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Sketches Of The History Of Man

In Two Volumes

Home, Henry

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Sect. 3. Of the book concerning Sophisms.

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The last book of the Topics is a code of the laws, according to which a fyllogistical disputation ought to be managed, both on the part of the assailant and defendant. From which it is evident, that this philosopher trained his disciples to contend, not for the truth merely, but for victory.

SECT. 3. *Of the book concerning Sophisms.*

A fyllogism which leads to a false conclusion, must be vicious, either in matter or form: for from true principles nothing but truth can be justly deduced. If the matter be faulty, that is, if either of the premises be false, that premise must be denied by the defendant. If the form be faulty, some rule of fyllogism is transgressed; and it is the part of the defendant to shew, what general or special rule it is that is transgressed. So that, if he is an able logician, he will be impregnable in the defence of truth, and may resist all the attacks of the sophist. But as there are fyllogisms which may seem to be perfect both in matter and form, when they are not really so, as a piece of money may seem to be good coin, when it is adulterate; such fallacious fyllogisms are considered in this treatise, in order to make a defendant more expert in the use of his defensive weapons.

And here the author, with his usual magnanimity, attempts to bring all the fallacies that can enter into a fyllogism under thirteen heads; of which six lie in the diction or language, and seven not in the diction.

The fallacies in diction are, 1. When an ambiguous word is taken at one time in one sense, and at another time in another. 2. When an ambiguous phrase is taken in the same manner. 3. and 4. are ambiguities in syntax; when words are conjoined in syntax that ought to be disjoined; or disjoined when they ought

ought to be conjoined. 5. is an ambiguity in profody, accent, or pronunciation. 6. An ambiguity arising from some figure of speech.

When a sophism of any of these kinds is translated into another language, or even rendered into unambiguous expressions in the same language, the fallacy is evident, and the syllogism appears to have four terms.

The seven fallacies which are said not to be in the diction, but in the thing, have their proper names in Greek and in Latin, by which they are distinguished. Without minding their names, we shall give a brief account of their nature.

1. The first is, Taking an accidental conjunction of things for a natural or necessary connection: as, when from an accident we infer a property; when from an example we infer a rule; when from a single act we infer a habit.

2. Taking that absolutely which ought to be taken comparatively, or with a certain limitation. The construction of language often leads into this fallacy: for in all languages it is common to use absolute terms, to signify things which carry in them some secret comparison; or to use unlimited terms, to signify what from its nature must be limited.

3. Taking that for the cause of a thing which was only an occasion, or concomitant.

4. Begging the question. This is done, when the thing to be proved, or some thing equivalent, is assumed in the premises.

5. Mistaking the question. When the conclusion of the syllogism is not the thing that ought to be proved, but something else that is mistaken for it.

6. When that which is not a consequence is mistaken for a consequence; as if, because all Africans are black, it were taken for granted that all blacks are Africans.

7. The last fallacy lies in propositions that are complex, and



imply two affirmations, whereof one may be true, and the other false; so that whether you grant the proposition, or deny it, you are intangled: as when it is affirmed, that such a man has left off playing the fool. If it be granted, it implies, that he did play the fool formerly. If it be denied, it implies, or seems to imply, that he plays the fool still.

In this enumeration, we ought, in justice to Aristotle, to expect only the fallacies incident to categorical syllogisms. And I do not find, that the logicians have made any additions to it when taken in this view; altho' they have given some other fallacies that are incident to syllogisms of the hypothetical kind, particularly the fallacy of an incomplete enumeration in disjunctive syllogisms and dilemmas.

The different species of sophisms above mentioned are not so precisely defined by Aristotle, or by subsequent logicians, but that they allow of great latitude in the application; and it is often dubious under what particular species a sophistical syllogism ought to be classed. We even find the same example brought under one species by one author, and under another species by another. Nay, what is more strange, Aristotle himself employs a long chapter in proving by a particular induction, that all the seven may be brought under that which we have called *mistaking the question*, and which is commonly called *ignoratio elenchi*. And indeed the proof of this is easy, without that laborious detail which Aristotle uses for the purpose: for if you lop off from the conclusion of a sophistical syllogism all that is not supported by the premises, the conclusion, in that case, will always be found different from that which ought to have been proved; and so it falls under the *ignoratio elenchi*.

It was probably Aristotle's aim, to reduce all the possible variety of sophisms, as he had attempted to do of just syllogisms, to certain definite species: but he seems to be sensible that he had fallen

fallen short in this last attempt. When a genus is properly divided into its species, the species should not only, when taken together, exhaust the whole genus; but every species should have its own precinct so accurately defined, that one shall not encroach upon another. And when an individual can be said to belong to two or three different species, the division is imperfect; yet this is the case of Aristotle's division of the sophisms, by his own acknowledgement. It ought not therefore to be taken for a division strictly logical. It may rather be compared to the several species or forms of action invented in law for the redress of wrongs. For every wrong there is a remedy in law by one action or another: but sometimes a man may take his choice among several different actions. So every sophistical syllogism may, by a little art, be brought under one or other of the species mentioned by Aristotle, and very often you may take your choice of two or three.

Besides the enumeration of the various kinds of sophisms, there are many other things in this treatise concerning the art of managing a syllogistical dispute with an antagonist. And indeed, if the passion for this kind of litigation, which reigned for so many ages, should ever again lift up its head, we may predict, that the Organon of Aristotle will then become a fashionable study: for it contains such admirable materials and documents for this art, that it may be said to have brought it to a science.

The conclusion of this treatise ought not to be overlooked: it manifestly relates, not to the present treatise only, but also to the whole analytics and topics of the author. I shall therefore give the substance of it.

“ Of those who may be called inventors, some have made important additions to things long before begun, and carried on through a course of ages; others have given a small beginning to things which, in succeeding times, will be brought to greater perfection. The beginning of a thing, though small, is the

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“ chief part of it, and requires the greatest degree of invention ;
 “ for it is easy to make additions to inventions once begun. Now
 “ with regard to the dialectical art, there was not something done,
 “ and something remaining to be done. There was absolutely
 “ nothing done : for those who professed the art of disputation,
 “ had only a set of orations composed, and of arguments, and
 “ of captious questions, which might suit many occasions. These
 “ their scholars soon learned, and fitted to the occasion. This
 “ was not to teach you the art, but to furnish you with the mate-
 “ rials produced by the art : as if a man professing to teach you
 “ the art of making shoes, should bring you a parcel of shoes of
 “ various sizes and shapes, from which you may provide those
 “ who want. This may have its use ; but it is not to teach the
 “ art of making shoes. And indeed, with regard to rhetorical
 “ declamation, there are many precepts handed down from an-
 “ cient times ; but with regard to the construction of syllogisms,
 “ not one.

“ We have therefore employed much time and labour upon
 “ this subject ; and if our system appears to you not to be in the
 “ number of those things, which, being before carried a certain
 “ length, were left to be perfected ; we hope for your favourable
 “ acceptance of what is done, and your indulgence in what is left
 “ imperfect.”

C H A P.

