

RAMON LLULL ON THE THEORETICAL UNIFICATION OF FALLACIES

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1. Introduction

Despite the opinion of those who, like Augustus de Morgan, question the viability of a satisfactory theory of fallacies,¹ it has been attested that medieval thinkers demonstrated a great interest in determining not only the nature of fallacies but also the conditions which assure their theoretical unification. In fact, at least two approaches adopted in the Middle Ages advocate a unified theory of fallacies. While the Aristotelian approach argues that the fallacy of *ignorantia elenchi* would act as a unifying principle for other fallacies, the Lullian approach differs in general terms as it claims that all fallacies would be assimilated by what he calls the Fallacy of Contradiction.

2. The Medieval Classification of Fallacies

Throughout the twelfth century the recovery and the dissemination of the Latin translation of *On Sophistical Refutations* prompted medieval thinkers to affirm that all fallacies – dependent or not on language – would ultimately be reduced to the fallacy of *ignorantia elenchi*.

¹ In addition to the traditional opinions of De Morgan and Joseph, who believed it to be impossible to elaborate a satisfactory classification of fallacies: Cf. A. DE MORGAN, *Formal Logic: or The Calculus of Inference, Necessary and Probable*, London, 1847, p. 237; H. W. B. JOSEPH, *Introduction to Logic*, 2. ed. Oxford, 1906, p. 569. The recent works of Finocchiaro and Massey are particularly influential. The conclusions of these works assure us that all efforts to determine a fallacy theory would show themselves to be unjustifiable upon final analysis: Cf. M. A. FINOCCHIARO, "Fallacies and Evaluation of Reasoning", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 18 (1981), pp. 13-22; G. J. MASSEY, "The Fallacy Behind Fallacies", *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 6 (1981), pp. 489-500.

Originally associated with a specific type of dialogue whose basic objective is the refutation of the opponents, in the Middle Ages the occurrence of *ignorantia elenchi* was still subject to the violation of conditions required for a genuine refutation.² According to some of the most renowned logicians of that time, a refutation would be nothing but a syllogism whose contradictory thesis adopted by the respondent would logically follow from their own affirmations.³ Roger Bacon defends this idea when he says that

a refutation is a syllogism with a conclusion contradicting [some other propositional]. For example, if a respondent says that Socrates is not something white and an opponent constructs a syllogism such as "Every man is something white, Socrates is a man; therefore Socrates is something white", this is a syllogism with a conclusion that contradicts that previously given by the respondent, and it is a refutation. Thus the nature of a syllogism and the nature of a contradiction are required for the nature of a refutation.⁴

² This was, for example, the thought defended at the end of the XIII century by the author of *Dialectica montacensis* who, apparently supported by passage 167a23-29 of *On Sophistical Refutations*, affirmed that "fallacia autem secundum ignorantiam elenchi est deceptio causam habens a parte nostri coequo impotentes sumus iudicare quid elenchus, quid non-elenchus. A parte vero motivi extra habet pro causa apparente pete-elenchitatem, non-elenchitatem autem pro causa falsitatis. Cum enim male particule sive differentie exigantur ad elenchum, aliquis habens omnes preter unam non advertit electum illius que sibi deest propter multitudinem aliarum quas habet. Et ita credit esse elenchus et non est". Anonymous, *Dialectica montacensis*, in *Logica modernorum: A Contribution to the History of Early Terminusist Logic*, ed. I. M. DE RUIK, v. II, 2, Assen, 1962-7, p. 603.

³ There were, however, those who similarly to the author of the interesting work *De fallaciis* unfolded such definitions, warned that the refutations could involve not only one but two syllogisms (Pseudo-Thomas Aquinas, *De fallaciis*, in *Opera omnia*, ed. Leonina, v. XLIII, 101-118, Roma, 1976, p. 111: "Est autem elenchus syllogismus contradictorius: qui quandoque est unus syllogismus, quandoque duo. Unus quidem, quando syllogismus concludit contradictoriam alicuius propositionis prius date; sicut si dicitur aliquod animal esse incorruptibile, et procedatur sic: Omne compositum ex contrariis est corruptibile, omne animal est huiusmodi. Ergo omne animal est corruptibile; hec conclusio contradictoria est propositionis prius date. Duo autem syllogismi constituunt elenchum quando ex duobus syllogismis contradictoria concluduntur, sicut si preficito syllogismo componatur alius talis syllogismus: Nullum beatum est corruptibile, aliquod animal est beatum, ergo aliquod animal non est corruptibile".

