialectical aims.

The italicized part at the end is the crux of the unclarity. Clarity is achieved by clarifying the sense in which logical consequence is part of theology's (and every true theory's) consequence relation.

Let ⊢ (unsubscripted) be logical consequence and let ⊢$_\Theta$ be theological consequence (*Theta* for theological consequence). In turn, read '$X \vdash A$' as 'X logically entails A' and likewise, mutatis mutandis, for '$X \vdash_\Theta A$'. (Here, X is either a set of sentences or, for simplicity for present purposes, just one sentence.) Now, logic is part of theology's consequence relation in that the latter 'extends' the former:

- Theological consequence (viz., ⊢$_\Theta$) *extends* logical consequence (viz., ⊢) iff if $X \vdash A$ then so too $X \vdash_\Theta A$.

There's nothing peculiar about theological consequence; every true theory has a consequence relation that extends logic (in the sense above). And in that sense, logical consequence is 'universal' – it's part of every true theory's consequence relation. If $X \therefore A$ is valid according to logic (i.e., logically valid) then $X \therefore A$ is T-valid for every true theory T, including the true theology. That's all there is to logic's being a part of every true theory's consequence relation: namely, the theory's consequence relation 'obeys' logic on any 'form' that logic declares to be valid. Importantly, what is not involved in logic's given universality (i.e., in its being a part of every consequence relation involved in every true theory) is that anything true of logical consequence is thereby true of T-consequence, for every true theory T. In particular, what is not involved in logic's universality is that anything true of logical consequence is thereby true of ⊢$_\Theta$, true theology's consequence relation.

But that's where Pawl's highlighted unclarity persists. In particular, logical consequence contraposes: if A logically entails B, then $\neg B$ logically entails $\neg A$. (In notation above: if $A \vdash B$ then $\neg B \vdash \neg A$.) But this doesn't entail that every consequence relation that extends logical consequence contraposes; and in particular, according to me, theological consequence doesn't contrapose.

There are two ways to diminish the unclarity around this point. The first route: what argument would establish that ⊢$_\Theta$ contraposes if ⊢ (logic) does?[8] The second route: is there a simple counterexample? I'll briefly address each route in turn.

3.1.1. Argument for target contraposition?

In highlighting the target unclarity Pawl's discussion gestures at an argument from logic's contraposing to the contraposition of theological consequence. The argument seems to be as follows.

1. Fact: if $A \vdash B$ then $A \vdash_\Theta B$. [Logic is part of ⊢$_\Theta$.]
2. Fact: if $A \vdash B$ then $\neg B \vdash \neg A$. [Logic contraposes.]
3. * *Suppose*: $A \vdash B$.

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[8] Generalizing, the issue seeks an argument for ⊢$_T$'s contraposing if ⊢ contraposes and ⊢$_T$ extends ⊢, but I'll focus on the particular case of logic and theology.

4. $* \neg B \vdash \neg A$. [2, 3]
5. $* \neg B \vdash_{\Theta} \neg A$. [1,4]
6.   *Hence*: if $A \vdash B$ then $\neg B \vdash_{\Theta} \neg A$. [3,4,5]

Is there anything wrong with this argument? No; the argument is sound.[9] But one must be clear about what the argument does (not) establish.

The argument *does* establish its conclusion: namely, that if logic declares that $A \therefore B$ is valid then theological consequence declares $\neg B \therefore \neg A$ to be valid – in short, that if $A \vdash B$ then $\neg B \vdash_{\Theta} \neg A$. (The same holds for every consequence relation involved in any of our true theories.) But this fact is not the one towards which Pawl's argument is directed.

The argument above is sound but does *not* establish Pawl's key desideratum, namely, that theological consequence itself contraposes: namely,

- $\vdash_{\Theta}$ contraposition: if $A \vdash_{\Theta} B$ then $\neg B \vdash_{\Theta} \neg A$.

