The Scope of Logic: Soto and Fonseca on Dialectic and Informal Arguments

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Scholars have frequently made large claims about changes in logical method between the late middle ages and the sixteenth century, which, they say, altered the very nature of dialectic.¹ In a recent book, Hannah Dawson speaks of ‘the rhetoricisation of logic by Agricola, Ramus and Talon, whereby inventio (discovery of arguments) and dispositio (judicial arrangement of arguments) were moved from rhetoric into logic.’² Other authors, notably Lisa Jardine, have argued that the impact of humanist dialectic went even further.³ She claims that logic was replaced by dialectic as a logic of probability rather than certainty, that the syllogism was demoted to the status of one argumentative strategy among others, and that there was a new focus on informal arguments, both through a renewed interest in the Topics and through the rediscovery of such classical argument forms as sorites, the heap argument.

These claims are difficult to substantiate, for two reasons. First, one can argue that the so-called rhetoricisation of logic was simply the insistence that rhetoric itself be drained of any content that overlapped with logic. Rudolph Agricola, whose De inventione libri tres, written around 1479, was first published in 1515, left matters of eloquence to the rhetorician, and kept anything to do with the Topics, with argumentation, or with the ordering of discourse for the logician. It is true that the attention to method and the ordering of discourse was new, but invention and judgment had always been the concern of the logician, as had been the dialectical (as opposed to the rhetorical) Topics. How far the material absorbed included informal persuasive devices remains to be seen. However, we should note that, so far as the Topics are concerned, the changes brought about by Agricola, and later by

¹ For a full discussion of this introductory material and further references, see Ashworth 2008, 609–43.
² Dawson 2007, 66.
Petrus Ramus, actually broke their link with arguments, both formal and informal, by treating them solely as headings under which material can be organised.

Second, the impact of humanism brought about differences in the type of logic textbook available, insofar as specifically medieval material was rejected by many sixteenth-century logicians, and much more emphasis was placed on clarity of language and the use of classical examples. This meant that in a simplified logic manual there was no discussion of types of conditional statement or of types of consequence, any more than there was serious discussion of the standard four kinds of argumentation. Accordingly, if one wants to find a principled account of formal argumentative devices, together with some discussion of whether or not there are legitimate informal argumentative devices, the place to look is in those longer, more scholastic, textbooks that retain at least some medieval material and that show the influence of humanism mainly in their attention to the Greek texts of Aristotle and his early commentators.

It is for this reason that I have chosen to examine two sixteenth-century Iberian scholastics, the Spaniard Domingo de Soto (1494–1560) and the Portuguese Petrus Fonseca (1528–1599), in order to see whether the changes in logical method brought about by the supposed influence of humanism are apparent. For Soto, I shall use the second edition of his *Summulae*, printed in 1539/40, because this was the version that was reprinted in Salamanca eight times, and that most successfully introduced Spaniards to earlier sixteenth-century Parisian teachings. For Fonseca, I shall use his popular *Institutionum dialecticarum libri octo*, which was first published in Lisbon in 1564. The last of its fifty three editions appeared in Lyon in 1625. It follows Aristotle’s *Organon*, taking up material from the *Categories*, *Perihermenias*, *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics*, *Topics* and *Sophistici*

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4 Domingo de Soto, *Aeditio Secunda Summularum*, Salamanca, 1539–1540. Note that the foliation is often inaccurate. I am grateful to Angel d’Ors for providing me with photographs of this edition.

5 Petrus Fonseca 1964.