⁴ Roger Bacon, "Summulae dialectices", *AMPLUM*, 53 (1986), pp. 139-289 and 51 (1987), p. 261 "[...] elenchus est syllogismus cum contradictione

In principle, there would be two categories of error that would typify the generic form of *ignorantia elenchi*. The error that some call "syllogistic" is based on the hypothesis that the contradiction of the argument adopted by the respondent would be a logical consequence of their respective premises, when in reality it is not. Whereas the so-called error of "contradiction" would occur when the conclusion of the apparent refutation would appear to be, when in fact it is not, the contrary of the respondent's thesis. To the majority of medieval thinkers the contradictions that compose genuine refutations would depend on conditions referred to by them as "with respect to the same" (*secundum idem*), "related to the same" (*ad idem*), "in a similar manner" (*similiter*) and "at the same time" (*in eodem tempore*). (Consequently, the omission or transgression of any one of these conditions would make contradictions apparent, thus prompting the emergence of four specific subtypes of *ignorantia elenchi*.⁵

Since the beginning of the twelfth century both syllogistic and contradiction errors have also been used as basis for the classification of fallacies. Through the influence of Aristotle, the majority of logicians of that time recognised that the deficiencies which determine fallacies that depend on language, or *in dictione*, were caused by contradiction errors, whereas deficiencies related to fallacies that do not depend on language, or *extra dictionem*, originated from syllogistic errors. An example of this is what Peter of Spain states regarding this matter:

Aristotle determines which fallacies come down to contradiction and which come down to syllogism, affirming: "those that depend on language are reduced to contradiction — a distinctive mark of a refutation — which is apparent, and the remainder are reduced according to the definition of syllogism."⁶

conclusionis, ut, si respondens dicit, quod Sor non est album, et opponens faciat talem syllogismum 'Omnis homo est album, Sor est homo; ergo Sor est album', hic est syllogismus cum contradictione conclusionis prius data a respondente, et est elenchus: et ideo ad naturam elenchi exigitur natura syllogismi et natura contradictionis".

⁵ See, for example, Lambert of Auxerre, *Logica: Summa Lamberti*, ed. F. ALESSIO, Florence, 1971, p. 190: "potest considerari ignorantia elenchi secundum quod est omisio alicuius quatuor conditionum que sunt complexive elenchi vel appropriate elencho in quantum elenchus est, que sunt: secundum idem, ad idem, similiter, et in eodem tempore".

⁶ Peter of Spain, *Tractatus called afferentaris Summulae Logicales*, ed. I. M. DE RUIK, Assen, 1972, p. 181: "determinat Aristoteles qui loci sophistici reducuntur

This subsequently suggests to medieval thinkers that the two errors committed by Aristotelian fallacies, syllogism and contradiction, would be the same that would distinguish the fallacy of *ignorantia elenchi*. They are thus led to admit that the fallacies of both groups were nothing but examples of the generic form of *ignorantia elenchi*. Concerning this topic, the author of the opus-cule *De fallaciis* affirms that

all of that which is against the definition of syllogism and contradiction is against the definition of refutation, as syllogism and contradiction form the nature of refutation. Consequently, given that in every fallacy the error occurs due to something which is omitted from the definition of syllogism or contradiction, the result is that every fallacy is reduced to ignorance of refutation as a general principle.⁷

It is therefore evident that there are two forms of *ignorantia elenchi*. Besides the specific form that unfolds into four subtypes due to the transgression of the conditions that ensure the integrity of a contradiction, there is also a generic form that assimilates all other fallacies precisely because it omits the elements that define refutation.⁸

3. The Unitive Character of Llull's Fallacy of Contradiction

In October 1308, Llull publishes the *Liber de nouis fallaciis*, in which he defends the theoretical unification of fallacies through

a parte contradictionis et qui a parte sillogismi, dicens: 'ergo qui sunt secundum dictionem, reducuntur quoniam est apprensus contradictio, quod erat proprium elenchi; alii autem reducuntur secundum sillogismi definitionem'.

