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Lorenzo Valla's Critique of Aristotelian Psychology

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LODI NAUTA

Introduction

The question how humanism relates to scholasticism is an highly complex one which admits of no simple answer. Today no scholar would consider them as monolithic and homogeneous movements. Our answer will vary with the subject under consideration (a particular discipline, schooling and the curriculum, methodology, attitude towards the ancients, and so forth), and is dependent on the region we look at as well as the period within the large stretch of time between, let us say, 1350 and 1600. Nevertheless some basic Weberian ideal positions may be distinguished. One may stress with P. O. Kristeller that the two lived for a long time aside each other, catered for different interests and motives, and functioned at different institutional levels. Humanism was not a philosophical movement but a literary one, focusing on grammar and rhetoric. According to this well-known line of interpretation, humanism should not be seen as “the new philosophy of the Renaissance, which arose in opposition to scholasticism, the old philosophy of the Middle Ages”, for “the Italian humanists on the whole were neither good nor bad philosophers, but no philosophers at all”.¹ Kristeller was therefore sceptical about the view that humanism represented a new vision of man.

A somewhat different position is developed by Ronald G. Witt in his book on the early phase of Italian humanism, even though Kristeller's views are his point of departure.² More than Kristeller, however, does Witt see humanism as embodying a new vision of man and the world, and as such he puts it in stark contrast to scholasticism. The Middle Ages are almost invariably associated with scholasticism, theology, and “agricultural, monarchical, ecclesiastical” values, while humanist values are

¹ P. O. Kristeller, *Humanism and scholasticism in the Italian Renaissance*, in: P. O. Kristeller, *Renaissance thought and its sources*, ed. M. Mooney, New York 1979, 85-105, on 90-1.

² *In the Footsteps of the Ancients*. *The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni*, Leiden 2000, 1-5.

“urban, communal and secular”.³ Moreover, the goals of the Middle Ages, Witt maintains, “are not ours, whereas the humanists’, in important ways are. We also share values. Like the humanists, for example, we regard issues of individual and societal reform as urgent, favor secular over supernatural arguments, and take a critical stance toward the authorities whom we cite”.⁴ Even though he qualifies the contrast occasionally, this contrast runs as a *basso continuo* through his work. In spite of this weakness, Witt’s book contains immensely valuable discussions of individual texts and authors, and is to be counted as a major contribution to scholarship on humanism.⁵

Other scholars have seen more points of contact between scholasticism and humanism, in spite of the obvious differences in interests, method and institutional setting. In the Low Countries and Germany, humanism and scholasticism often overlapped during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century.⁶ Eckhard Kessler has argued that humanism can be considered in some respect as a transformation of issues—in particular in the field of language and grammar—already dealt with by the scholastics. According to him, the humanist project may be interpreted, “nicht als ‘Wiederbelebung des klassischen Altertums’ durch Überwindung der Scholastik sondern als Transformation der scholastisch-aristotelischen Tradition mit Hilfe antiker Denkelemente (. . .)”.⁷ The very fact that humanists reacted so vehemently against the scholastics shows that “sie noch an diese gebunden sind und das Neue, das sie vertreten, auf die scholastische Tradition bezogen ist und nur von ihr her, als Antwort auf ihre Probleme, verstanden werden kann”.⁸

³ Ibid., 199.

⁴ Ibid., 29.

⁵ See the critical appraisals by Robert Black in his review article in: *Vivarium*, 40 (2002), 272-97 and my *Humanisme en de middeleeuwen*, in: *Millennium*, tijdschrift voor middeleeuwse studies, 16 (2002), 68-77.

⁶ See for instance G.-R. Tewes, *Die Bursen der Kölner Artisten-Fakultät bis zur Mitte des 16. Jahrhunderts*, Cologne 1993, 665-805 (‘Bursen-Humanismus und Bursen-Scholastik in Köln’); T. Heath, *Logical Grammar, Grammatical Logic and Humanism in Three German Universities*, in: *Studies in the Renaissance*, 18 (1971), 9-64; J. H. Overfield, *Humanism and Scholasticism in Late Medieval Germany*, Princeton, N.J. 1984.

⁷ E. Kessler, *Die Transformation des aristotelischen Organon durch Lorenzo Valla*, in: E. Kessler, C. H. Lohr and W. Sparr (eds.), *Aristotelismus und Renaissance. In memoriam Charles B. Schmitt*, Wiesbaden 1988, 53-74, on 55. While critical of Kessler’s interpretation, I have learned much from his stimulating work.

⁸ Ibid. Cf. also his *Die verborgene Gegenwart Ockhams in der Sprachphilosophie der Renaissance*, in: W. Vossenkuhl and R. Schönberger (eds.), *Die Gegenwart Ockhams*, Weinheim 1990, 147-

Modern scholarship on Lorenzo Valla, in particular on his work on dialectics, reflects these different approaches to the question how humanism relates to scholasticism. In some accounts of Valla's scholarship, the medieval traditions do not play a prominent role. His radical use of philology in bringing into focus the Greek text of the New Testament and in exposing the forgery of the donation of Constantine is highly innovative, and scholars have argued that his philological and grammatical studies are without precedent.⁹ Some scholars have emphasised that Valla's thinking departs in fundamental ways from scholastic modes of thought, and that the two have hardly anything in common. John Monfasani for instance has argued that, while there are some apparent similarities between Valla's nominalism and Ockham's, "Valla's anti-realist tendencies start from quite a different basis than Ockham's, and Valla's logical system can hardly be accommodated to Ockham's".¹⁰ Most scholars are less reluctant to bracket the names of Ockham and Valla. W. Scott Blanchard has argued that Valla's critique of the universals and Aristotelian categories "continues late medieval developments in the logic of William of Ockham", and that "his theory of the relationship that exists between language and the world is, with some qualification, broadly nominalistic, and therefore represents a continuation of certain medieval developments".¹¹ Fubini has spoken of "l'impronto del nominalismo occamistico", and Zippel too has used the phrase Valla's "occamismo".¹² The best developed defence of

64, on 148 (Ockham was for the humanists not only "der äußere, unverständene Gegner" but also, "neben Cicero und Quintilian, der innere Gesprächspartner"; "er scheint zu zeigen, daß seine [i.e. Ockham's] verschwiegene und daher verborgene Gegenwart die Rezeption der antiken Rhetorik durch die Humanisten gleichermaßen motiviert und geprägt hat").

⁹ But see the important study by Robert Black, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy. Tradition and Innovation in Latin Schools from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century*, Cambridge 2001, who stresses the continuity between medieval and humanist grammar teaching, at least at an elementary level.

¹⁰ J. Monfasani, review of Lorenzo Valla, *Repastinatio dialectice et philosophiæ*, ed. G. Zippel, in: *Rivista di letteratura italiana*, 2 (1984), 177-94, on 191; repr. in his *Language and Learning in Renaissance Italy. Selected Articles*, Aldershot 1994, no. VI. Compare also his *Disputationes vallianæ*, in: F. Mariani Zini (ed.), *Penser entre les lignes. Philologie et philosophie au Quattrocento*, Villeneuve d'Ascq 2001, 229-50 on 234.

¹¹ W. Scott Blanchard, *The negative dialectic of Lorenzo Valla: a study in the pathology of opposition*, in: *Renaissance Studies*, 14 (2000), 149-89 on 179.

