

Qua Solution, 0-Qua Has Problems: A Response to Beall and Henderson

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Abstract: We present an objection to Beall and Henderson’s recent paper defending a solution to the fundamental problem of conciliar Christology using qua or secundum clauses. We argue that certain claims the acceptance/rejection of which distinguish the Conciliar Christian from others fail to so distinguish on Beall and Henderson’s 0-Qua view. This is because on their 0-Qua account, these claims are either acceptable both to Conciliar Christians as well as those who are not Conciliar Christians or because they are acceptable to neither.

In this note, we present an objection to Beall and Henderson’s recent paper (Beall & Henderson 2019) defending a solution to the fundamental problem of Conciliar Christology.¹ We shall argue that on Beall and Henderson’s picture, certain claims the acceptance/rejection of which distinguish the Conciliar Christian from others fail to so distinguish, either because they are acceptable to both the Conciliar Christian and others or because they are acceptable to neither. We will first briefly set out the relevant parts of Beall and Henderson’s view, and then present our objection.

1. Beall and Henderson’s 0-Qua Solution

The problem Beall and Henderson seek to solve concerns an apparent contradiction arising from consideration of Christ’s *dual natures*. This is what they call the

¹ Conciliar Christians are those Christians adopting the doctrines espoused by the Ecumenical Councils. Beall and Henderson use the term “Orthodox Christian.”

fundamental problem of Christology. On the one hand, Christ has a human nature, according to which He is mortal, mutable, and limited in power and knowledge, while on the other hand, He has a divine nature, according to which He is immortal, immutable, omnipotent, omniscient, and so on. Christ, having these two natures, seems to be subject to incompatible predications, for instance in that He is both mutable and immutable. In their paper, Beall and Henderson consider solutions to the fundamental problem where some part of the statements predicating qualities of Christ are modified by a *qua* or *secundum* clause operating on either the divine or human nature. They distinguish four natural options for what element of the predication may be so modified: the whole sentence (0-Qua), the subject (1-Qua), the copula (2-Qua), or the predicate (3-Qua). For example, applying these different interpretive options to the sentence “Christ is mutable” yields:

- (0-Qua) Qua-Human: Christ is mutable.
- (1-Qua) Christ-qua-Human is mutable.
- (2-Qua) Christ is-qua-Human mutable.
- (3-Qua) Christ is mutable-qua-Human.

Beall and Henderson develop and defend a version of the 0-Qua view. They read this operator as expressing truth *in a story*.² In their words:

It is natural to think of Christ's divine nature as delivering (i.e., entailing) a true story of anything that exemplifies that nature. . . . Indeed, any nature delivers some true story of whatever possesses it—at the very least, the essential truths tied to that nature. (Beall & Henderson 2019, 159)

As an example, “Qua-Divine: Christ is immutable” expresses that “Christ is immutable” is true in the Divine story of Christ. Similarly, “Christ is mutable” is true in the Human story. According to their account, the truth in “Christ is immutable” is just the Qua-modified truth in the Divine story. This apparently solves the problem because in neither story is Christ correctly predicated of both of the pair of mutually incompatible predicates “mutable” and “immutable,” nor can one draw the unmodified conclusion that “Christ is mutable and not mutable” from the two true 0-Qua-modified claims.³ This is because one cannot be guaranteed that the union or combination of two internally consistent true stories will result in an internally consistent or true story. As they put the point:

The true story of Christ is given not by the union of all nature-tied stories of Christ but is rather a set of logically consistent stories tied to Christ's two (otherwise inconsistent) natures. (Ibid, 160)

²They distinguish “story” from “fictional story.”

³In general, one cannot infer an unmodified claim from a modified one, on Beall and Henderson’s account.

