

*Llull's arguments for the existence of God.
A reflection on the basis of the Llibre del gentil*

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The 'common' first book of the *Llibre del gentil i dels tres savis* is a remarkable opening to the whole work insofar as it exemplifies the common basis of the three monotheistic religions. It does not disclose the religious affiliation of the wise men. Instead, Llull shows that there is a consensus of their religions about the fundamental questions of whether God exists and whether there is an afterlife after death.

When the three wise men for the first time use the method of the trees which they learned from Lady *Entallegencia*, they do not do this as a 'brain teaser' but with the goal of convincing the gentile of the existence of God. They dialogue with him, not with each other, although they cannot meet him on a philosophical basis that would conceive of God as the Idea of the Good or the Unmoved Mover. The gentile simply has never heard of God. He does not deny God's existence. Thus, Llull's arguments are deliberately tailored to be fruitful on the basis of an openness to faith. He provides demonstrations *for* God's existence, *not against* atheism. His aim is not to refute that belief in God is irrational but to justify that faith in God makes human life more reasonable.

ARGUMENTS IN THE FIRST BOOK - A SELECTION

The first wise man undertakes to prove the existence of God pairing the following six divine attributes: (1) goodness-greatness, (2) greatness-eternity, (3) eternity-power, (4) power-wisdom, (5) wisdom-love, (6) love-perfection.¹ These combinations of attributes were presented in the prologue by Lady *En-*

1. Cf. Llull (2001: 1520).

tallegencia as flowers of the first tree.² If we leave Lull's allegorical way of speaking aside, he states that by purely rational reflection on goodness, greatness, eternity, power, wisdom, love and perfection he intends to demonstrate the existence of God as the apex and personification of being.

What kind of demonstrations are his arguments? Lull begins with God's goodness and greatness:

Sir, [...] you see that all the good which exists in plants, living things, and all other things of this world is limited and finite. Now, if God were naught, it would follow that no good would be in accord with infinite being, and that all existing good would be in accord with finite and limited being, and infinite being and non-being would be in accord with one another.³

Lull starts from everyday experience ("vos vets..."), he establishes a relation of correspondence ("se convengués") and points to a critical boundary, where the transition from the finite to the infinite takes place, to a border with the transcendental realm. As in figure A of the *Ars*, this first argument starts with "bonea" and pairs it with "granea", the second attribute from the *Ars*. Given the frame narrative of the *Llibre del gentil*, the wise man could have started with any flower of the first tree. The order follows the *Ars*. The combination of "bonea" and "granea" has led some researchers to speculate that Lull's first argument may be directly related to Anselm's argument of the *Proslogion*.⁴ There Anselm also sets out to prove that God is "id quo melius

2. Cf. Lull (2001: 9): "Lo primer arbre en lo qual veetz .xxi^a. fflor, aquell arbre significa Deu e ses vertutz increades essencials, les quals son escrites en aquelles fflors, segons que veets. Aquell arbre a dues condicions / enffre les altres. La una es que hom deu atribuir e conexer a Deu tota hora la major nobilitat en essencia e en vertuts e en obres. L'autra condició es que les fflors no sien contraries les unes a les altres, ni sien les unes meyns de les altres. Sens que hom no aja conexença d'estes dues condicions, / no pot hom aver conexença del arbre ni de ses vertuts ni de ses obres".

3. Lull (2001: 16): "Seyer – dix lo savi al gentil –, vos vets que tot lo be qui es en les plantes e en les coses vivents e en totes les altres coses del mon, es termenat e ffinít. On, si Deus res no era, seguir-s'ia que null be no-s covengués ab esser infinít, e que tot lo be qui es se covengués ab esser ffinít e termenat, e esser infinít e no esser se covenrien"; Bonner (1995: 119).

4. Cf. Judycha (1999: 327): "It is very characteristic that for Lull it is Bonitas which is the first in the order of the Dignities, which corresponds to the importance Anselm attached to this concept, following St. Augustine. Some scholars also think that the fact of Magnitudo be-

cogitari nequit”,⁵ thus according to tradition starting from goodness, not greatness. Whether Llull had any access to Anselm’s work cannot be established beyond doubt. Yet even if there was no direct connection, it is clear that both based themselves on the same Neoplatonic-Christian sources and thus were bound to reach comparable conclusions.

