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WITHOUT QUALIFICATION:
AN INQUIRY INTO THE SECUNDUM QUID

Abstract. In this paper I will consider several interpretations of the fallacy of *secundum quid* as it is given by Aristotle in the *Sophistical Refutations* and argue that they do not work, one reason for which is that they all imply that the fallacy depends on language and thus fail to explain why Aristotle lists this fallacy among the fallacies not depending on language (*extra dictione*), amounting often to a claim that Aristotle miscategorises this fallacy. I will argue for a reading that preserves Aristotle's categorization by a quite different account of how qualifications function.

Keywords: fallacies; language; secundum quid; hasty generalization; the principle of non-contradiction

1. The Fallacy of Secundum Quid

Pickard-Cambridge translates Aristotle's (SR, §5) musings on this fallacy as follows:

Those that depend on whether an expression is used absolutely or in a certain respect and not strictly, occur whenever an expression used in a particular sense is taken as though it were used absolutely, e.g. in the argument 'If what is not is the object of an opinion, then what is not is: for it is not the same thing 'to be x' and 'to be' absolutely. Or again, 'What is, is not, if it is not a particular kind of being, e.g. if it is not a man.' For it is not the same thing 'not to be x' and 'not to be' at all: it looks as if it were, because of the closeness of the expression, i.e. because 'to be x' is but little different from 'to be', and 'not to be x' from 'not to be'. Likewise also with any argument that turns upon the point whether an expression is used in a certain respect or used absolutely. Thus e.g. 'Suppose an Indian to be black all over, but white in respect of his teeth; then he is both white and not white.' Or if both characters belong in a particular respect, then, they say, 'contrary attributes belong at the same time'. This kind of thing is in some cases easily seen by any one, e.g. suppose a man were to secure the statement that the Ethiopian is black, and were then

> to ask whether he is white in respect of his teeth; and then, if he be white in that respect, were to suppose at the conclusion of his questions that therefore he had proved dialectically that he was both white and not white.

Aristotle is talking here about expressions being used "in a certain respect" and "with a particular sense." Then he explains his first two examples by saying that they involve a confusion between "to be" and "to be x" in the first example and "not to be" and "not to be x" in the second "because of the closeness of the expression."

These certainly look like linguistic points and I would not want to deny that a linguistic confusion is the cause of the fallacy or that such a confusion explains why the fallacious argument could be mistaken for a good argument. However, the claim that it *is* a fallacy depending on language and not just *caused* by linguistic confusion amounts to the claim that it is some syntactic or perhaps semantic item of the expression – the subject, the predicate, or the copula – that is qualified by the "respect" or "sense," ignoring which qualification constitutes committing the fallacy. I will go through these in turn, give reasons for rejecting them, and then provide an alternative analysis of what Aristotle means by the 'use' of an expression. My basic claim is that Aristotle has a fairly austere idea of the meaning of an expression where it does not change from one use to another; what does change are factors that are, although indicated linguistically, extra-semantic, and these affect how the expression is mapped onto a truth-value.

a. Qualifying the Subject

The subject-qualifying reading takes the fallacy as involved with generalization. Because *most* of the Indian is black, it does not follow that *all* of the Indian is black, and it is only the latter that would be shown to be false by the whiteness of the Indian's teeth. The would-be refuter has taken a statement uttered as one susceptible to exceptions as if it were absolute.

This is currently probably the most popular analysis and is defended by writers as diverse as Walton (1999 & 2005), Tindale (2007) and van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1987). It basically identifies the fallacy of *secundum quid* with the fallacy known as *hasty generalization*. Certainly, hasty generalizations are fallacious. But is it the fallacy of hasty generalization that Aristotle is describing here?

The popularity of this interpretation is surprising because the textual evidence supporting this as an interpretation of Aristotle's fallacy rather than a description of a genuine but quite different fallacy is actually pretty

thin. In its favour, Aristotle does distinguish between different kinds of generalization in the *Posterior Analytics* where statements preceded by "most" are described as *qualified* and those preceded by "all" are described as *unqualified*. Thus, it may be natural to think that a fallacy Aristotle describes as "ignoring qualifications" is ignoring this distinction, making an unqualified generalization when only a qualified generalization is permissible. Against this interpretation, however, I would make five points.