While their major move is away from unmodified to modified truth, Beall and Henderson do make room for claims which are true or false in an unmodified sense. Specifically, in Section 4.3 they introduce Truth and Falsity simpliciter in terms of truth or falsity in some relevant set of stories. The two key definitions are summarized below:

- Truth (Simpliciter): Let P be any statement. Then P is True (simpliciter) if and only if P is true in all relevant stories.
- False (Simpliciter): Let P be any statement. Then P is False (simpliciter) if and only if P is false in all relevant stories.⁴

There is more to be said concerning Beall and Henderson's story, but these remarks are enough to allow us to press our objection.

2. The Objection

The objection centers on the status of certain claims the acceptance or rejection of which distinguish Conciliar Christians from non-Conciliar Christians and non-Christians. The problem is that on Beall and Henderson's view, certain of these claims cannot be a source of disagreement between Conciliar Christians and everyone else. In some cases, this is because a putative distinguishing claim is acceptable both to those who are Conciliar Christians and those who are not, while in other cases because the claim is acceptable to neither of these groups. In what follows, we consider each of these problems in turn.

2.1 Claims Both Can Accept

We start with a putative distinguishing claim which, on Beall and Henderson's account, both the Conciliar Christian and those who are not Conciliar Christians can accept. Beall and Henderson claim (ibid, p. 160) that any truth in "Christ is mutable" is elliptical for their (4): "According to the human story: Christ is mutable." Similarly, they maintain that any truth in "Christ is immutable" is elliptical for their (5): "According to the divine story: Christ is immutable (not mutable)."

Anyone familiar with the story of Christ, *whether or not they accept that story*, can accept both (4) and (5). To accept (4), it's enough just to know that the claim "Christ is human" is part of the human story; and to accept (5), it's enough to know that the claim "Christ is divine" is part of the divine story. The crucial observation is that it's easy to accept both (4) and (5) without any commitment to Christ's being human, or to Christ's being divine, or even to Christ's existence. Conciliar Christians and all others can thus agree on (4) and (5). For those who are not Conciliar

⁴This account is adapted from supervaluationist approaches to truth in semantics. Some discussion is available in section 5 of Sorensen (2018).

Christians, this is no different from accepting “Holmes lives on 221B Baker Street,” when the truth in this claim is understood as elliptical for “according to *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Holmes lives on 221B Baker Street.”

So on Beall and Henderson’s account, any truth in the claim that “Christ is mutable” is something that can be accepted by anyone. So too for any truth in the claim that “Christ is immutable.” While there is certainly plenty of debate to be had about the appropriate reading of claims like “Christ is immutable,” we think it’s a necessary constraint on candidate readings of these claims that they should not be acceptable to someone who fully rejects Christ’s divinity. This is, after all, a central point of theological disagreement, which our theory of truth should not obscure. According to Beall and Henderson’s reading, one may recognise the truth of (5) while fully rejecting Christ’s divinity, obscuring this important point of disagreement.

2.2 Claims Neither Can Accept

We turn now to the second problem. There exist claims that the Conciliar Christian ought to accept but which, on Beall and Henderson’s view, they cannot. This makes it seem like there is agreement with non-Christians (and many non-Conciliar Christians) about points where there is in fact genuine theological disagreement.

In particular, consider the sentence:

- (6) Christ is two-natured.

This claim is central to Conciliar Christianity, and a known problem point for Qua theories in general—indeed, it is one of the main objections that Pawl (2016) considers to other Qua theories:

Christ is two-natured. But neither nature all by itself is a nature in virtue of which Christ is two-natured. Christ, while aptly predicated by “two-natured” is not aptly predicated by “two-natured-qua-divine” or “two-natured-qua-human.” (Pawl 2016, 137)

As it turns out, the 0-Qua account runs into serious problems with (6). This is because the 0-Qua theorist can assert:

- (7) According to the divine story Christ is divine (has a divine nature).
- (8) According to the human story Christ is human (has a human nature).⁵

But they cannot assert (6) nor anything equivalent to it in meaning. This is because, on their view, “natures can be thought of as delivering—entailing—true stories of whatever exemplifies that nature.” That is, the stories are entailed by the natures. But Christ’s divine nature does not on its own entail that he is two-natured, nor does his

⁵ Beall and Henderson appeal to precisely these sentences in their reply to the objection that their view is “heretical in its rejection of both the divinity and humanity of Christ” (Beall & Henderson 2019, p.168).

human nature on its own have this entailment. Only together do Christ's two natures entail that Christ is two-natured: it is *because* Christ has a divine nature *and* a human nature that we can say he is two-natured.