Llull’s second argument combines greatness and eternity: “everything that has a beginning must take its beginning from something which has neither beginning nor end, which thing is God of glory”.⁶ There can be no *regressus ad infinitum* in time “by which impossibility is proved God’s existence, which is eternal by His own power”.⁷ This consideration is supported by an additional cosmological argument: eternity is much better in harmony with infinite greatness than with a limited sky. Also a causal *regressus ad infinitum* is impossible:

If eternity were naught, then everything which exists would necessarily have a beginning, and if everything which exists had a beginning, it would follow that beginning was its own beginning. Yet, as you see, my good friend, [...] this is something to which reason will not consent.⁸

Something cannot at the same time and in the same respect owe its beginning to another and have it out of itself.

The other four demonstrations follow a similar pattern: Llull establishes in each case an argument from convenience.⁹

ing in the second place on Llull’s list of Dignities testifies to the latter being familiar with the Anselmian formula describing God as *id quo maius cogitari nequit*”.

5. Cf. Anselm (198: 9, I 108, 11-13; 14, I, 11, 8; 18, 114, 21-22).

6. Llull (2001: 16): “tot ço qui a comensament cové que prena comensament d’alcuna cosa qui no aja comensament ni ffi, la qual cosa es lo Deus de Gloria”; Bonner (1995: 120).

7. Llull (2001: 17): “per la qual inopibilitat es provat Deus esser, lo qual es eternal per son poder metex”; Bonner (1995: 121).

8. Llull (2001: 16): “Si eternitat no era nulla cosa, covenria que tot sso qui es agués comensament; e si tot so qui es avia comensament, seguir-s’ia que comensament ffos comensament a si metex. E assó, bells amic [...], vos vesets que raó no o consent”; Bonner (1995: 120).

9. Cf. below p. x.

IMPLICIT PREMISES OF LLULL'S DEMONSTRATIONS

Llull meticulously, almost pedantically elaborates every single argument for the existence of God to demonstrate that it does not contain any logical errors. Among the premises which form the basis of Llull's demonstrations of God are logical and ontological assumptions, which he does not always state explicitly.¹⁰

Regarding logic, Llull's God is subject to the principle of excluded contradiction. Moreover, as a matter of principle, no thing that is finite in quality can ever create anything infinite, and Llull cannot accept any *regressus ad infinitum*. This is also due to his ontological options, such as the conditionality of being.

Ontologically, Llull starts from the primacy of actual being over imagined being. This implies that *being is qualitatively superior to nonbeing*. "Ens et bonum convertuntur"¹¹ or, as Llull asserts, "[i]t is clear to the human understanding that good and greatness accord with being; for the greater the good, the more it accords with essence, or with virtue, or with both together".¹²

Secondly, due to the *conditionality of being* there are different degrees of perfection. The highest perfection of being is the condition for making being possible on all lower levels. Only because there is infinite goodness there can be a finite good, even if our knowledge of good remains linked to the experience of the finite good and has to infer the existence of an infinite good from there. In other words, to every property *x*, which exists only in a deficient form, i.e., which is not fully realized, there must be a perfect property *x* which is this perfection in itself, since the latter is the precondition for the imperfect property *x* to exist at all. The order of how things are caused is exactly the opposite of how they are discovered. These foundations of Llull's demonstrations are akin to Aquinas' *argumentum ex gradibus*. There also things with gradual, transcendental qualities, such as good and true, depend on a maximum of these qualities which exists at the highest degree of being.

10. Colomer (1963: 584) even assumes that "Lógica y Ontología coinciden".

11. This goes back to Dionysius (1990), ch. 5 and has been quoted among others by Bonaventura, I Sent. d.I a.1 q.2 (I 32a Quaracchi) and Aquinas, STh I^a q.5 a.4 ad 1 and I^a-IIae q.27 a.1 ad 3.

12. Llull (2001: 15): "qe be e granea se covenen ab esser; cor aytant con lo be es major, d'aytant se cové mills ab essencia o ab vertut o ensems"; Bonner (1995: 119).