¹² R. Fubini, *Contributo per l'interpretazione della Dialectica di Lorenzo Valla*, in: G. F. Vescovini (ed.), *Filosofia e scienza classica, arabo-latina medievale e l'età moderna*, Louvain-la-Neuve 1999, 289-316 on 303 (and cf. 305); G. Zippel, introduction to his edition of Valla's *Repastinatio dialectice et philosophiæ*, Padua 1982, 2 vols., i, pp. lxxxviii and cxi.

this position is by Eckhard Kessler who speaks of "Vallas Anknüpfung an Ockham". He has argued that "the Ockhamist interpretation of Aristotle's Organon was the foundation of Valla's reform".¹³

In a recent article I have criticised this widely-held interpretation.¹⁴ By comparing Ockham with Valla on semantics and ontology, I have tried to show that there is no good reason to bracket their names. Apart from the fact that Valla's knowledge of medieval logic was superficial and that of late-medieval developments almost non-existent, his version of nominalism has almost nothing to do with Ockham's and is, in some respects, fundamentally at odds with it. Further, the two show widely different approaches, methods and arguments. This article will continue this line of research and consider a hitherto neglected and misunderstood aspect of Valla's critique of scholastic philosophy: his criticisms of Aristotelian psychology or, to use a more appropriate term, *scientia de anima*.¹⁵ Some scholars such as Trinkaus have suggested that there is a link between Valla's criticisms and Ockham's rejection of sensible species in the process of cognition. Others have bracket his name with later Renaissance natural philosophers such as Telesio in considering man and his mental faculties as integral part of nature.¹⁶ After having looked in some detail at Valla's arguments (which surprisingly few scholars have done), I shall briefly examine these claims.

Valla's *Repastinatio dialectice et philosophie*

Valla's critique of Aristotelian psychology occurs in the framework of his attack on scholastic-Aristotelian logic and metaphysics in the *Repastinatio dialectice et philosophie* ('re-ploughing' or 're-laying' the ground of dialectics and philosophy). This work, as he himself makes clear, is meant as a thorough transformation of the Organon. The first book of the *Repastinatio*, which deals with the categories and transcendentals, corresponds to the *Categories*; the second, which deals with the combination of terms into

¹³ Kessler 1988 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 7), 63, 55 and *passim*.

¹⁴ Lodi Nauta, *William of Ockham and Lorenzo Valla: False Friends. Semantics and Ontological Reduction*, in: *Renaissance Quarterly*, 56 (2003), 613-51.

¹⁵ D. Des Chene, *Life's Form. Late Aristotelian Conceptions of the Soul*, Ithaca and London 2000, 11 n. 3 on the term '*scientia de anima*'.

¹⁶ C. Trinkaus, *Valla's Anti-Aristotelian Natural Philosophy*, in: *I Tatti Studies*, 5 (1993), 279-325, on 301. G. Zippel 1982 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 12), vol. 1, cxviii-cxx. Cf. Fubini 1999 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 12), 316.

propositions and with commonplaces, to the *De interpretatione*, the *Topica* and the *Rhetorica*; the third, which deals with the combination of propositions into various forms of argumentations, to the *Analytica Priora* and, to a lesser extent, *De sophisticis elenchis*.¹⁷ Valla attempts to replace the traditional transcendental terms (essence, quiddity, being, truth and unity) by ‘*res*’, a good classical Latin word and one which, according to Valla, captures much better our ordinary notion of a thing than do the ungrammatical terms of the scholastics. Furthermore, he reduces the ten Aristotelian categories to substance, quality and action, which correspond roughly with the basic grammatical categories noun, adjective (and adverb) and verb by which we describe things in the world. His discussion of the human soul, which will be considered in detail in this article, is part of his treatment of substance, while the related theme of sensation is discussed in one of the chapters on qualities.

Valla continued to work on the *Repastinatio* throughout his life. It exists in three versions, which differ from each other in some respects. In the first version the treatment of the soul (chapter 14) includes a long section on the virtues, which in the later versions has become a separate chapter (10) after that of the soul (9). In the later versions, Valla quotes extensively from Aristotle’s works, which he has studied in the intervening years. The third recension testifies to his deepened knowledge of Greek with digressions on terms such as ζῶον, κτιζῶ and λόγος.¹⁸ Moreover, the second and in particular the third recension treat some new issues, which generally take up the first half of that chapter; the second half of it corresponds to the discussion in the first recension. For my purposes it is not always necessary to take notice of these differences. Valla’s basic positions remain unaltered. I have reordered his discussion and distilled the main issues.

¹⁷ A. Perreiah, *Humanistic Critiques of Scholastic Dialectic*, in: *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 13 (1982), 3-22, on 12; Kessler 1988 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 7), 55; J. Monfasani, *Lorenzo Valla and Rudolph Agricola*, in: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 28 (1990), 181-200, on 195 (repr. in his *Language and Learning in Renaissance Italy*, no. V). For a recent, uncritical discussion of the *Repastinatio*, see Marco Laffranchi, *Dialettica e filosofia in Lorenzo Valla*, Milan 1999.

¹⁸ On the (limited) use of Greek in the *Repastinatio* see P. Mack, *Renaissance Argument. Valla and Agricola in the Traditions of Rhetoric and Dialectic*, Leiden 1993, 100-2, who concludes that Valla’s interest in Greek was as “an aid to the understanding of Latin rather than a separate and equally important study”.

Souls of Plants, Animals and Men

Valla's basic conviction is that the soul is a much more noble thing than the hylomorphic account of Aristotle, at least on Valla's interpretation, implies.¹⁹ He stresses therefore at various places the soul's dignified nature, its immortality, autonomy and superior position vis-à-vis the body and vis-à-vis animals, comparing it to the sun's central place in the cosmos.²⁰ On the other hand this positive evaluation is not easy to square with some views expressed elsewhere in his work. For one of his main point of criticisms of Aristotle is the latter's view that animals lack a rational soul. According to Valla, animals too have a soul, albeit a mortal one, for they too possess memory, reason and will. (See below.) But if the difference between the human soul and the soul of animals is one of degrees, why does the human soul survive death, while the soul of animals, which consists of the same capacities, does not? Valla's answer is simply that God created immortal souls for men, as the biblical account of God's infusing spirit in man shows.²¹ But in an earlier passage he claims that the souls of animals are substances which are created out of nothing, with divine aid, rather than "ex potentia materie" as philosophers have claimed.²²

Why does Valla insist on this point? Not out of love for animals, I suppose, but rather because it enabled him to contradict Aristotle and to set him against his favourite authorities Cicero and Quintilian. Quintilian, for instance, considered speech as the main difference between man and animals, arguing that "animals had thought and understanding to a certain extent".²³ Valla quotes Quintilian and adds that the various meanings of the term 'logos'—speech or language and reason—have been confused by later philosophers who thought that 'a-loga' means 'without reason' while it only meant 'without speech' in the case of animals.²⁴

¹⁹ I quote volume and page number of Zippel's edition. Vol. 1 contains Valla's third version, including a critical apparatus which lists variant readings from the second version. Vol. 2 contains the first version.

²⁰ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel 1982 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 12), i, 59-73 (for the comparison, see 71).

²¹ *Ibid.*, i, 68-69.