In that respect, the argument is defective; it misses its target.

3.1.2. Counterexample to target contraposition?

The search for a sound argument from the contraposition of logic to the contraposition of theological consequence is not fruitful; in fact, it is doomed. There are counterexamples that refute the would-be target. One counterexample, from my view, is made plain in the fallacious (because equivocating) argument towards heresy discussed above (see §3.1). But there is a simpler though more abstract way to see how counterexamples emerge.

Here's one clear way to see how logic can contrapose but, even though $\vdash_{\Theta}$ (viz., theological consequence) never disobeys logic when logic claims that some pattern $X \therefore A$ is valid, $\vdash_{\Theta}$ itself doesn't contrapose. Let's suppose (not implausibly) that fundamental-problem properties – tied essentially to one of Christ's two natures – are truly (and/or falsely) exemplified by Christ in all of the possibilities recognized by the true theology. Take

Christ is immutable.

as an example. This, then, is true in all of theology's possibilities but, according to Contradictory Christology, likewise is false across all such possibilities; (1) is glutty in all models of the true theological theory. (This is what we're stipulating for the example.)

Notice that theology thereby carves out a proper part of logical space of possibilities wherein there is a 'necessary glut', recognized as such by theology's

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[9] Some readers might worry about the use of conditional proof here or even detachment from these conditionals; the worry is fully answered by the fact that this argument is done in the language of a (meta-) theory which validates such things.

consequence relation $\vdash_\Theta$. But this has direct effects on contraposition. To see this, let γ (gamma as heuristic for glut) be one of theology's necessary gluts: it is true and false at all models of the true theology, so that † γ (logic's truth operator applied to γ) and $\neg\gamma$ (logic's falsity operator applied to γ) are each true and false at all possibilities seen by theology's consequence relation. But, then, since γ is at least true at all possibilities seen by $\vdash_\Theta$, we have the following theology-valid form/pattern:

$$A \therefore \gamma$$

That is: $A \vdash_\Theta \gamma$. But now contrapose to get the form/pattern:

$$\neg\gamma \therefore \neg A$$

Since γ is glutty everywhere that $\vdash_\Theta$ sees, it's at least true every such where. But there are many sentences A in the language of theology that are just true (not also false) at many possibilities. All we need is one such A and one such possibility where A is just true; for at that possibility $\neg A$ is thereby just false, even though, as above, $\neg\gamma$ is glutty (and thereby at least true). Accordingly,

$$\neg\gamma \nvdash_\Theta \neg A$$

which is to say that $\neg\gamma$ does not theology-entail $\neg A$.

Putting the pieces of the example together, one can see that one (among other) ways that contraposition for $\vdash_\Theta$ fails arises from special features of the language of the theory (i.e., of theology) and in particular constraints on the space of theoretical possibilities that result in making some sentences necessarily glutty.[10]

But necessary gluts (or gaps) are not necessary for ruining contraposition in a theory's consequence relation. Suppose that, as some have suggested (in conversation), the true theology is a glut-only theology, treating logic's gappy possibilities as theoretical impossibilities.[11] Suppose, too, that there are no theoretically necessary gluts; it's just that the space of theoretical possibilities is exhausted by ones where sentences are either just true, just false, or they are glutty. (No gaps, though it's worth noting that the example can be run with no gluts and just gaps too.) In that case, even though (we're stipulating) there are no theoretically necessary gluts, theology's consequence relation fails to contrapose, largely for the same reason given above. To see this, note that without gaps in the picture the following is a true theological-entailment claim according to the given theological consequence relation:

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[10] Another route towards the same point points to theology-necessary gaps (if there are any), which are possible according to logic but which I've set aside as not directly relevant to Pawl's overall discussion.