Thirdly, there is cosmos, not chaos:¹³ there are mutually compatible and incompatible values, which Llull presupposes as a given and as making sense to human understanding. Responsible for this *well-orderedness of being* is a principle of similarity, namely that every imperfect form of existence has, to a lower degree, the same qualities as the perfect form of existence apart from its perfection. Thus, every imperfect being is extrinsically caused through another imperfect or perfect being and every being is oriented towards perfection. Here Llull uses a form of reasoning that goes back to Avicenna and was used by Aquinas in the *via quarta*. He reaches the border between the best possible finite (and thus not perfect) being and the perfect being as the 'condition of possibility' for the finite best possible being.

What kind of qualities can belong to both imperfect and perfect being? Obviously, for Llull the transcendentals undisputedly belong to this class of attributes. Their basis is formed by both the Platonic doctrine of ideas (of the true, one, beautiful, and good) and the Aristotelian theory of categories, for transcendentals¹⁴ are properties which can belong to different things in different categories, unlike the property of being red which occurs only in the category of quality. According to Llull, the divine attributes of being good, true, and one are reflected in the created being. Strictly speaking, as divine perfections they can only be in a perfect being, but they are mirrored in the *transcendentalia* attributed to every natural being.¹⁵ So far, Llull's approach coincides with that of Aquinas, Bonaventure, and other advocates of the *transcendentalia*.

Yet besides the good, the true, the one, Llull also incorporates the other divine attributes into this structure of argumentation. They too, in their contingent modes of realization, are attracted to an optimum to which they aspire and which they approximate more or less.¹⁶ For Llull it is decisive that

13. Cf. e.g. Llull (2001: 48): "Manifesta cosa es que lo mon es ordenat".

14. According to Pseudo-Thomas (1996: ch. 2) the *transcendentalia* are "ens, res, aliquid, unum, verum, bonum", thus properties "rebus omnibus cuiusque generis convenientes". In *De veritate* q.1 a.1 co Aquinas himself refers to the same six: res, ens, verum, bonum, aliquid, unum.

15. This idea corresponds to what Bonaventure describes as God's traces in the steps of the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*.

16. The possibility of an extension beyond the canon of the traditional *transcendentalia*, which was not yet that traditional at the time of Llull, seems to be contained in the definition

they are compossible properties. Their compossibility, not their transcendental nature makes them applicable to different things at the same time. This assumption is confirmed by the rules of the trees in the prologue of the *Llibre del gentil*, which make consistency and the absence of contradiction a condition for the application of the tree method.¹⁷

ON THE CLASSIFICATION OF LLULL'S ARGUMENTS

On this basis Llull develops his own strategies for dealing with 'uncertainties', if one wishes to translate somewhat freely the expression *res dubia* from Boethius' definition of what an *argumentum*, a formal-logical conclusion is.¹⁸

The *argumentum ex gradibus* clearly is the most popular method in Llull's work. The linguistic indicator for this demonstration strategy is "quant mes se cové" or "quan mes cové" ("all the more must one ..."). Llull aims his *argumenta ex gradibus* to transcend the categorial confinement of being. They are based on the assumption that, Neoplatonically speaking, the lower level of being partially participates in the higher being on the next higher level or, in Aristotelian terminology, strives to imitate the next higher state of being.¹⁹ Theoretically, the relation between imperfect and perfect forms of being would be conceivable on the basis of emanation, exemplarity or aspiration to perfection. Either way this allows Llull to conclude: if there is already a positive *x* at the lower level of being, how much more must this *x* then exist on the higher level of being? Llull also operates with the negative version: if there is no negative *x* at the lower level of being, how much less can this negative *x* be at the higher level of being?

of transcendentals by Claubert (1691: 283): "Quae [...] sic rebus communia sunt, ut omnes earum classes exsuperent, uno nomine appellantur transcendentia [...] quod in supremo rerum. Omnium apice concepta, omnia permeent et ambient, ad omnia rerum genera pertinent. Cuius modi sunt ens, unum, verum, bonum etc."

17. Thus, for example, the second rule of the first tree postulates that the flowers must not be in conflict with each other and that none of them should be larger or smaller than the others; cf. Llull (2001: 9).