⁷ Pseudo-Thomas Aquinas, *op. cit.*, p. 114: "Quia igitur de ratione elenchi est sillogismus et contradictio, quicquid est contra definitionem sillogismi et contradictionis, est contra definitionem elenchi. Et cum in qualibet fallacia defectus accidat per hoc quod aliquid omittitur de definitione sillogismi et contradictionis, ideo omnis fallacia reducitur ad ignorantiam elenchi sicut ad aliquid generale".

⁸ Peter of Spain, *op. cit.*, p. 180: "Fieri quidem solet duplex distinctio ignorantie elenchi, secundum quod est una specialis de tredecim fallaciis, et secundum quod est generalis ad quam omnes tredecim fallacie reducuntur. Uno enim modo distinguitur sic quod ignorantia elenchi dicitur specialis secundum quod ignorantia elenchi causatur ignorantia harum differentiarum, scilicet *ad idem*, et *secundum idem* et *similiter* et in *eodem tempore*; et sic ignorantia elenchi est contra formam completivam elenchi, quia iste differentie sunt complete contradictionis et sic elenchi cum contradictio sit completa elenchi. Secundum autem quod ignorantia elenchi causatur communiter ab ignorantia omnium differentiarum in definitione elenchi positarum, ita est generalis, et sic ad ipsam omnes fallacie reducuntur".

an alternative method capable of assuring that all Aristotelian fallacies be assimilated by his Fallacy of Contradiction. Before presenting this method he performs a detailed analysis of the new fallacy.

In general terms, the arguments affected by the definite form of the Fallacy of Contradiction are formally made up of an inconsistent pair of categorical premises that consist of a universal negative proposition and a particular affirmative proposition. Both, in turn, act as basis for the conclusion that is characterised as a particular proposition whose predicate is simultaneously affirmed and denied of its subject. Based on this description, one can assume that Llull's new fallacy has the form

No *S* is *P*.

Some *S* is *P*.

Therefore, some *S* is and is not *P*.

In the Middle Ages, most thinkers embraced two causes for any fallacy.⁹ According to them, the cause of appearance (*causa apparentie*) of a fallacy is what gives it the ability to simulate being that which, in effect, it is not. Whereas the cause of non-existence (*causa non existentie*) of a fallacy is that through which an argument where the fallacy emerges is not what it appears to be. By using this differentiation, Llull establishes in the extract below not only the motivating principle or cause of the appearance of the Fallacy of Contradiction, but also the cause of its non-existence or principle of its deficiency:

As the intellect has two acts, namely, believing and understanding, and in generating knowledge — so that it is finally successive — rather believes than understands, so fallacies have their origin

⁹ See, for example, Peter of Spain, *op. cit.*, p. 98 "Quia fallacia dicitur uno modo deceptio causata in nobis, alio autem modo fallacia dicitur causa sive principium illius deceptionis. Et isto secundo modo intendimus hic de fallaciis. Unde sciendum est quod in qualibet fallacia isto secundo modo sumpta duplex est principium sive duplex causa, scilicet principium motivum sive causa movens sive causa apparentie et per hoc omnia idem principium nominatur; aliud autem principium sive alia causa est principium delectus sive causa non existentie, quod idem est, sive causa falsitatis. Principium autem motivum sive causa apparentie in qualibet fallacia est quod movet ad credendum quod non est. Principium vero delectus sive causa falsitatis est quod facit creditum esse falsum".

and, consequently, opinions in the first act. Thus, is revealed in the major proposition the apparent cause of its paralogism and in the minor the cause of its deficiency.¹⁰