²² *Ibid.*, i, 65. In the Middle Ages some thinkers such as Adelard of Bath held that animals have rational souls but this was a minority position. Augustine and Aquinas, for instance, were quite adamant in maintaining that animals lack reason; see R. Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals. The Origins of the Western Debate*, London 1993, 195-8.

²³ *Institutio oratoria*, II.xvi.15-16, transl. H. E. Butler, 4 vols., Cambridge, Mass. i, 323-4.

²⁴ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel 1982 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 12), i, 70. An important source for Valla is Lactantius who held that animals have reason, can converse, laugh, and have foresight (*Divine Institutes*, III.10; cf. Sorabji, 1993 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 22), 202).

To those who see the difference between men and animals in terms of ‘instinct’ and ‘reason’, Valla replies that this is only a matter of words.²⁵ Instinct is nothing more than a sort of impulse (*impetus*), which also men possess when they are excited; hence they are called “instincti”. This impulse arises from the will, and hence it would be of no help to those who argue that the presence of instinct means the lack of reason. Aristotle therefore was wrong, Valla continues, to argue that animals and young children lack the power to choose (*electio*) because they lack reason. His criticisms of Aristotle are unfair, however, for Aristotle’s opinion was clearly that reason develops as children grow older, appetite being the primary faculty in the early years of their life. Elsewhere Valla himself gives a quotation from Aristotle’s *Politics* to this effect.²⁶

Valla also argues for a rational soul in animals because he wants to get rid of the idea of three or four different souls in creatures—one of the central doctrines of Aristotelian psychology. Of course, there existed a large literature on the question whether the expressions ‘vegetative’, ‘sensitive’ and ‘rational soul’ did not jeopardise the soul’s unity. Thomas Aquinas for instance held that in human beings there is only one soul substantially, a soul which is rational, sensitive and nutritive.²⁷ Valla’s criticism does not seem to consider such a defence. He rejects out of hand, without much discussion, the existence of “vegetative, sensitive, imaginative and rational souls”.²⁸ For him there is only one soul, which has three capacities—memory, reason and will. This has two important consequences: animals are upgraded and plants downgraded. The animal soul has the same constitution as that of the human soul; hence, it is said to

²⁵ *Ibid.*, i, 67-8. Zippel quotes Paul of Venice’s *Liber de anima*: “apes et formicae (...) agunt solum ex instinctis naturae (...) et ita non proprie agunt opera prudentiae, sed solum prudentiae naturalis” (*Summa philosophiae naturalis*, ed. Venice 1503, 84v, col. B). In the Middle Ages, the common view was that the seemingly rational behaviour of animals was due to the estimative faculty. On Avicenna’s theory of estimation and its influence in the Latin West, see D. Hasse, *Avicenna’s De anima in the Latin West*, London-Turin 2000, 127-53. On Aquinas’ position who held that only animals had this faculty, see Sorabji 1993 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 22), 64; cf. 75, 86 and 113.

²⁶ *Politics*, VII.15, 1334b22, quoted by Valla, *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel 1982 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 12), i, 62. Cf. *Politics*, I.13, 1260a12-14 (reason may be complete or incomplete). See Sorabji 1993 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 22), 70.

²⁷ *Quaestiones disputatae de anima*, q. 11, ed. B.-C. Bazan, Rome 1996 (Leonine ed., vol. 24,1).

²⁸ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel 1982 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 12), ii, 409. The separate mentioning of the “imaginative soul” is odd, for imagination, as one of the internal senses, belonged to the sensitive soul.

be a substance which is created, with divine aid, out of nothing rather than out of pre-existing material. Valla claims that all schools of philosophers have denied this.²⁹ By excluding the vegetative aspect, he denies—against Aristotle—that plants and trees have souls.³⁰ They are not “animalia”, that is animated things (“res animate”). But Valla then has to answer the question how plants live—if they can be said to live at all—if not by the presence of a soul. Valla’s argument drives him almost as far as to accept the conclusion that they actually do not live, but he seems to hesitate, perhaps because this would contradict the ordinary usage of the word ‘live’. Hence, if they must be said to live at all, they live “per viriditatem”, not “per animam”, and he quotes St Paul’s words “[Thou] fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die”, by which St Paul, however, means quite something else. Thus Valla apparently does not consider nutrition and reproduction as adequate criteria of life.

The Three Capacities of the Soul: Memory, Reason and Will

According to Valla, the soul exists of memory, reason and will—the Augustinian triad—which was also influential among the scholastics, especially the Franciscans. Valla does not quote Augustine here, but he is clearly indebted to the church father in his chapter on God, although Valla would not be Valla if he did not make some critical remarks on Augustine’s ambiguous statements on the ontological nature of the persons of the Trinity.³¹ The capacities are closely connected to each other—one of the reasons why animals too possess reason, for no one would deny that they have memory and will. Memory comprehends and retains things, reason (which is “identical to the intellect”) examines and judges them and will desires or rejects them.³² Valla simply speaks of things which memory perceives and retains and reason judges. There is no men-

²⁹ Ibid., i, 65.

³⁰ Valla was apparently not the only one to do so. Suárez writes that “certain moderns (so I am told) have dared to deny that the vegetative form, considered absolutely [*praecise*], is a soul; and consequently they deny that plants are alive” (quoted by Des Chene 2000 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 15), 25 n. 32; cf. 57, n. 10).

³¹ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel 1982 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 12), i, 50; ii, 404. For Valla’s sometimes critical stance towards Augustine see R. Fubini, *Indagine sul De voluptate di Lorenzo Valla*, in his *Umanesimo e secolarizzazione, da Petrarca a Valla*, Rome 1990, 339-94, on 374.

³² Ibid., i, 66-7; ii, 410.

tioning of phantasms or species or other kinds of intermediaries, though of course it would be difficult to hold that the various capacities of the soul—memory and reason for instance—can work without any kind of intermediary.

Memory is fundamental, being the “mother” of reason or the soul’s life.³³ Wisdom is therefore called the daughter of experience (*usus*) and memory. These are ancient *topoi*,³⁴ though the typically humanist orientation on human experience and practice give them a new colouring. More importantly, Valla describes the capacities (which he also calls *vires*) in physiological terms, taking over, without much discussion, some traditional points. The body receives its powers and hence its warmth from memory (which includes sense perception); that the region of the heart constitutes the sensory centre is good Aristotelian doctrine.³⁵ From reason it has its ingenuous distribution of the humours and other things (“sollertam distributionem”), from the will it has its warmth. Valla is particularly fond of the analogy between the soul and the sun. Just as the sun has three qualities—vibration, light and ardour—so the soul has memory, reason and will. Their activities are compared to those of the vibrating and radiant beams of the sun by which things are grasped, illuminated and heated. There are some echoes of Lactantius’s *De opificio Dei*, which is quoted a few times by Valla.³⁶

Though memory is called the soul’s life and mother of the intellect, in the chapter on the virtues Valla stresses that there is no functional hierarchy between the capacities. It is one and the same soul that comprehends and retains, investigates and judges, and desires or hates things,

³³ *Ibid.*, i, 73; ii, 410.