18. Cf. Boethius (1891: I, col. 1173B): "Argumentum est ratio rei dubiae faciens fidem".

19. The Aristotelian Unmoved Mover moves as beloved; cf. Aristotle (1980: XII, 7, 1072b3-4).

This negative version can already be classified as a variant of the so-called *argumentum e contrario*.²⁰ This type of argument works by proving the falsity of the opposite or by concluding from considering the contrary. Llull uses the impossibility of thinking the opposite for proving the existence of God.²¹ Although he applies this argument in its classical form, he seems more familiar with the following type, which could be termed *argumentum e contrarietate*, if Boethius had not cautioned against this: the greater the difference between good and evil the better, for then the good agrees better with being and the evil with nonbeing.²² In Llull's own words, "if nonbeing and defect are in accord with being and with perfection in man and in the things of this world, how incomparably more fitting it would be for being and perfection to be in accord in something that had no nonbeing or defect".²³ The distinction between good and evil seems to Llull to be objective, universally valid and rationally obvious. For him the question is idle whether the good is good because God wants it or whether God wants the good because it is good. Due to the divine attributes, God could never want evil. The ordered internal structure of the individual being as well as of reality as a whole leads to the greatest possible contradiction between good and evil. The resulting binary oppositions make the so-called argument *ex convenientia* possible. It relies on the fact that being and goodness as well as nonbeing and evil are linked and that imperfect being strives for the greatest possible agreement with being,²⁴ since

20. Here, too, Boethius (1891: IV, col. 1214C) can help to clarify the terminology: "Sumuntur uero argumenta non ex contrarietate sed ex contrario, et non ex similitudine sed ex simili, ut appareat non ex relatione sumi argumentum sed ex adiunctis negotio, et ea esse adiuncta negotio, quae sunt ad ipsum de quo agitur negotium affecta".

21. Cf. Llull (2001: 19): "per la qual impossibilitat es donada demostrança al humá enteniment que Deus es, en lo qual no a no esser ni deffaliment, e en lo qual es esser e acabament".

22. According to the classification by Colomer (1963: 586), who identifies seven different types of arguments for the existence of God in Llull's work, this argument would still fall under "prueba por los grados de perfección", for "Llull parte del hecho de experiencia de que en los seres del universo el bien y la perfección se dan: a) en gradación de más y menos; b) con mezcla de mal e imperfección, c) finita y limitadamente [...]".

23. Llull (2001: 19): "si no esser e deffaliment se covenen ab esser e ab acabament en home e en les alters coses qui son en lo mon, quant mes, sens tota comparació, se cove que esser e acabament se colvenguen en alcuna coza on no sia no esser ni ffaliment"; Bonner (1995: 123).

24. Cf. e.g. Llull (2001: 15): "be e granea se covenen ab esser", "mal e poquea, qui son contraris a be e a granea, se covenen ab no esser" (my emphasis).

being is good. In its simple form, i.e., without involving the opposition between good and evil, it reads: if God exists, the positive x agrees more with being than if God does not exist.

Arguments from convenience are in most cases only probable and of limited force. Working like analogies, they take for granted the fact they deal with; yet instead of just clarifying it like analogies do, they try to establish the fact itself. When mistaken for arguments from necessity, they seem to represent reason as an instrument of theological rationalism, not as a tool for *searching* to understand faith. However, terms like *necesse est* or *es provat* in such arguments are just used to bring out the convenience more forcefully.

What method of demonstration does Lull choose for these different types of arguments? In the *Llibre del gentil* he does not yet clarify this, but later he explicitly distinguishes three methods. In every demonstration something demonstrating shows something demonstrated. If one can show the lesser by the higher, it is a *demonstratio per causas* or *propter quid* (e.g., when the sun is shining, it must be daytime); if, on the other hand, one can demonstrate the higher through the lesser, it is a *demonstratio per effectus* or *quia* (e.g., it is daytime; therefore, the sun must be shining). Already before Llull, these two methods were used as classical arguments. He notes this himself²⁵ and states that they are inadequate for the “investigatio distinctionis in diuinis personis”. In the case of God, the *demonstratio per causas* cannot be used at all, “because God does not have anything above God”. The *demonstratio per effectus* is labelled as ‘not preferable’. Thus, Llull develops the demonstration from equiparity or equivalence (*per aequiparantiam* or *aequiualentiam actuum diuinarum rationum*).