[11] Mike Rea, Tim Pawl, Natalja Deng and Gill Russell have independently suggested that a contradictory theology that is uniformly glutty or, dually, uniformly gappy enjoys a theoretical unity (and thereby some degree of theoretical attractiveness) over one that treats some theological 'problems' as gluts and some as 'gaps'. This sort of issue, which I discuss no further here, might motivate a glut-only theology or a gap-only theology.

$$A \vdash_\Theta B \vee \neg B$$

(Recall that FDE governs the truth and falsity conditions of the logical vocabulary; and so, without gaps, $B \vee \neg B$ cannot be made untrue; it is either just-true or it is a glut.) But now consider the contraposition:

$$\neg(B \vee \neg B) \therefore \neg A$$

This is not Θ-valid, that is,

$$\neg(B \vee \neg B) \nvdash_\Theta \neg A$$

To see this, go to a possibility, recognized by $\vdash_\Theta$, whereat A is just-true and B is a glut. As a walk through the truth/falsity conditions for logical negation and disjunction will reveal, $\neg(B \vee \neg B)$ is glutty in the given possibility too. But, then, $\neg(B \vee \neg B)$ can be (at least) true while $\neg A$ can be untrue – not even at least true. So, in light of the Θ-recognized counterexample, the given form is Θ-invalid, even though logic itself (viz., FDE) contraposes.

3.2. Observable gluts

Perhaps one of the most striking issues is the one to which Pawl points concerning observable gluts. Pawl raises the issue as follows (quote at length):

> According to Contradictory Christology, Christ is not mutable, in the ordinary sense of that term. Christ cannot, and did not, change. Now, one question here is, 'what did that look like, in real life?' Someone put a nail next to the flesh of his blessed hand, then struck the nail with a hammer. Did the nail pierce the skin? Yes, it did. But did it also not pierce the skin, owing to the fact that to be pierced is to change, and Christ did not change? Given that Contradictory Christology is an attempt at a general answer to the Fundamental Problem, what holds for mutability should hold for materiality, and for all the other instances of difficult predicates for Christology: passible, contingent, temporal, etc. What does it look like for something not material – not material in the sense of being the contradictory of material; not material in the same sense that the number 2 or the form of Courage is not material – to be struck? It seems to me that the contradictions proliferate at an astounding rate. He bled and he didn't; he walked on water and he didn't; he had a body and he didn't. Everything he did in life that required being incarnate is also something that he did not do, owing to the fact that he was not material, passable, mutable, and temporal. As [an] autobiographical note, I have a hard time picturing in my mind what it would look like to be around Jesus. (448)

Pawl is admirably clear that he takes this issue to be at best only tangential to his main dialectical aims (which concern his principal claim discussed above in §2); however, the issue is likely to be one of wide interest to other readers, and so I discuss the direction of my thinking below – alas, only gesturing at the direction of my reply, not going into detail. (As above, details are left to a larger project.)

Before turning directly to the main issue of observable gluts, it is worth flagging (though, given space, only flagging) that the 'astounding' spread of would-be contradictions to which Pawl points may not be nearly as widespread or astounding as portrayed. One reason, similar to the issues discussed in §3.1 above, is that the entailments on which Pawl's portrait depends may not contrapose in ways that underwrite the would-be spread of gluts. For present purposes I leave that issue for a larger discussion elsewhere, and assume for the sake of discussion that at least some of the observable gluts to which Pawl points – for example, that it's true that blood ran from Christ's hands and that it's false that blood ran from Christ's hands – are contained in Contradictory Christology as I advance it.

There is a great deal more to be said about observable contradictions than can be said here. My strategy is to address two issues: one, the dialectical role that the issue of observable contradictions might be taken to play; the other is simply the direction of my current thoughts on the issue of observable contradictions – and specifically the observable contradiction of Christ. I take each in turn.