Notice that not all Qua theories are vulnerable to this objection. For instance, a 1-Qua theory can accommodate Christ's two-naturedness by glossing it as something like:

- (9) Christ-qua-human has a human nature and Christ-qua-divine has a divine nature and these natures are not the same.⁶

This sentence expresses the core idea in (6), that Christ has two distinct natures, even if it does it in a somewhat roundabout way. But the 0-Qua theorist cannot say anything like (9) because for them the Qua modifier applies to *the whole sentence*. The account is simply unable to handle mixed sentences like (9).

There are two ways that the 0-Qua theorist might reply to this worry. This first is to argue that (6) is true unadorned. However, this response is blocked by the fact that, as discussed above, Beall and Henderson have already given a story of unadorned claims on which they are true in both stories. Consequently, they are committed to the claim that for the unadorned (6) to be true, the following must also both be true:

- (10) According to the divine story, Christ is two-natured.
- (11) According to the human story, Christ is two-natured.

But based on what the two stories are supposed to be, it seems like neither (10) nor (11) are true. The problem for Beall and Henderson remains: while it is true on the divine story that Christ has a divine nature, and it is true on the human story that he has a human nature, Christ's divine nature is not a part of the human story and his human nature does not appear in the divine story. It is therefore not true on either story that Christ has two natures. Of course, it is also not false on either story—for neither story explicitly denies (6). That Christ is two-natured is therefore compatible with both stories; however, we see no non-ad-hoc reason to add it to either.

Another possible reply to the problem presented by sentences like (6) is to add a third kind of adornment. Thus, Beall and Henderson might try to gloss the problem sentences as follows:

- (12) According to human and divine stories taken together, Christ is two-natured.

However, if they make this move then there is no non-ad-hoc way for them to avoid giving the same treatment to the paradoxical statements that motivated the view in the first place. That is, according to the divine and human stories taken together, "Christ is both mutable and immutable" is also true. So this response is not available

⁶ Here we are again following Pawl (2016) who outlines a number of solutions of this form tailored to various kinds of Qua theory (but not 0-Qua).

to Beall and Henderson on pain of the fundamental problem reappearing. In fact, this kind of solution is precisely what they are excluding by denying that the true story of Christ is a union of stories.

We have focused on (6) because in its simplicity it makes the problem transparent. However, we believe the issue raised in this section runs deeper than (6) alone. Fundamentally, Beall and Henderson will not be able to accommodate the truth of claims which are grounded in both of Christ's natures working in concert. This suggests that pulling apart the human and divine natures into two stories is, at a deep level, incompatible with the idea that Christ should be "acknowledged in two natures, unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably."⁷

2.3 The Upshot

We have shown that there are claims which mark clear points of disagreements between Conciliar Christians and others but which, on Beall and Henderson's account, either everyone or no-one can accept. In other words, these clear points of disagreement are, on their account, erased. We have only exhibited one example of each kind of claim, but we take it that other examples are available. For instance, it seems that any other claims involving both of Christ's natures are subject to the worry in 2.2, and that many or all of the central claims concerning Christ's divine powers are subject to that raised in Section 2.1. We think that these are substantial problems which indicate that Beall and Henderson's solution is deeply unsatisfying, and we suspect that Conciliar Christians will agree with this appraisal. We come at this question from the point of view of non-Christians, and while we are happy to find points of agreement with Conciliar Christians, it seems that neither of us should want the kind of agreement delivered to us by Beall and Henderson's proposal.⁸

⁷ From the Chalcedonian Creed (Tanner 1990).

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