³⁴ Aulus Gellius, *Noctes atticae*, XIII.8; Aristotle, *Anal. Post.*, 2.19, 100a5-6; *Metaph.*, 1.1, 980b29-30: from perceptions memory is derived and from memories experience (*empeiria*). Cf. Sorabji 1993 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 22), 20. One is reminded of Hobbes: “all knowledge is remembrance” (*English Works*, ed. W. Molesworth, 11 vols., London 1839, iv, 27). Still another source for the importance of memory is Augustine, who said that memory is the fundamental source of all our truth (*De trinitate*, XV. 40), because it is the storehouse of everything we know, including the eternal, innate ideas, which divine illumination enables us to see. Though divine illumination is mentioned once by Valla in a controversial passage (i, 19-20), I do not think it is of much relevance here.

³⁵ E.g. *De partibus animalium*, II.10, 656a28.

³⁶ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel 1982 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 12), i, 122 and 155; ii, 432 and 446. For quotations from Lactantius by Valla, see the index of Zippel’s edition (the *Divine Institutes* is quoted more often by Valla). For the analogy between the soul and the sun in Valla see C. Trinkaus, *Italian Humanism and Scholastic Theology*, in: A. Rabil (ed.), *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms and Legacy*, 3 vols., Philadelphia 1988, 327-48 on 343-4.

and no capacity rules over the other.³⁷ Valla's point is obviously addressed to those who place the intellect above the will. It is the will, with the aid of memory, which teaches the intellect rather than the other way round.³⁸ The intellect can even be hindered by the body, that is, by bodily affections such as drunkenness, headache or tired limbs. This should not be taken as a confirmation of Valla's anti-intellectual stance in ethics, for elsewhere he praises man's soul, which, in contrast to those of animals, is made fit to know heavenly and eternal things.³⁹ Moreover, the argument would not upset scholastic philosophers, who did not shy away from this obvious, physiological fact, but for whom the question then became important what that dependency tells us about the ontological category in which we have to place the soul.⁴⁰

For Valla, the relationship between the soul and its three capacities is that of substance and its qualities.⁴¹ He does not pose explicitly the question, which scholastics treated at length, whether the soul is identical with its powers. It is interesting to note however that in this respect he is closer to the scholastic tradition than the Augustinian one. Augustinians had argued that the difference between the soul and its powers is merely a verbal one, the soul being identical to its powers, which are only different names for its diverse actions. When the writings of Avicenna and Averroes became known, scholastic authors began to accept a real distinction between the soul and its powers. Albertus the Great and Thomas Aquinas described them as substance and its qualities or essence and its accidents.⁴² Nominalists generally took the Augustinian line in saying that

³⁷ Ibid., i, 75: "Et iccirco errant, qui intellectum voluntatis dominum imperatoremque constituunt. Ausim dicere, ne doctorem quidem illum esse voluntatis: non docetur voluntas, sed ingenium seipsum labore suo docet adiutrice memoria, utque hoc ducem memoriam ita ipsum voluntas ducem habet, una eademque anima tum capit et tenet, tum inquirat et iudicat, tum amat aut odit; nec sibi ita ipsa imperat ut una in parte domina sit, in alia ancilla: quod si posset imperare ratio voluntati, nunquam profecto voluntas peccaret."

³⁸ Compare however *Repastinatio*, i, 67, ed. Zippel 1982 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 12): "ergo non potest in brutis sequi voluntas, nisi antecesserit iudicatio", as if the will has to wait for reason's judgement. Valla could have argued that this constitutes a difference between animals and men, but he does not do so.

³⁹ Ibid., i, 69 echoing Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, III.10.

⁴⁰ See K. Park, *The organic soul*, in: C. Schmitt and Q. Skinner (eds), *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, Cambridge 1988, 464-84, on 468. On the question whether soul is substance or accident see Des Chene 2000 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 15), 67-102.

⁴¹ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel 1982 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 12), i, 65 and ii, 410. Cf. ii, 365 where this is stated with some vehemence ("Sed non ideo quia abesse a substantia nequeunt [scil. qualitates], erunt hec omnia coniuncta 'substantie' nomine appellanda. .").

⁴² E.g. Albert the Great, *De homine*, I.73.2.2.2 (ed. A. Borgnet, *Opera omnia*, vol. 35,

there is no real difference between the powers of the soul and the soul itself.⁴³ Though Valla's general approach to the soul is more Augustinian than Aristotelian (see below), he unwittingly sides with Thomas Aquinas, against Ockham, in describing the soul and its capacities as substance and its qualities; the qualities, even though they cannot be absent from the substance, nevertheless are not identical with it. It is unlikely that he took a conscious stand in this medieval debate.

A last point about terminology. In view of the terminological abundance of the scholastic tradition, Valla may be forgiven to reshuffle terms such as quality, form, essence, substance and consubstance in the successive versions of the *Repastinatio*.⁴⁴ Thus, in one chapter the soul is called a substance, in another an essence having the potential of perceiving, understanding and willing as qualities ("which cannot be absent from the essence") and in still another chapter "a form or preferably a quality".⁴⁵ And perhaps we should add 'esse', given Valla's insistence that 'esse' and 'essentia' are the same.⁴⁶ Even though these terms do not necessarily exclude each other—thus in scholastic-Aristotelian philosophy the soul was called both the form of the human body and an individual substance (to mention only two important expressions)—his vacillation between terms does not enhance clarity and in fact weakens his professed claim to revise and simplify Aristotelian metaphysics and concomitant terminology.

Immortality and Self-Movement

In the later versions of the *Repastinatio* Valla quotes Aristotle extensively but nevertheless in a highly selective manner.⁴⁷ Aristotle had said that "the soul of man is divided into two parts, one of which has a rational principle in itself, and the other, not having a rational principle in itself, is able to obey such a principle", that is reason and appetite. The latter

616b); Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I.1, q. 77, art. 6 ("Utrum potentiae animae fluent ab eius essentia"). See P. Künzle, *Das Verhältnis der Seele zu ihren Potenzen*, Freiburg i. Br. 1956, 144-218.

⁴³ For Ockham's arguments concerning the soul and its faculties, see *In Libros Sententiarum*, II.24, St. Bonaventure, N.Y. 1981 (Opera Theologica V). Cf. K. Park, *Albert's influence on late medieval psychology*, in: J. A. Weisheipl (ed.), *Albertus Magnus and the Sciences*, Toronto 1980, 501-35, on 517-9.

⁴⁴ For discussion see Mack 1993 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 18), esp. 42-9 and 61-3.

⁴⁵ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel 1982 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 12), i, 115 and i, 46.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, i, 38.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, i, 62-4.

is prior to the former, as we can see from young children: “anger and wishing and desire are implanted in children from their very birth, but reason and understanding are developed as they grow older”.⁴⁸ Reason survives death, appetite dies with the body. Valla also gives some long quotations from *De anima*, including the crucial but ambiguous expression that “the soul is inseparable from its body, or at any rate that certain parts of it are (if it has parts)” (413a4-5) and the definition of a soul as the substance (*ousia*) in the sense of the form of a natural body having life potentially within it (“necessarium animam usiam esse, ut speciem corporis naturalis potentia vitam habentis”).⁴⁹

Valla flatly contradicts Aristotle without offering serious argumentation. He takes offence at Aristotle’s talk of parts of the soul—a rational eternal part and an irrational corruptible part (*De anima* II.1-2)—as if the soul is a composite thing.⁵⁰ Aristotle’s dictum that what comes into being in time must also perish in time, is attacked because it leads to the following dilemma: either the soul perishes with the body or it is not generated and thus existed before its embodiment. And both positions are false, for the soul is both generated and eternal.⁵¹ Valla here points to a serious problem which all commentators on Aristotle had to face. If the soul (or at least its rational part) is eternal, why does it not lack a beginning in a time as well; in scholastic terms: if the soul is said to be eternal why only *a parte post* (i.e. with a beginning but no end) and not also *a parte ante*, having no beginning either? Medieval scholars used one of their standard devices, the distinction between *proprie* and *improprie*: the human intellect is generated but not in the ordinary way (i.e. out of previous matter); it is generated *improprie*, that is, it is created, and hence may be said to have a beginning in time but no end.⁵² In addition, they

⁴⁸ *Politics*, VII.15, 1334b22 (Jowett’s translation in J. Barnes, *The Complete Works of Aristotle. The Revised Oxford Translation*, 2 vols., Princeton 1984, ii, 2117).