3.2.1. Note on dialectical role

An important dialectical point to keep in mind: one might try to argue from the absence of anticipated observable consequences of $!A$ to a rejection of $!A$. The thinking, for example, might be this: we know what it looks like when A is true; we know what it looks like when A is false; and so we know what it looks like when $!A$ is true, since $!A$ is true just if A is true and A is false. But for the alleged Christological $!A$ we see only the observable consequences of A, or only the observable consequences of $\neg A$; and hence we should reject that $!A$ is true since its observable consequences are absent.

The would-be argument is not a good one. The success of such an argument rests squarely on our knowledge of the observable consequences of $!A$. One might insist that the observable consequences of a conjunction just are the observable consequences of its conjuncts. But even if that's generally true, the claim is at least doubtful when it comes to contradictions, which, after all, tend to have (what else to say) 'contradictory consequences' – for example, that the cat is on the mat, that it's false that the cat is on the mat, and so on. If there were very strong reasons to think that the observable consequences of gluts just are the observable consequences of both conjuncts then we'd have a swift argument against Contradictory Christology – at least given that, as I'm assuming (and in fact firmly hold), the historically observed consequences of (for example) Christ's crucifixion were only the expected ones (e.g., blood running down the hand, etc.). But pending discovery of such very strong reasons for thinking that the observable consequences of gluts just are the observable consequences of both conjuncts, I think that the point remains doubtful.

From my perspective, there is very strong reason to think that Christ is contradictory (e.g., among other potential ones, the longstanding fundamental-problem arguments); but there's also strong reason to think that those who observed the crucifixion did not observe anything out of the ordinary (no would-be flittering between blood and absence of blood, or a nail hole and the absence of a nail hole, or any other flickering-buffering magic); they saw the blood, oozing from the nail holes, and so on – full stop. But rather than infer – in light of the ordinary observable consequences and lack of extraordinary 'flickering' or whathaveyou – that therefore there's no contradiction we should instead infer the more immediate fact: namely, that the observable consequences of (observable) contradictions are just so: they are the observable consequences of just one of the conjuncts. As such, it is not – nor has it ever been – that we look to its observable consequences to conclude that a phenomenon is contradictory; we rather look to a broader set of data, including, in the case at hand, revelation, the councils, reflection, and more.

While there is a very interesting and important issue concerning the observable consequences of Christ's contradictory being, the dialectical role that the issue plays is not a simple one from the absence of extraordinary observable consequences to the absence of the given contradiction.[12]

3.2.2. Initial thoughts on the observable contradiction of Christ

Setting aside the dialectical issues, the fundamental question remains: what should we make of the observable consequences of Christ's contradictory truths?

I do not, as yet, have a full answer, but the direction of my answer is strongly apparent in the discussion above (see §3.2.1). Pawl raises the question (only to record an autobiographical fact):

> What would it look like for it to be both true and false that blood ran down Christ's hand?

By my lights the more pressing question is the one that Pawl explicitly (and non-autobiographically) raises (see the second sentence of the quoted Pawl passage in §3.2). The fruitful question, towards figuring out the truth about observable gluts, is not what *would* it look like for the given contradiction to be true but rather

> What *did* it look like when it was true and false that blood ran down Christ's hand?

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[12] Lest some readers are wondering: the epistemology of all this is not intended to be different from the epistemology of other truths. The truth about epistemology of just about anything is messy and hard; but I see no reason to think that epistemology is wildly different in the case of a contradictory theology. The topic has been largely unexplored; and so surprises are likely; but, at least as yet, I see no reason to think that the epistemology of Contradictory Christology requires breaking genuinely new epistemological ground.

And the answer to this striking and fundamental question is the, by comparison, rather dull but obvious answer: it looked exactly as it did. And how was that? It was just as all of us believe: it looked like blood running down the hands – and that's an end on't.

That's the answer. But the answer presses for explanation:

> How can the observable consequences of an 'observable conjunction' $A \wedge B$ fail to be (so to speak) the sum of the observable consequences of A and the observable consequences of B?