Yet what is it and how does it function? Contrary to the demonstrations *propter quid* and *quia* it starts from equal terms (*per aequalia*). Among its equal premises a change of order is always possible but will leave the truth-value of the demonstration unchanged. The means of demonstrating and what is to

25. Cf. Llull (1981: prol., ROL IX, 216): “Quoniam quidquid demonstratum fuit ab antiquis, fuit demonstratum propter quid aut propter quia. Et subiectum huius libri sit inuestigare distinctionem in diuinis personis per demonstrationem. Quae quidem demonstratio non potest fieri propter quid, ex ea *quia Deus non habet supra se aliquid*; et demonstratio quia *non est potissima*. Idcirco intendimus probare distinctionem in diuinis per aequiparantiam et aequiualentiam actuum diuinarum rationum” (translated passages highlighted). Cf. on this Jaulent (1995); Bonner (1995: 457475), and Lohr (1993: 742-743).

be demonstrated are on the same level and have the same actuality, as in the example Llull provides: God cannot sin because his power is equal to his will, and by his will he does not want to sin.²⁶ The concepts of transcendentals and compossibility paved the way to this method of demonstration. Esteve Jaulent believes “that it permeates Llull’s entire work, especially since it forms the basis of all demonstrations of convenience”.²⁷ In Llull’s eyes, this method is the most conclusive, for while the basic principles of the two Aristotelian forms of demonstration are the universal concepts of knowing from causes in the first and from effects in the second case, Llull’s *demonstratio per aequiparantiam* is based on arguments of congruence which are constitutive principles of reality. Due to its structure, however, there prevails a certain tautological character.

CONCLUSION

For Llull, there are good reasons to call the belief in God rational. While rendering the belief in God’s existence a rationally justifiable position, the demonstrations of God’s existence also contribute decisively to clarifying what to think of God. For instance, God is characterized by having certain attributes of his own accord (“per se metex”). However, there is also the danger that God will become part of the pyramid of reality and thus a dispensable hypothesis or a mere stopgap. “When conceived as the ultimate reason or the highest being, functions are assigned to God, a procedure that thwarts its own intentions. For a functionally conceived God cannot remain the absolute and ultimate cause in all areas and in all respects.”²⁸ Nevertheless, Llull’s arguments for God elucidate those central questions to which God may possibly be an answer.

26. Cf. Llull (1722: prol., MOG III, 93): “Tres sunt species demonstrationis, quarum prima est de aequiparantia, hoc modo videlicet, quando sit demonstratio per aequalia, sicut demonstrare Deum non posse peccare, eo quia ejus potestas est una eadem essentia cum sua voluntate, quae nullo modo vult peccare, et ipsa voluntas est una eadem essentia cum justitia, quae adversatur penitus peccato cum injuria concordanti; et cum omnes divinae dignitates sint aequales in essentia et natura, ideo manifeste potest fieri demonstratio per aequiparantiam; et hoc idem sequitur in virtutibus, proprietatibus et entitatibus creaturarum”.

27. Jaulent (1998: 22, note 33).

28. Vorgrimler (1993: 28).

Given the huge number of Llull's demonstrations, the legitimate question arises: what does Llull prove by them? The adequacy of language and being, which makes Anselm search for the *unum argumentum*, causes Llull to come up with *quam plurima argumenta* in order to do justice to the various attributes of God. In this regard Llull's five trees rather correspond to Aquinas' *quinque viae* than Anselm's ontological argument. Llull's immense quantity of arguments has further functions: it seeks to provide the best possible demonstration of God and to show that there can be no logical alternatives to reckoning with God's existence. It also illustrates the deficiency of human reason and of all logic in the face of God's incomprehensibility. The spiral circularity of the method demonstrates how small the respective progress of knowledge is. Llull takes his refuge to a perspectivity, to as many different perspectives as possible, in order to illuminate God as the object of his thinking from as many sides as possible.

Yet with God never all shadows will disappear. Since Llull is quite aware of this, he keeps insisting on it in his *Llibre del gentil*: the transcendence of God cannot be grasped by human intellectual efforts. Nevertheless, these efforts bring about a robust progress which is not to be underestimated, namely that a rationally justified belief in God can help the various religions converge in a common understanding of God. A doctrine of God worked out by means of 'natural reason' forms the common foundation for the different faiths of the representatives of the three monotheistic religions. The three wise men's statements about God in the *Llibre del gentil* are based on a common 'substructure', namely a chain of demonstrations of the existence of God, which with the help of reason is shared by all three religions.

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