⁴⁹ *De anima*, II.1, 412a20.

⁵⁰ But as Park 1988 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 40), 468 writes “Aristotle had never attributed continuous actuality to the soul’s powers (*δυνάμεις*); he had written of them as potentialities for different kinds of action and had used them primarily as convenient categories for classifying living things”. See also Sorabji 1993 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 22), 66 who notes that Plato’s three-part division of the soul (presented in the *Republic*, *Phaedrus* and *Timaeus*) is criticised by Aristotle. Aristotle endorses a two-part division, rational and irrational, in his ethical writings but in other works criticises this (Sorabji refers to Paul Vander Waerdt, *Aristotle’s Criticisms of Soul Division*, in: *American Journal of Philology*, 108 (1987), 627-43).

⁵¹ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel 1982 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 12), i, 65-5.

⁵² See the texts assembled in O. Pluta, *Kritiker der Unsterblichkeitsdoktrin im Mittelalter und Renaissance*, Amsterdam 1986, 94, 97, 99; for the recognition that both positions may find

often admitted that both positions on the soul (mortal or immortal) can be supported by texts from Aristotle. Valla occasionally admits this too,⁵³ but his hostility towards the authority of the scholastics prevents him from reading Aristotle in a more favourable light.

It is not easy to gauge Valla's own position. He is much better in destruction than construction. If the soul is a unified substance, it survives death as a whole, including its capacities. But then, it is not easy to see why only men have this prerogative of having an immortal soul, for Valla—as we have seen—also says that the souls of animals are substances which are not created out of the “*potentia materie*” but out of nothing, with divine aid.⁵⁴ Further, the capacities are closely connected to the body, but Valla does not say anything about the condition of a soul separated from the body, except that it is possible, as we learn from “*Homerum et omnes magos*”.

The soul's divine origin leads Valla to reject the Aristotelian notion of the soul as a ‘*tabula rasa*’. The soul is not blank but already inscribed or painted (“*picta*”) at birth, namely in the image of God, as we can see from the inborn knowledge of Adam and Eve and also from that of young children who died before their soul could receive marks, yet “who know and understand”.⁵⁵ This however is difficult to square with the importance which Valla ascribes to memory and experience as the mother of the intellect. Valla's criticisms are even more odd, given the fact that the immediate context of his remark on the ‘*tabula rasa*’ is the recognition that knowledge is acquired only gradually in contrast to virtues and vices which can be acquired and lost in a moment's time.⁵⁶

support in the Aristotelian corpus, *ibid.* 23-4, 31 n. 54, 84; cf. my *The Pre-existence of the Soul in Medieval Thought*, in: *Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale*, 63 (1996), 93-135 on 132-3.

⁵³ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel 1982 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 12), i, 66.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, i, 64-5.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, ii, 419. He also compares the soul in a body to a fire covered by ashes: “the fire emits heat, sparks and light as far the ashes permit it” (ii, 419). While the image suggests the soul's dependency on the body, the image is meant to demonstrate the soul's autonomy; for if the senses, Valla writes, which receive their powers from the soul, do not need external powers to carry out their duties, this is true a fortiori for the soul itself. Like the flame of the fire seizes and devours its material on which it feeds and turns it into coals, so does the soul transform the things which it perceives and keeps by its warmth and light. Far from being a ‘*tabula rasa*’, it “paints” other things, and leaves its image on perceived objects rather like the sun which leaves its image (“*imaginem suam pingit*”) on smooth and polished things. See for the latter image Trinkaus 1988 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 36), 344.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, i, 77-9; ii, 418.

In the third version Valla discusses the soul's movement. He unfortunately follows Aristotle in maintaining the heart to be the location of the soul. The heart receives its vibration, perception and heat from the soul; hence the heart is moved more than any other part of the body and is responsible for the diffusion of the heat throughout the body, causing bodily effects. This does not mean, however, that the soul itself moves. Valla rejects Plato's view that the soul moves itself, and is even more critical of Aristotle's view that the soul does not move at all. Valla's point is that we should not apply terms such as 'rest' and 'movement' to spirits or souls and God, except metaphorically. Only sensible things can be said to move or to rest ("rerum que sub sensus corporis veniunt", as the second version has it).⁵⁷ Consequently, the Aristotelian conception of God as the First Mover is also rejected.

Valla points here to what we now would call a category mistake. Of course, Valla was not the first to draw attention to the metaphorical nature of some of our philosophical concepts. Aristotle subjected Plato's theory of Forms to this kind of criticism; indeed Plato himself had already done so in the *Parmenides*; Thomas Aquinas and later Aristotelians knew that matter cannot be literally said to desire anything; and Ockham noticed that the terminology of goals can only be applied metaphorically to inanimate objects.⁵⁸ Highly sensitive to the proper use of words, Valla made several such points, e.g. that the vocabulary of desire should not be applied to form and matter, that there is no 'passio' and no goals in inanimate things, that the senses are not being acted upon (*pati*) by objects, and that the terminology of prior and posterior should not be taken literally in expressions such as 'prior in nature'.⁵⁹ It may be objected however that in this passage on rest and motion of the soul Valla does not do justice to Aristotle, who had raised a number of pertinent questions in book I of *De anima* before presenting his own theory of the soul in book II. Aristotle criticises Plato, for instance, for taking the soul to be a magnitude—not unlike the kind of criticism Valla makes. But Aristotle himself knew how difficult it is for us to think without images; we usually think of non-quantitative or indefinite things in terms of quantitative

⁵⁷ Ibid., i, 72 app.

⁵⁸ For Ockham see *Summula Philosophiae Naturalis*, ed. S. Brown, St. Bonaventure, N.Y. 1984, 228 (Opera Philosophica VI). For Thomas see D. Des Chene, *Physiologia. Natural Philosophy in late Aristotelianism and Cartesian Thought*, Ithaca 1996, 202.

⁵⁹ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel 1982 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 12), i, 111; i, 154; i, 154; i, 150-1.

or definite ones.⁶⁰ Ironically, Valla accuses Aristotle and the entire “peripatetica natio” of asking us to imagine things of which we cannot form an image, such as prime matter or a form without matter, a line without breadth and other mathematical “ficta”,⁶¹ although in another work he allows himself to imagine the believer’s heavenly rewards.⁶² Valla has no use for abstractions, which in his view leave ordinary experience and good classical Latin far behind and create philosophical problems were none existed.