Let $O(A)$ be the observable consequences of A. (For simplicity I'll think of $O(A)$ as the set of truths that record the observable consequences of A.) Normally, we expect that $O(A \wedge B)$ is just the sum – the union of – the observable consequences of A together with the observable consequences of B, namely,

$$O(A \wedge B) = O(A) \cup O(B)$$

Explanation is required for the failure of this expected equation.

The explanation, I suggest, adverts to the special case of contradictions together with the apparent fact that perception privileges the positive.

Not surprisingly, the conjunction of A and its logical negation $\neg A$ is a special case of a conjunction. Focusing, for simplicity, only on logically atomic sentences (let me use 'p', 'q' etc. for atomic sentences),[13] the special case is one in which logic's fundamental unary operators (viz., truth and falsity) are applied to a single claim. This special case, I suggest, really is a case where $O(\neg p)$ is 'exactly hidden' by $O(p)$. In particular, my arm is resting on the armrest; and this arm takes up a certain region of space r; and when it's (only) false that my arm is in r then $O(\neg p)$ involves no observation of my arm in r, just as when it's (only) true that my arm is in r then $O(p)$ involves the observation of my arm in r.[14] My view is that *perception privileges the positive*; the otherwise perceivable emptiness of r (involved via the falsity of my arm's being in r) is 'hidden behind' my arm. Take away the truth of p and leave only the falsity of p; the emptiness of r is there.

My current view on observable contradictions, informed (I admit) by holding to the observable contradiction of Christ and the apparent historical record of perceiving only the 'positive traces' of the contradiction, may be expressed as the general perception-privileges-the-positive principle (PPP):

- Let A be glutty. Then $O(!A) = O(A)$.

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[13] Atomic sentences, in this context, are devoid of logical vocabulary.

[14] I'm sliding between 'observation' and 'truly recorded observation' here to make the point plain. If, as I'm assuming, $O(A)$ is a set of claims recording A's observable consequences then there aren't any observations in $O(A)$, just truths recording as much. But I hope that the slide in this context causes no confusion.

I carry no pretense that this is all that need be said on the topic. Much more reflection is required to get at the full truth of observable contradictions. But I also see no reason to think that the matter is somehow so wildly perplexing that it serves as a reason to doubt the truth (or even plausibility) of Contradictory Christology.

3.3. The 'loss' of material modus ponens and more

In his §4 Pawl gestures towards the logical invalidity of material modus ponens, material modus tollens, disjunctive syllogism, where these can be thought of as 'argument forms' or would-be sentence-sentence or set-sentence forms (where the set contains only sentences). Let $\supset$ be logic's material conditional, defined (per usual) via logical negation and logical disjunction:

$$A \supset B := \neg A \vee B$$

The given 'argument forms' to which Pawl refers are

- Material Modus Ponens (MMP): $A, A \supset B \therefore B$
- Material Modus Tollens (MMT): $\neg A, B \supset A \therefore \neg B$
- Disjunctive Syllogism (DS): $\neg A, A \vee B \therefore B$

Each of these forms is logically invalid (according to FDE, which I take to be the correct account of logical consequence). A single counterexample, which exists in logic's space of possibilities, refutes their would-be logical validity: namely, a case in which A is a glut and B is gap (i.e., not at least true and not at least false).[15] Since A is (at least) true (since glutty), so too is the logical disjunction of A and any sentence in the language, including B and including the negation of B, namely $\neg B$. But, then, each of $A \vee B$ and $\neg B \vee A$ are (at least) true, in which case, by definition of the material conditional, $B \supset A$ is (at least true). But since B is a gap, neither B nor its negation $\neg B$ is true in the given case, and hence none of the conclusions in the target forms are even at least true. This refutes the would-be logical validity of MMT and DS. To see that MMP is similarly refuted, note that since A is a glut, its negation $\neg A$ is also true; and, hence, by truth conditions for disjunctions $\neg A \vee B$ is at least true, and hence by definition of the material conditional $A \supset B$ is at least true; ergo, the second premise of MPP is at least true; ergo, from this and above, both premises of MPP are at least true, but B, being a gap, is not even at least true.