Despite Lull's affirmation that the cause of appearance of the fallacy lies in the major premise and the cause of its non-existence is due to the minor premise, there is no indication in this passage about the nature of such causes. In order for the nature of these causes to be determined, one needs to review a passage from the *Liber de refugio intellectus*, where Lull warns us that in the arguments affected by the Fallacy of Contradiction "the major premise is always ambiguous, as in one sense it is considered false and in another it is considered true, whereas the minor premise is true in an absolute sense."¹¹

In fact, such observations make it clear, on the one hand, that by associating the cause of the appearance of the Fallacy of Contradiction with its major premise Lull is actually identifying it with the ambiguity that such a proposition raises. On the other hand, by linking the cause of its appearance to the minor premise, he is referring, in the final analysis, to the inconsistency created by the opposition between the proposition and one of the meanings of the major premise.

Another aspect which cannot be overlooked regarding the Fallacy of Contradiction is explained by Lull in an excerpt from the *Logica nova* which states that "it is so named because it seems to involve a contradiction, although it does not".¹² From this asser-

¹⁰ Ramon Llull, *Liber de nouis fallaciis*, ed. Gn. Lohr, Turnhout, 1983 (*ROL*, 11), pp. 12-13: "Quia intellectus habet duos actus, scilicet credere et intelligere, et in generando scientiam ante credit, quam intelligit, ut sit finaliter successivus, igitur in primo actu fallaciae habent ortum, et per consequens opiniones. Et sic in maiori propositione ipsius paralogismi causa apparentiae apparuit; et causa defectus ipsius apparentiae in minori, concludendo realiter veritatem".

¹¹ Ramon Llull, *Liber de refugio intellectus*, ed. Gn. Lohr, Turnhout, 1983 (*ROL*, 11), p. 232 "maior propositio semper est duplex: et quoad unum sensum falsa, sed quoad alium dicitur esse vera. Sed minor propositio simpliciter dicitur esse vera".

¹² Ramon Llull, *Logica nova*, ed. W. FÉRRER, Turnhout, 1998, (*ROL*, 23), p. 128: "Dicitur autem haec fallacia contradictionis, quia videtur concludere contradictionem, sed non concludit". Cf. also Ramon Llull, *Liber de nouis fallaciis*, *op. cit.*, p. 12: "Quam fallaciam 'apparentem contradictionem'

tion one can immediately conclude that there are two phases that distinguish such a fallacy. Firstly, it simulates the derivation of a contradiction from an inconsistent pair of premises. Subsequently, the identification and suppression of the ambiguity responsible for the inconsistency prevents a contradiction from occurring as a result of inconsistent premises.

Although the considerations mentioned so far reveal that many characteristics of the new fallacy coincide with the basic properties of *ignorantia elenchi*, at least one crucial difference can be identified between them. During the thirteenth century when many influential thinkers such as William of Sherwood defended the idea that *ignorantia elenchi* would affect any argument that "seemed to involve a contradiction, but did not actually do so",¹³ without exception, they were indeed declaring that such an argument would appear to be a genuine refutation.¹⁴ However, used in an entirely differentiated way by Lull, this affirmation was employed to point out that the Fallacy of Contradiction would consist of the above-mentioned phases, as well as to distinguish it from the Aristotelian fallacies. According to him, as it would appear to involve a contradiction, without actually doing so, his fallacy would make a true conclusion seem false, whereas the other fallacies would make a false conclusion seem true.¹⁵

apellamus, eo quia videtur contradicere, et nihil realiter contradicit"; Ramon Llull, *Liber de refugio intellectus*, *op. cit.*, p. 232: "Fallacia ista videtur concludere contradicitorie; et tamen non concludit".

¹³ William of Sherwood, "Introductiones in logicam" ed. Gn. Lohr *et al.*, *Tractatio*, 39 (1983), p. 286: "In his quattuor paralogismis est ignorantia elenchi, quia videtur concludi contradictio et non concluditur".