Thus, ‘rest’ and ‘motion’ should not be applied to spiritual things such as souls. Nevertheless, as Valla’s own discussion of the soul makes clear, it is not easy *not* to speak about the soul in ‘earthly’, material terms. The soul can become angry, it is at rest, it diffuses its power throughout the body, it resides in the senses, it perceives, judges and so forth. Moreover, Valla takes his comparisons rather seriously, for even though he does not identify the soul with fire, its triad vibration, illumination and heat recurs throughout his discussion; they are real, existing qualities, inhering in a real, existing substance.

Sensation

In view of Valla’s rejection of the vegetative, sensitive and rational souls and their various faculties and powers, it is not surprising that he does not show much interest in the complicated process of sensation. For him it suffices to say that it is one and the same soul which perceives, judges and wills. He distinguishes between those qualities that are perceived by the outer senses (*sensibus*) and those which are perceived by the soul only (*sensis*, a term borrowed from Quintilian).⁶³ The latter category comprises (1) concepts which are in the soul such as virtue, vice, knowledge, and emotions, (2) things which pertain to the composite (body and soul) including concepts such as glory, honour, dignity, power, fatherhood, priesthood, (3) things which can be said of all things such as number, order,

⁶⁰ See for instance *De memoria* 449b30-450a9.

⁶¹ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel (*op. cit.*, above, n. 12), i, 111 and i, 143-5. See my *Lorenzo Valla and the Limits of Imagination*, in: Lodi Nauta and Detlev Pätzold (eds.), *Imagination from the Later Middle Ages to the Early Modern Times*, Peeters: Louvain-la-Neuve (forthcoming).

⁶² *On Pleasure (De voluptate)*, ed. and transl. A. Kent Hieatt and M. Lorch, New York 1977, 286-7, making use of the rhetorical strategy of ‘evidentia’.

⁶³ Quintilian, *Inst. orat.*, VIII, 5, 1; Valla, *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel 1982 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 12), i, 115-6 and 124.

series, difference, similarity, fortune, necessity and cause, and (4) concepts such as genus and species and part and whole which describe relationships between things in terms of their signification.⁶⁴ Though Valla's distinction of these categories is not very illuminating, his aim seems to be to bring as much as possible under the rubric of quality, rejecting the need for the other accidental categories such as quantity and relation.⁶⁵ The relevant point to make here is that he does not say how this process of mental vision works.

The qualities of extra-mental objects are perceived by the corporeal senses, which function as the "seat of the soul" or rather as the seat of its "potencie".⁶⁶ Valla writes that it is memory, as the first capacity of the soul, that sees, hears, tastes, smells and touches outer objects,⁶⁷ but again, he does not explain how exactly things are perceived and processed. When he discusses the proper objects of the individual senses (colour and form of the eyes, sound of the ear, and so forth), he focuses on the way we talk about them by listing adjectives naming the different sorts of objects: "soft", "hard", "smooth", "sharp", "warm", "cold", "humid", "dry", "dense" and so forth, in the case of objects touched, "sweet", "bitter", "salty" and so forth in the case of objects tasted. His observations are not without interest, e.g. that we often use the name of the sense for the object. We say e.g. "tactus durus" or "tactus lenis" though it is not the sense which is hard or soft but the object of touch, just as it is the colour or body which is white rather than vision itself even though we say "visus est albus".

Valla does not exhibit any inclination to treat the physiological aspects of sensation. The term 'species' (sensible or intelligible) does not occur. The Aristotelian *sensus communis* is mentioned in order to be rejected without argument. The medieval commentary tradition on *De anima* had viewed the common sense as one of the internal senses, alongside imagination (sometimes distinguished from *phantasia*), memory and the *vis aestimativa* (foresight and prudence).⁶⁸ Imagination and the *vis aestimativa* are not even

⁶⁴ Cf. Kessler 1988 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 7), 68-70.

⁶⁵ See Nauta 2003 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 14).

⁶⁶ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel 1982 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 12), i, 115-6; ii, 446, lines 8 and 23 ("animam que sedet in oculis nostris atque in aliis sensibus"; "anime corporea sedes"). Valla should have written "vim animae que est in oculis etc." in accordance with his view that the soul has its "fixed and perpetual place in the heart (...), from where it diffuses its power throughout the body" (ii, 410).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, i, 72-3.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, i, 73. Aristotle however had considered it not as another sense over and above

mentioned by Valla, while memory is promoted, as we have seen, to the principal capacity of the soul, including all the functions which scholastics had divided among separate faculties within the sensitive soul. Valla's aversion to reification of scholastic entities and processes and their corresponding names may have contributed to his reduction and simplification of the processes of sensation and cognition, and it was to be expected that he offers no alternative explanations of these processes. Perhaps his knowledge of the details of the medieval *scientia de anima* was just very meagre; certainly his interest in them was.

There is however one passage which may offer some additional details, but it contains a textual problem, rendering it difficult to interpret.⁶⁹ In his discussion of the Aristotelian category 'pati', Valla briefly treats the question whether colours, sounds and so forth extend to the senses as the peripatetics hold (a theory called intramission) or vice versa that the power of the senses goes to them as Macrobius, Lactantius and "many philosophers" hold (extramission). In the first version of the *Repastinatio*, Valla says that, on account of the presence of our soul in the senses, it is much easier for our soul to extend to, by way of the rays of the eye, to the colours than that the colours come to the eyes. The senses function as a multiple mirror (*multiplex specula*) for the soul.⁷⁰ There are also many things, Valla admits, which can be said in favour of the other, intramissionist view, such as the concave structure of the ear, the *spiritus* in the nostrils by which the odour is attracted, but he refrains from discussing the matter in more detail. In the later versions he clearly favours extramission, because

otherwise a person with sharp vision would not see (*aliter non cerneret*) better from a distance than someone with poor eyesight when there was little difference in discerning between the two when close up (. . .). Nor would colours and shapes be carried (*feruntur*) to the vision (*visus*) by help of brightness, but come to the eye as though to a mirror. For thereby those images (*imagines*) are perceived in the eye which the eye itself does not see in itself but sees what it discerns not in the air (for in which part of the air?) but in its own place, better or worse according to its own powers of projecting its glance, and not without the help of the brightness. Something similar can be said about sound.⁷¹

the five senses but as their common nature; *De anima*, III.1, 425a27 (cf. W. D. Ross, *Aristotle*, London ³1964, 140). In medieval times it was credited—among other things—with combining sensible qualities from more than one sense (e.g. the colour and perfume of a rose).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, i, 155-6; cf. ii, 445-6.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, ii, 446.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, i, 155-6: "Aliter non cerneret melius qui acuto visu est eminus quam qui hebeti,

This passage has received different interpretations, dependent on how we read “nec colores et figure feruntur ad visum beneficio splendoris, sed ad oculum velut ad speculum” (though no one seems to have noticed the problem). If we take this clause as Trinkaus does and interpret the indicative “feruntur” as a subjunctive (“ferantur”), we must conclude that Valla holds that colours and shapes are carried to the eye with the help of the brightness of the medium—in darkness the eye cannot see—and that he rejects the view that the eye is a passive mirror which receives images from outer things. If we translate, however, the indicative “feruntur” as indicative, the meaning would be that Valla *denies* that colours and shapes are carried to the eye. The first interpretation seems to be correct, even though in the first recension of the *Repastinatio* Valla compares the eyes and the other sense organs with mirrors. Laffranchi therefore holds that “colori e figure, infatti, in quanto immagini, sono portati all’occhio come uno specchio”, while Saitta takes the indicative “feruntur” as an indicative but *denies* that the eye functions simply as a mirror (“L’occhio non è un semplice specchio dove si vedono le immagini che l’occhio stesso non vede”).⁷²