So, Pawl is exactly right that such forms are logically invalid. Is this a loss? Well, logic never validated them; rather, a bad account of logic validated them. The question is: what about the flat-out ubiquity of such argument forms that appear to underwrite our 'reasoning' and the consequence relations involved in many, many, many of our true theories? Without an answer to this, Contradictory Christology appears to be

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[15] Counterexamples for each of the given forms can be given without invoking truth-value gaps (which I've been bracketing out of the discussion until this spot); but using gaps affords a single counterexample to all three.

plainly implausible: we're left with next to no resources to do our theology (or, for that matter, biology, physics, mathematics, more)!

This issue is a very big one. (And that's an understatement.) This paper is not the venue to tackle the problem, but let me highlight some important directions of reply that, by my lights, sufficiently address the concerns. (Clarification: I don't mean that the highly abbreviated remarks below sufficiently explain the replies; I mean that the replies, when spelled out in full, sufficiently address the concerns. My aim here is only to gesture in the direction of the replies.)

3.3.1. Extra-logical consequence and logical vocabulary

One important reply is that in many of our true theories we are not dealing with glutty (i.e., contradictory) phenomena; the theories rule out the logical possibility of gluts as theoretical impossibilities. But take away the theoretical possibility of gluts, so that a theory's entailment (consequence) relation doesn't treat them as candidate counterexamples, and you've thereby taken away the common core of the (logical) counterexamples to MPP, MTT and DS. Accordingly, those forms are valid according to the given theories that restrict the space of available possibilities. And this is precisely what happens in our true theory of (for example) arithmetic, biology or so on. In particular, even though

$$A, A \supset B \therefore B$$

is *logically* invalid, it is valid according to those consequence relations involved in true theories whose space of possibilities precludes (the logical possibility of) gluts.

The details of how this is pulled off is less pressing than that it is pulled off in many true theories.[16] In turn, the explanation for why so many of our true theories appear to validate MMP, MMT and DS – where these use only logic's given expressions (i.e., logic's conditional, negation, etc.) – is that they do. Logic itself doesn't do the work for the theories; the theories' respective consequence relation build in extra-logical (and otherwise logically invalid) patterns that result in the given theory-specific validities.

3.3.2. Extra-logical vocabulary

Another important reply is that while the logical invalidity of MMP, MMT and DS may be initially surprising, the effects of such logical invalidity are minor-to-nil, even if extra-logical consequence relations (per §3.3.1) are set aside. On this reply, one points not (mainly) to extra-logical constraints imposed on a theory's consequence relations; instead, one points to extra-logical vocabulary for which modus ponens, modus tollens, even disjunctive syllogism are valid (according to any entailment

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[16] For some details see, for example, my papers on 'shrieking' (similarly 'shrugging'): Beall 2013a; 2013b; 2018.

relation defined over that vocabulary). Skipping details here, the idea is simply that there are more conditionals involved in many of our true theories than logic's material conditional; and it may well be that Modus Ponens for such conditionals is not in any way undermined by the possibility of gluts. Similarly, mutatis mutandis, for different negations and disjunctions.

On this reply, the widespread appearance of MMP's validity, MTT's validity and so on is one of mistaken identity: the expressions involved aren't in fact logic's expressions (for which such forms are invalid) but rather extra-logical vocabulary for which such forms are valid.[17]

3.3.3. Necessary instances versus valid forms

Yet another reply is that MMP and so on have counterexamples even though many of its instances don't. In particular, it might be, as a matter of fact, that the vast majority of *instances* of MMP are necessarily truth-preserving over all relevant possibilities (however these are to be carved out) even though, of course, there are a few instances that spoil the soup (so to say). On this reply, we are surprised to learn that MMP (etc.) is logically invalid because the vast majority of instances of MMP are necessarily true across the space of all possibilities that wind up being theoretically possible (according to our true theories).[18]