¹⁴ See, for example, Albert the Great, *Liber Elenchorum* III, 9, in *Opera omnia*, ed. A. Borgesen, v. II, Paris, 1890; Simon of Faversham, *Quaestiones novae super libro Elenchorum*, ed. S. Brasesen *et al.*, Toronto, 1984, q. 27; and John Duns Scotus, *Quaestiones super librum Elenchorum Aristotelis* q. 55, in *Opera philosophica*, ed. G. Fitzjones *et al.*, v. II, 255-566, New York, 2004.

¹⁵ Ramon Llull, *Liber de nouis fallaciis*, *op. cit.*, p. 12: "Quam fallaciam 'apparentem contradictionem' appellamus, eo quia videtur contradicere, et nihil realiter contradicit. Et per hoc ab aliis antiquis fallaciis est diversa, quia antiquae verum significant, et verum tamen non concludunt"; Ramon Llull, *De fallaciis, quas non credunt facere aliquid, qui credunt esse philosophantes, contra parvissimum actum Dei verissimum et perfectissimum*, ed. H. REDDINGEN, Turnhout, 1967 (*ROL*, 6), p. 485: "aliae fallaciae significant, quod hoc, quod est falsum, sit verum, et ista fallacia significat, quod hoc, quod est verum, sit

Furthermore, it is worth noting that resorting to a strategy in order to resolve ambiguities, so as to prevent contradictions from being derived from inconsistent propositions, would suggest – corroborated by a specific extract from *De fallaciis* where the modal reading of the premises of the Fallacy of Contradiction is proposed – that Llull would have adopted a non-adjunctive posture in relation to the occurrence of inconsistencies. He would thus have interpreted such premises as “it is possible that *p*” and “it is possible that not-*p*”, therefore avoiding the emergence of a contradiction from an inconsistency since “possible-*p* and possible not-*p*” does not follow from “possible-*p*, possible not-*p*”.¹⁶

After determining the distinctive features of the new fallacy, Llull strives to show that the Aristotelian fallacies would be assimilated by it. The following passage, for example, demonstrates Llull’s assessment of the Aristotelian fallacy of equivocation:

Every dog is able to bark. A celestial constellation is a dog; thus, a celestial constellation is able to bark. No dog is able to bark. But some dog is able to bark; thus, some dog is and is not able to bark. The old major and the new major are contraries. In this way, the old conclusion is absolutely false, as it is said of the same thing, but the new conclusion is absolutely true as it is said of different things. Through the new fallacy, we can thus observe the error of the old fallacy.¹⁷

falsum”; and p. 488: “et quod sint vere fallaciae, patet in hoc, quia sophista requirit habere species supra dictas oppositas, ut puta quod hoc, quod est verum, videatur esse falsum, et quod est falsum, videatur esse verum”.

¹⁶ Ramon Llull, *De fallaciis, quas non credunt facere aliqui* [...], *op. cit.*, p. 485: “Fallacia Raimundi est ista, quae est de contradictione; quae quidem fallacia est separata a modo aliarum fallaciarum, quia medium intrat conclusionem; et aliae fallaciae significant, quod hoc, quod est falsum, sit verum, et ista fallacia significat, quod hoc, quod est verum, sit falsum; et maior proposito istius fallaciae semper est duplex, causans distinctionem, et hoc sic: (1) Nullus lapis est visibilis; quidam lapis est visibilis; ergo quidam lapis est visibilis et non visibilis. Quaero: Quae sunt causae istius fallaciae? Et respondendum est, quod possibile et impossibile; quoniam possibile ponit, quod lapis sit visibilis per accidens; impossibile vero ponit, quod non sit visibilis per se, cum non sit substantia sensata”.

¹⁷ Ramon Llull, *Liber de novis fallaciis, op. cit.*, p. 48: “Primo intendimus dare exemplum de fallacia aequivocationis per unum modum, et postea ad necessariam dictam fallaciam applicare. Et sicut declarabitur primus modus, sic possunt declarari alii modi per ipsam fallaciam generalem. Et talem processum intendimus tenere in aliis fallaciis. Omnis canis est latrabilis.