Firstly, it is not clear that there are any fallacies of generalization in Aristotle; Aristotle does talk, of course, about induction, but there are no inductive arguments as such. Secondly, even if there were, "The Indian is black" does not seem to me like any kind of general statement, and it is difficult to see what could bring a person to say that it is were they not already in the thrall of a theory that demands it. Thirdly, even if the statement could be read as such a generalization, saying "This part of the Indian is black and this part of the Indian is black ..." and so on, then this statement would not express a proposition in Aristotle's sense of a single attribute copulated with a single thing, and it appears that it should. Fourthly and most importantly, it is not clear that "The Indian is black" taken in its *unqualified* sense is actually false, for in asking one to suppose an Indian to be black all over but white in respect of his teeth Aristotle does not seem to take this supposition to be in any way incoherent; there is no inconsistency in saying that the Indian is white in a certain respect but black absolutely. The textual evidence for this is in *Metaphysics* IV (§6) where he writes that "it is ... impossible that contraries should belong to a subject at the same time, unless both belong to it in particular relations, or one in a particular relation and one *without qualification*" [my italics]. This last clause is important, because the identification of *secundum quid* with hasty generalization presumed that it was false to make an unqualified statement that the Indian is black if his teeth are white, yet here we see Aristotle explicitly saying that it is *not* impossible for being-black to belong to the Indian without qualification and its contrary being-white to also belong to the Indian in a particular relation. Fifthly, it is not clear how this interpretation is meant to apply to Aristotle's first example where he distinguishes between being an object of opinion and being *simpliciter*. Aristotle here seems to be averring to the fact that we can have opinions about objects that do not exist and states of affairs that do not obtain, and that we should not be forced to say that they do exist *simpliciter* (perhaps in some kind of Platonic realm of Forms) because they exist as objects of opinion, that they should be said "to be" because they can be said "to be x"; to say this is to commit the fallacy (Knuuttilla and Hintikka,

1986). It is even harder to find any kind of generalization involved here than in the other examples.

For these reasons I reject the subject-qualifying reading.

b. Qualifying the Predicate

The predicate-qualifying reading builds the qualification into the predicate. In other words, "The Indian is white with respect to his teeth" is not to be read as "Part of the Indian (namely his teeth) is white" as it would be in the subject-qualifying reading, but as "The Indian is white-with-respect-to-his-teeth" where presumably this predicate denotes a way of being white rather than an object that is white. Then, trivially, the contrary is "The Indian is not-white-with-respect-to-his-teeth" and either of these contraries is logically consistent with the unqualified statement "The Indian is black." Kirwan (1979) gives this kind of analysis.

I reject the predicate-qualifying reading for the following reasons. Firstly, it seems just plainly odd to think of being white-with-respect-to-my-teeth as a way of being white. This does not describe a kind or intensity of whiteness – it is not being said that the whiteness is the whiteness as of teeth, which could apply equally to things that are not teeth. Secondly, this would allow predicates to be multiplied indefinitely. Thirdly, I see no textual evidence that this is a possible reading of Aristotle.

c. Qualifying the Copula

The copula-qualifying reading would say that "The Indian is white with respect to his teeth" should be read as "The Indian is, with respect to his teeth, white." This is an unusual reading that I am not sure is actually defended. Although Aristotle says that the arguer in the first two examples might confuse "to be" and "to be x", yet he does not claim that the arguer equivocates between them. Perhaps this is because the copula "to be" is syncategorematic and as such does not have a meaning at all, making it nonsensical to speak of two of its occurrences being similar in appearance but disparate in meaning, as we must if we are to claim an equivocation or ambiguity to be responsible. Similarly with "to be, with respect to y, x" and "to be, with respect to z, x". Although neither of these are syncategorematic, if Aristotle had claimed some kind of equivocation, it seems to me that he would simply have classed this case along with the fallacy of ambiguity or perhaps of form of expression, and would be saddled also with an indefinitely large number of copulas. That he doesn't do this suggests that these do actually have the same meaning, where meaning for Aristotle must be a more austere conception than it is for most modern theories.

In the next section, I will give an alternative analysis that preserves Aristotle's categorization and that I take to be consistent with the text. What is qualified when one speaks "in a certain respect" is not part of the content of what is uttered, but a condition of its being uttered; for example, a condition for the application of the predicate such that "The Indian is black" can be stated absolutely even when parts of it are white. It is only utterances uttered under the same conditions for which logical principles are applicable and ignoring such qualifications amounts to misapplying logical principles, that is to say, applying them when they are inapplicable.

2. A non-linguistic analysis

I will focus on the Principle of Non-Contradiction as my logical principle. In modern logic this is usually expressed as something like $\neg(p \wedge \neg p)$ but, Aristotle's being a tensed logic, it is by no means contradictory for "The Indian is black" and "The Indian is white" both to be true (or false) – what cannot be the case is that black and white be truly attributed to the Indian at the same time and in the same respect. Thus, Aristotle gives the Law of Non-Contradiction in *Metaphysics* IV (§3) as "the same attribute cannot *at the same time* belong and not belong to the same subject and *in the same respect*" [my italics]. Expressions being used "in a certain respect" and "with a particular sense" as stated in the fallacy of *secundum quid* in the *Sophistical Refutations* obviously parallels an attribute belonging "in a certain respect" or "in a particular relation" to its subject and has nothing at all to do, I dare say, with the qualified and unqualified generalizations of the *Posterior Analytics*.