3.3.4. Theory-specific absurdities and 'DS' etc.

Another sort of reply, similar to some of the foregoing, is another case of mistaken identity. In this case, we are in fact relying on theory-specific absurdities (see 443) when we 'reason' in disjunctive-syllogism or 'reductio' sorts of ways. Consider one example, where $\vdash_T$ is the consequence relation of theory T, and $\perp$ is some T-specific absurdity, some explosive sentence according to $\vdash_T$ where, let us stipulate (for simplicity), $\perp$ is (just) false in every possibility (model) recognized by $\vdash_T$. In this case, we have the sort of reductio- or disjunctive-syllogism-like pattern:

- If $A \vdash_T \perp$ (i.e., A entails an absurdity) and $A \vee B$ is true according to T, then either A is untrue according to T or T is the trivial theory (for the given language).

The idea here is that this sort of reductio- or disjunctive-syllogism-like pattern is ultimately the only sort of such pattern that we ever need in our theorizing. The given pattern (or, if you want, principle) might not – for various technical reasons – be expressible in the target theory T to which the principle applies; but it's a prevalent principle for reasoning about T.

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[17] For details on this sort of reply, see the work of early 'relevance' (aka 'relevant') logicians (Routley et al. 1982; Anderson et al. 1992) and various applications (Priest 2006; Field 2008; Beall 2009). References in such works point to a multitude many other works in which such ideas are discussed.
[18] This sort of story is gestured at in Beall 2009.

3.3.5. Extra-linguistic acceptance-rejection

One other reply (probably not the last available) points not to extra-logical consequence relations, which beef up entailment relations to validate MMP etc., and points not to extra-logical vocabulary to stand in for the otherwise weak (but universal) logical vocabulary, but rather points to 'extra-linguistic' behavior that we – qua theorists – utilize in our reasoning about theories. The details of this reply are spelled out in different ways in different places, but the basic idea is that when we talk about the apparent validity of MMP (or the like) we are instead talking about rational acceptance-rejection behavior, whereby we have both of the following sentences

$$A, A \supset B$$

in our theory. Logic, of course, does not validate B's going into the theory; however, a generalization of logic (to so-called multiple-conclusion logic) does say that at least one of

$$!\,A, B$$

is true if our theory, which contains both A and $A \supset B$, is itself true. Hence, if – for whatever our theoretical reasons – we reject the logical possibility of $!\,A$ (i.e., the possibility of the contradiction $A \wedge \neg A$ being true) we are then assured, by the given generalization of logic, that our putting B into the theory results in a theory which remains true.[19]

3.4. Conciliar Christology and charity

An issue raised by Pawl's discussion (see his §§2-3) is whether Contradictory Christology, as I advance it, is compatible with Conciliar Christology as Pawl defines it in his *A Defense of Conciliar Christology* (Pawl 2016). On this topic there is a lot to say, and a lot of details to wade through. I leave the broader discussion to a larger project, focusing on just a few points of reply.

First, I do think that Contradictory Christology, as I've advanced it (so far), is compatible with Pawl's definition of 'Conciliar Christology'; and I remain committed to this until I see good reason to give it up. As far as I can see, Pawl hasn't provided (or, to be clear, claimed to provide) good reason to think that Conciliar Christology is incompatible with Contradictory Christology. The one explicit argument rests on whether conciliar fathers took themselves to be committed to the absence of logical contradictions. Pawl says that the most charitable reading of relevant conciliar texts is one according to which it's absurd (i.e., theoretically impossible) that Christ be contradictory. I briefly argued in 'Christ – A Contradiction' (see §5, reply to objection

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[19] Details of this sort of reply are filled out in various places, including especially Beall 2015, but also with important early ideas in Routley et al. 1982.