Convinced that both causes of the Fallacy of Contradiction can be used as fallacy-unifying principles, Llull examines each of the thirteen Aristotelian fallacies and concludes that they all contain ambiguities that cause inconsistencies. Basing himself on these findings, he utilises these ambiguities to develop a pair of inconsistent propositions that would act as premises for the Fallacy of Contradiction. Such a procedure, according to Llull, would reduce the Aristotelian fallacies to the new fallacy, thus assuring its unification.¹⁸

ABSTRACT

Ramon Llull on the Theoretical Unification of Fallacies

In the third distinction of the *Liber de novis fallaciis*, Ramon Llull falls back upon his Fallacy of Contradiction to create a procedure

Caeleste sidus est canis; ergo caeleste sidus est latrabilis. Nullus canis est latrabilis. Sed quidam canis est latrabilis; ergo quidam canis est latrabilis et non latrabilis. Maior antiqua et maior noua sunt contrariae. Et sic conclusio noua antiqua est simpliciter falsa, quia dicitur de eodem; sed conclusio noua est simpliciter vera, quia dicitur de diuersis. Declaratur ergo per fallaciam nouam de fallacia antiqua, in quo peccat. The reduction of the rest of the Aristotelian fallacies can be found *ibid.*, pp. 48-52.

¹⁸ Probably motivated by the thesis that language is inherently imperfect, Llull thus radicalizes the reduction, on the basis of the Fallacy of contradiction, to such an extent that even arguments which share one of the valid syllogistic forms, as they involve some type of ambiguity, should be assimilated by the fallacy in question (Ramon Llull, *Liber de novis fallaciis, op. cit.*, p. 12: “Quapropter antiquae ad istam fallaciam reducuntur, et sic de syllogismis omnibus”). See, for example, how Llull proceeds in the reduction of a syllogism in Barbara: “Pars isla erit de quibusdam syllogismis, deductis per decem et nouem modos syllogismorum trium figurarum, de quibus videtur, quod sint veri, et simpliciter non sunt, ut cum uicissima fallacia apparebit, ad quam applicabimus antedictos. Et primo de primo sic. Omne animal est substantia. Omnis homo est animal; ergo omnis homo est substantia. Nullum animal est substantia. Quoddam animal est substantia; ergo quoddam animal est substantia et non est substantia. Modo declarando ultimum syllogismum, declarabitur, quod primus est sophisticatus; et istum modum declarationis intendimus in aliis conseruare. Maior est duplex, quoniam quod est inferius, non est, quod est superius, sicut animal, quod est inferius respectu substantiae, quae est superius; et sic de homine respectu animalis. Minor simpliciter est uera, quoniam ponendo secundum sensum maioris, prius primum; eo quia hoc animal est haec substantia. Patet ergo, per quem modum cum uicissima fallacia ostenditur, quod primus syllogismus non est simpliciter uerus” (*ibid.*, p. 52). Regarding the reduction of other valid syllogisms see *ibid.*, pp. 53-56.

able to ensure that the other fallacies can be assimilated by it, thus promoting the theoretical unification of fallacies. At first, the Fallacy of Contradiction affects those arguments that contain some kind of ambiguity and share the form “No S is P and some S is P ; therefore some S is P and is not P ”. According to Lull, such arguments would appear to be invalid because they merely simulate the derivation of a contradiction from an inconsistent pair of premises, although shown to be valid in the light of the identification and removal of the ambiguity responsible for the apparent contradiction. Convinced that, once adopted as criteria for identifying fallacious arguments, the notions of inconsistency and ambiguity could act as principles of unification and systematisation of the fallacies, Lull endeavors to show that all Aristotelian fallacies bring about some inconsistency generated by several types of ambiguity. Overall, he examines each one of the thirteen Aristotelian fallacies and gets through the analysis of their initial premise a pair of inconsistent propositions, which will act as premises of a new argument affected by the Fallacy of Contradiction. Benefiting from the paraconsistent character of that fallacy, Lull can – once he has discarded the risk of trivialisation – make use of such inconsistency to detect the presence of some ambiguity in the Aristotelian fallacy, which would guarantee – according to him – its unrestricted reduction to the Fallacy of Contradiction.

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2. CONTEMPLATION