It is certainly true that Valla allots the senses, as “potencie anime”, an active role in the process of perception (though then the metaphor of the senses as mirrors may be considered as ill-chosen). But the passage is too ambiguous to conclude, as Trinkaus does, that Valla rejects a medium and any intermediary, even though this may seem to follow from the quoted passage. After all, Valla describes memory as “comprehending and retaining things” and reason as judging these things—processes which can only be done with the aid of some kind of images of the extramental objects.⁷³ Moreover, Valla once uses the term “imagines”—probably taken from Lactantius—which the soul sees and which can hardly be said to be merely invented by it.⁷⁴ They must be images of the outer

cum inter hunc et illum in rebus cominus cernendis parum intersit: quanquam nonnunquam hic illo cominus, ille hoc eminus melius cernat, nec colores et figure feruntur ad visum beneficio splendoris, sed ad oculum velut ad speculum. Ideo enim imagines ille cernuntur in oculo, quas in se oculus ipse non cernit, et id quod cernit non in aere (nam in qua parte aeris?) sed in loco suo cernit, melius peiusve pro viribus suis iactus, neque id sine splendoris auxilio. De sono autem simile quiddam dici potest (...); transl. Trinkaus 1993 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 16), 302.

⁷² Laffranchi 1999 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 17), 259; G. Saitta, *Il pensiero italiano nell’Umanesimo e nel Rinascimento*, vol. 1 *L’umanesimo*, Bologna 1949, 225.

⁷³ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel 1982 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 12), i, 410; cf. ii, 66-7.

⁷⁴ Pace Saitta 1949 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 72), 225 who writes: “Modernamente si potrebbe dire che è il senso che crea le immagini e non viceversa”. For Lactantius’ position see *De*

objects, and even if these images are directly reflected in the eye, nevertheless they have to travel through the air, or whatever medium is present, to the senses. This is clearer in the case of sound. For even though Valla writes that “something similar can be said about sound”, he undermines his own account by writing that voice projects from a solid body into the air, that loud noises can kill animals and even split inanimate things, that is, things which lack senses.⁷⁵

Valla and Ockham

My conclusion is that Valla’s discussion offers no serious starting-points for a comparison with the medieval commentary tradition on the *De anima* and other works. In view of his aversion to scholastic philosophy and terminology in general it is no surprise that his account of the soul does not fit in with the scholastic discussions, but it may surprise that he does not even bother to mention their terms, distinctions and arguments in order to refute them.

Valla does not discuss the Aristotelian faculty psychology and provides us with a much simpler account of direct perception by the soul or rather by one of its potencies, the senses. There is no mentioning of ‘sensible species’ or ‘phantasmata’—crucial terms in the medieval debates on the nature and function of these qualities. It is therefore difficult to maintain that Valla “is undoubtedly referring” to the scholastic controversy about the existence and nature of sensible species.⁷⁶ Moreover, Valla’s discussion about the age-old question of the *direction* of sense perception is not the same as the scholastic controversy about the existence and nature of sensible species: even Ockham, who rejects sensible species, does not question that objects act on the senses with efficient causation to produce cognition, that is, intuitive cognition according to Ockham’s theory.⁷⁷ Valla’s simplification of medieval doctrines is often achieved by simply ignoring them. To a philosophically minded reader his account lacks analytical

opificio Dei, c. 9: “The power of sight of the eyes rests upon the intention of the mind. And so, since the mind (...) uses the eyes as though they were windows, this happens not only to the insane or intoxicated, but also to the sane and sober” (Lactantius, *The Minor Works*, transl. M. F. McDonald, Washington, DC 1965, 29).

⁷⁵ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel 1982 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 12), i, 122; cf. ii, 432 and i, 116, 9–13. What he writes about harmonies is difficult to square with “direct reflection in the sense of hearing” (i, 156, 13–6).

⁷⁶ Trinkaus 1993 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 16), 301.

⁷⁷ *In Libros Sententiarum*, II.13, St. Bonaventure, N.Y. 1981, 276 (Opera Theologica V).

sophistication, for it leaves out almost all the epistemological problems which had vexed the scholastics. But then, Valla would associate analytical sophistication with scholastic hair-splitting and empty words.

Nevertheless, some net results of his discussion look similar to positions formulated by others. Valla's rejection of sensible 'species'—granted that he indeed rejected the concept—reminds one of Ockham, who writes for instance that "a thing itself is seen or apprehended immediately, without any intermediary between itself and the [cognitive] act".⁷⁸ Ockham's rejection of intermediaries however was motivated by epistemological reasons. The postulation of intermediaries—be it the species of scholastics, the 'ideas' of seventeenth-century philosophers or the sense data of twentieth-century analytical philosophers—always give rise to sceptical rejoinders, for how do we know whether the intermediary species, quality or idea is an adequate representation of its object? Ockham wanted to circumvent these sceptical rejoinders by distinguishing intuitive cognition, which gives us direct and correct information about the existence of an object, and abstract cognition which abstracts from judgements of existence or non-existence. This leaves the processes that yield intuitive knowledge however unexplained, but as Stump writes: "proponents of the distinction seem to want to claim that for a certain sort of cognition (. . .) there are *no* mechanisms or processes. There is just direct epistemic contact between the cognizer and the thing cognized".⁷⁹ Direct cognition cannot be explained, precisely because it is direct and defeats further analysis. This may account for the absence of any explanation in Valla's discussion as well.

It has been suggested that Ockham's theory is not as economic as the rejection of species suggests.⁸⁰ The gain as a result of the rejection of species is lost by introducing different kinds of intuitive and abstract cognitive acts as well as a distinct kind of qualities imposed on the sense organs, which strengthens or weakens them. Thus, sensory intuitive cognition in the sensitive soul causes an intellective intuitive cognition of the same object—even though we are not aware of apprehending the same object twice over.⁸¹ Abstract cognitive judgements by which the intellect

⁷⁸ *In Libros Sententiarum*, I.27.3, quoted by E. Stump, *The Mechanisms of Cognition: Ockham on Mediating Species*, in: P. V. Spade (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, Cambridge 1999, 182.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 184; cf. 194-5.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 193-5.

⁸¹ See also E. Karger, *Ockham's Misunderstood Theory of Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition*, in: Spade 1999 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 78), 218.

apprehends a universal are made by the rational soul; the sensitive soul is not capable of such acts of judgement. Thus the apprehending of the universal ultimately derives, on Ockham's account, from the cognised thing that acts on the senses by which a complicated process of acts is occasioned. As Stump summarises: "if an abstractive judgement is formed at all, the first one formed is caused in its turn by the intuitive cognition. In this way, the states of the intellect are determined, ultimately, by something outside the cognizer (...) For Ockham, the intellective does not actively extract anything in perception. Rather, in perceiving, the intellect is acted upon, and its acts are caused to be what they are by the way reality is because some real extramental object or quality causes it to be in a certain state".⁸² Valla has a much simpler picture: it is one and the same soul—not two as in Ockham—which perceives, judges and wills. Nor does Valla introduce a distinction equivalent to Ockham's intuitive and abstract cognition,⁸³ let alone a multiplicity of acts. He simply does not tell us how universals are formed out of sense data. In a passage on truth he even seems to endorse some kind of divine illumination, which enables us to see true concepts or universals, but the passage is too brief and ambiguous to gauge his precise ideas—if he had any.⁸⁴

Valla's criticisms of Aristotelian psychology are based on a highly selective reading of Aristotle's works. In replacing what he took to be Aristotle's account of the soul by an Augustinian one, he ignored the scholastic debates on the processes of sensation and cognition. There is no evidence that he was well-informed about these debates, although his treatment of some general questions such as the relationship between reason and will and that between reason and instinct may have been occasioned by what he read in the literature.