We can only apply the Principle of Non-Contradiction if the expressions are used in the same respect and at the same time – the semantic value of the expression does not, on its own, determine a truth-value. The fallacy of *secundum quid* is committed when we try to apply this principle to a situation where it is inapplicable, that is to say, where the expressions are not used in the same respect and at the same time. This is a purely logical error and does not depend on language, as I hope to show.

I have already raised problems with treating the qualification as qualifying the meaning of the expression; it is not the case that the expression means something different on each occasion – the semantic value of the expression does not change. Therefore, *secundum quid* is not a fallacy due to double meaning. Just because it is not due to double meaning does not in itself establish that *secundum quid* is not a fallacy depending on language,

since not all fallacies depending on language are due to double meaning: the fallacy of form of expression and the fallacies of composition and division are not. Is there a resemblance to any of these fallacies strong enough that we may nevertheless count *secundum quid* among those fallacies depending on language or what Aristotle calls the fallacies *in dictione*?

There is a similarity between this example and the following example Aristotle gives of the fallacy of composition (SR, §4):

> Upon the combination of words there depend instances such as the following: 'A man can walk while sitting, and can write while not writing'. For the meaning is not the same if one divides the words and if one combines them in saying that 'it is possible to walk-while-sitting' and write while not writing. The same applies to the latter phrase, too, if one combines the words 'to write-while-not-writing': for then it means that he has the power to write and not to write at once; whereas if one does not combine them, it means that when he is not writing he has the power to write.

One could perhaps say that the contraries walking and sitting are not both being truly attributed in the same respect and at the same time, thus making it a fallacy of *secundum quid*. Taking respect and time into account, we do not get the impossible to instantiate because of the self-contradictory conjunctive predicate walking-and-sitting.

However, in this case we are talking about what a man can do, and it is not being argued that his power of walking-and-sitting is derived as a consequence of its being true at t1 that he is walking and its being true at t2 that he is sitting. We are not told whether either of these is true – maybe he has spent his entire life lying down. This does not affect what he *can* do, except in the trivial sense that it is impossible for a man already lying down to lie down. In the fallacy of composition the problem is the linguistic one of the proper semantic function of the phrase "while sitting" and the mistake is to take it as further determining (adverbially modifying) the predicate, thus assigning the wrong semantic value. It is this that makes it fundamentally dependent on language.

So, it does not seem that the *secundum quid* can be assimilated to any fallacy *in dictione*. In contrast, I think that one of Aristotle's examples of a fallacy *in dictione* is better handled when seen as a case of *secundum quid*. This example is given by Aristotle as a fallacy of ambiguity:

> 'The same man is both seated and standing and he is both sick and in health: for it is he who stood up who is standing, and he who is recovering who is in health: but it is the seated man who stood up, and the sick man who was recovering'. For 'The sick man does so and so', or 'has so and so done to him'

is not single in meaning: sometimes it means 'the man who is sick or is seated now', sometimes 'the man who was sick formerly'. Of course, the man who was recovering was the sick man, who really was sick at the time: but the man who is in health is not sick at the same time: he is 'the sick man' in the sense not that he is sick now, but that he was sick formerly.

It seems odd to me to think of this as a case of double meaning. Can "the sick man" really mean "the man who was sick formerly"? Certainly we may continue to refer to objects using descriptions that were true but are so no longer, and perhaps we may think of this as using "sick" in a different way (a question of pragmatics), but to say that "sick" can mean "was sick formerly" is something I find peculiar. Perhaps the alleged ambiguity is less strange in Greek. But it seems almost as odd to think of "the sick man" as performing any useful referential function because it doesn't rule any men out but simply reflects the trivial fact that for reasons just given it is logically impossible for the man already in health to recover or for the man who is already standing to stand up. Even so, if "it is the seated man who stood up" is true then it is true in virtue of two attributions – one of being seated and one of standing up – and this would only be contradictory were the attributions claimed to be true at the same time, which is to say that the claim of contradiction (i.e., that he is both seated and standing up) commits the fallacy of *secundum quid* by ignoring the qualification of time. Although none of Aristotle's examples seem to ignore qualification of time in contrast to qualification of respect, to say that the person is sick and in health *at the same time* and in the same respect does seem to me be analogous to the fallacious claim that the Indian is black and white at the same time and *in the same respect.* The problem arises in the same way: the conditions for the application of the Principle of Non-Contradiction have not been met.