O2) that the prima facie more charitable reading is one according to which Christ is contradictory. Pawl's target 'Explosive Theology' responds to my argument.

Without getting into any of the details (which, again, I expect to cover in a larger project), I am not convinced that Pawl's given reply undermines my argument; but I do fully concede that the case of 'the most charity' is as yet at least epistemically underdetermined – waiting, perhaps, on further evidence about both the full intentions of the relevant authors of the relevant passages, and especially the weight that those to-be-discovered intentions carry with respect to the content and consequence relation involved in true theology (in this case, true conciliar theology). But beyond conceding that the matter remains open for debate, I should note two other points, one methodological and the other, in turn, on the fate of Contradictory Christology vis-a-vis Conciliar Christology (were it to turn out to be incompatible with Conciliar Christology because the authors, let us imagine, intended to endorse the explosion of logical contradictions, and that their intentions are to be treated as relevantly authoritative).

On the methodological point: I think that it's a highly delicate matter for those committed to Conciliar Christology as to *which* matters the councils – when taken to be infallible – are a source of truth. There is a great deal more to say on this, but suffice to say, just to flag the issue for further debate, that I see no reason to think that Conciliar Christology demands that conciliar fathers recorded the truth about logic, metaphysics and more in their (presumably, spirit-inspired) infallible writings. Such texts may well record the true account of many central matters theological, but that's compatible with the authors of the texts being wrong about what they took the true metaphysics to be or the true account of logical consequence to be. Short of a detailed, explicit – and, presumably, infallible – statement of what (for example) the metaphysics of natures truly is, or the full slate of features of logical consequence truly are, or so on, such conciliar texts may record the official constraints on Christology, the Trinity, or the like, all the while written by well-meaning authors who were in fact wrong about the details of the metaphysical or logical ingredients of said truths.[20] The point – again, simply flagged for present purposes – is that charitably reading the conciliar texts is compatible with acknowledging that the authors of the texts were wrong about salient and, in the current context, dialectically central ingredients. (Example: it's true that Christ exemplifies the divine nature and also the human nature, even if nobody, as yet, has the truth about what natures are, or what the exemplification relation is, or what logical consequence demands on all such discussions, etc.) So goes an important methodological point from my perspective.

The second point is that, while I do think that Conciliar Christology is compatible with Contradictory Christology, if evidence ultimately shows that the authors intended their work to be incompatible with a contradictory account of Christ, *and* we are convinced that their intentions about logical consequence (presumably backing their first intentions) are to be accepted as authoritative (indeed, sufficient for truth on the matter), then I'd grant that this is a major blow to the viability of a Contradictory Christology qua candidate open to (for example)

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[20] Sarah Coakley's paper on different ways to think of the creeds (Coakley 2002), discussed in Thomas McCall's contribution to the current symposium, is illuminating on this issue.

Conciliar Christians (understood per Pawl's account of Conciliar Christology). But, as things sit, I find it very difficult to believe that we'll reach such a state. Moreover, I remain convinced that Contradictory Christology is more plausible than the many non-contradictory accounts of Christ; and so if Conciliar Christology is ultimately incompatible with Contradictory Christology, this is a knock against the former. But supporting such a view is a burden I leave to the promised larger book project.

4. Summary

Pawl's chief objection to Contradictory Christology takes the form of a would-be dilemma according to which Contradictory Christology, as I advance it, either results in the trivial theology or the trivial biology (or some such science). But the dilemma, I've argued, is only a would-be one. Pawl's arguments for the horns fail to establish their target points.

Despite his principal objection failing to hit its mark, Pawl's discussion is eminently valuable for the future viability of any would-be contradictory theology, including the still-growing Contradictory Christology that I have advanced. The issues that Pawl has raised reach the very foundations of Contradictory Christology – and, again, contradictory theology of any sort. I hope to that my future work measures up to the value of the Pawline prods in his 'Explosive Theology'.[21]

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