⁸² Stump 1999 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 78), 192.

⁸³ Kessler 1988 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 7), 69-70 has attempted to relate Ockham's concept of 'notitia intuitiva' to Valla's qualities, perceived by the soul and the senses: "die Begriffe oder Intentionen [sind] bei Ockham natürliche Qualitäten in der Seele und daher zumindest verbal identisch mit dem, wovon Valla spricht", but he himself points to the differences between their accounts, which seem to me decisive: "Alles also, was unmittelbar in der Seele gegeben ist und Grundlage von Aussagen zu sein vermag, hat bei Ockham den Charakter der Begrifflichkeit (...) In Vallas System der durch körperliche und geistige Sinne unmittelbar gegebenen seelischen Inhalte dagegen machen die Begriffe (...) nur einen—und nicht einmal den wichtigsten—Teilbereich aus, nämlich den des vierten geistigen Sinnes (...)". Moreover, the epistemological context of Ockham's discussion is absent from Valla's.

⁸⁴ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel 1982 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 12), i, 19. See Nauta 2003 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 14), § 8.

A similar case can be found in his neglect of medieval thinking on language, as I have argued elsewhere.⁸⁵ Though it is plausible that he read Peter of Spain's *Summulae* and Paul of Venice's *Logica parva* and perhaps the logical commentaries of Albert the Great,⁸⁶ he does not show a great familiarity with late-medieval terminist logic. Thus, in spite of the claims of modern scholars that Valla's transformation of medieval metaphysics and logic is nominalist in spirit and continues Ockhamist nominalism, I think this interpretation is untenable on closer inspection. Valla's views on ontology and semantics are very different from Ockham's. The same conclusion holds, I have argued in this article, for his simplification of the Aristotelian account of the soul. It may superficially remind us of Ockham's, but it is in fact entirely different in character and inspiration.

Valla and Renaissance Natural Philosophy

His approach makes it also difficult to bracket Valla with natural philosophers of the later Renaissance such as Telesio and Bacon, as has been done by various scholars. Zippel for instance has argued that Valla foreshadows Renaissance naturalism, formulating positions which "preclude alle soluzioni tardo-rinacimentali del Telesio" or which can be viewed as "la prima consapevole anticipazione storica del pensiero di Bacone".⁸⁷ Fubini too places the *Repastinatio*, the direct influence of which was limited, in the tradition of "la via dell'empirismo razionalistico moderno, che solo molto più tardi, nel secolo di Descartes e di Bacone, avrebbe portato alla fondazione ambiziosa di un 'Novum Organum' della conoscenza".⁸⁸ And Trinkaus argues that Valla has "a place as part of the internal dissidence within the dominant natural philosophy of his own age, the late middle ages and the Renaissance".⁸⁹

It is beyond the scope of this article to go into Valla's critical chapters on Aristotle's natural philosophy, but at least in his discussion of the

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Mack 1993 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 18), 90-2; S. Camporeale, *Lorenzo Valla. Umanesimo e Teologia*, Florence 1972, 122-4. Zippel notices that the library of the Visconti's at Pavia was accessible to scholars and contained a number of relevant scholastic works, which Valla could have studied there (Zippel 1982 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 12), introduction to his edition, i, p. civ).

⁸⁷ Zippel 1982 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 12), introduction to his edition, i, p. cxviii.

⁸⁸ Fubini 1999 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 12), 316.

⁸⁹ Trinkaus 1993 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 16), 322.

soul we do not find much evidence for these claims.⁹⁰ It is rather his thorough simplification of the naturalistic account of sensation and cognition of Aristotle and his followers which made it difficult to uphold an experiential basis for such an account. As Park has rightly observed, the medieval kind of psychology “was more than an abstract system; it had in addition a strong observational component. Nonetheless, it remained experiential rather than experimental in character, relying on common experience to suggest and confirm rather than to test proffered explanations. The physical model it assumed was a simple hydraulic one, based on a clear localisation of psychological function by organ or system of organs”.⁹¹ By replacing such a faculty psychology with a strong observational basis by a simplified, Augustinian account in which it is stressed that it is one and the same soul which perceives, judges and wills, Valla is clearly not foreshadowing early-modern “empirismo razionalistico”.

To mention just one example: Valla’s view that animals too have a rational soul is not inspired by a consistently naturalist approach towards men as part of the natural world. He still adheres to an Augustinian account of the creation of man’s soul as reflecting the Trinity, and rather inconsistently ascribes to animals too a soul created by divine aid. A theory of cognition is conspicuously absent from Valla’s work, while this has always occupied a central place in the philosophy of the scholastics and those who transformed it in the direction of a mechanistic-naturalist philosophy such as Telesio and Hobbes. As is well known, Hobbes reduced sense perception to local motions in the body, caused by external objects. The understanding is nothing but a special form of imagination, which man has in common with animals.⁹² Telesio had already argued that the intellect is a continuation of the senses, and that the difference between man and animals is only one of degree, “human spirit being more fine and copious than that of other animals”.⁹³ Since Valla does not present any alternative for the scholastic and naturalist accounts of sensation and cognition, it is difficult to maintain that his critique of the Aristotelian

⁹⁰ More on this in a forthcoming article of mine, *Valla and Renaissance natural philosophy*.

⁹¹ Park 1988 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 40), 469. Cf. Des Chene 2000 (*op. cit.*, above, n. 15), esp. ch. 1.

⁹² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 2 (*English Works*, ed. W. Molesworth, 11 vols., London 1839, iii, 11).

⁹³ Telesio, *De rerum natura iuxta propria principia*, ed. C. Vasoli, Hildesheim-New York 1971 (= repr. of 1586), 333, quoted by K. Schuhmann, *Hobbes and Telesio*, in: *Hobbes Studies*, 1 (1988), 109-33, on 116.

scientia de anima has a place in either Ockhamist nominalism or in Renaissance naturalism.

Valla's rejection of scholastic terminology is motivated by his wish to return to classical Latin. The eloquent Latin of the great authors should be point of departure in all our intellectual exercises. A good, adequate description of the world requires a sound grasp of all the semantic and grammatical features of the Latin language. An abuse of this language has created the philosophical muddles of the scholastics. Thus, Valla's virulent anti-Aristotelianism is primarily motivated by linguistic reasons and fuelled by his aversion to claims which go beyond common sense and thereby beyond ordinary language, that is, the language of the great authors, which in his view adequately reflects common sense. His criticisms—often pertinent and interesting but at the same time self-contradictory and inconsistent—were those of an outsider, someone who intentionally placed himself in strong opposition to those he criticised. Their mode of thinking, distinctions and terminology were not his, but neither were their *problems* his. And this rendered his rhetorico-linguistic critique ineffective, for science and philosophy require more than what the senses register and what the particular language (classical Latin in Valla's case) we have learned to speak or write can express.

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