3. Conclusion

By the use of an expression Aristotle does not mean to imply that the content or semantic value of the expression varies with its uses. Convention, and not a minute examination of every point on an object's surface, dictates whether an object is white absolutely and without qualification. By the use of an expression Aristotle means the time at which and the respect in which the expression was uttered. Aristotle seems to put less information into the semantic component and more into an inferential component that takes

as inputs both the semantic value of what was uttered and the conditions under which (including the intention with which) it was uttered; it is these together that determine the truth-value.

Normally the conventions of language-use dictate that in, for instance, "The Indian is white" it is the present (denoted by the present tense of the copula) and the absolute sense of "white" (which is *not* the same as saying that every point on its surface is white) that is intended. If we want to make another intention explicit then we need to say something like "The Indian is white with respect to his teeth." But it is a mistake to think of "with respect to his teeth" as any part of the content or as playing any semantic role *within* the sentence. Rather, it has an inferential role. It tells you with what respect you have to speak should you wish to agree or disagree with me; it tells you what has to be the case in order for logical relations to hold. Only expressions used in the same respect (and time and place and relation etc.) have logical relations between them; no logical relation, and therefore no logical impossibility, holds between expressions used in different respects. Similarly, only an unqualified expression can contradict another unqualified expression.

The fallacy of *secundum quid* occurs when logical principles such as the Principle of Non-Contradiction are applied to expressions that are not used in the same respect. It is a logical error, not a linguistic error, even if its cause is, as Aristotle suggests in one of his examples, because "to be" and "to be something" are linguistically similar. I would add that cases where logical principles are applied to expressions that are not used to refer to the same time should also be included under this fallacy, and in fact, despite the lack of examples, in his initial characterization of the fallacy he refers to "the use of an expression absolutely or not absolutely but with some qualification of respect or place, or time, or relation". He goes on when explaining the fallacy of *ignoratio elenchi* to say that "to refute is to con-tradict one and the same attribute ... in the same respect and relation and manner and time in which it was asserted" (SR, §5). Thus, on my analy-sis the fallacy of *secundum quid* turns out to be a special case of *ignoratio elenchi* – the statement that the Ethiopian is black, even when unquali-fied, is not refuted when it is established that his teeth are white, nor has the would-be refuter proved dialectically that the Ethiopian is both white and not white.

This should make less tempting the idea sometimes floated that, in fact, all fallacies depend on language. This argument would go as follows. The fallacy of *secundum quid* is miscategorised by Aristotle as a fallacy not depending on language and should be re-categorised as a fallacy depending

on language. Then, by a kind of slippery slope, it may be argued that if we can do this for the *secundum quid* why not do the same for all fallacies *extra dictione*, for they all seem to have linguistic elements.

Now, I agree that all fallacies depend on language in the sense of the following thesis (T): It is the case that all fallacies have a source in language, in so far as linguistic phenomena account for the objective resemblance of a bad argument to a good argument, and hence explains why the bad argument deceives the unaware. But this is the case for fallacies *in dictione* and *extra dictione* equally – Buridan calls this linguistic aspect of the fallacy the Cause of Illusion and every fallacy has a Cause of Illusion and a Cause of Defectiveness (Buridan, 2001; Botting, 2012) – and is not what distinguishes the two classes of fallacy. The distinction rests on why the fallacious argument, whatever one's reasons for making it or thinking it good, is an example of a bad argument, or in other words, in what the badness of the bad argument and the goodness of the good argument consists (the Cause of Defectiveness). Aristotle seems to say that in the fallacies *in dictione* it consists of a difference in meaning between homonymous terms or using terms that belong to one category (in Aristotle's technical sense of the *Categories*) as if they belonged to another. But even for Aristotle this is ameliorated by his claim that all fallacies can be reduced to *ignoratio elenchi*, which is a fallacy *extra dictione.* On this basis (T) goes further in claiming that no fallacies are fallacies depending on language but depend instead on invalid inferences. It is logical validity that constitutes the goodness of those good arguments that the bad arguments resemble. There is a miscategorization after all, but in the opposite direction to that proposed, caused by a conflation between the question of what a fallacy actually is and why it occurs. Logic answers the first question, language the second (Botting, 2012).

The interpretations given of this fallacy where it depends on language are wrong and fail to capture Aristotle's correct analysis where it does not. The slippery slope is blocked at its first step. Consistently with (T), the fallacy of *secundum quid* is not a fallacy depending on language, still less does it have anything to do with generalizations. It is a logical error.

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