

From an Outsider's Point of View: Lorenzo Valla on the Soul

Lodi Nauta

University of Groningen

Abstract

In his *Repastinatio* . . . Lorenzo Valla launched a heavy attack on Aristotelian-scholastic thought. While most of this book is devoted to metaphysics, language and argumentation, Valla also incorporates chapters on the soul and natural philosophy. Using as criteria good Latin, common sense and common observation, he rejected much of standard Aristotelian teaching on the soul, replacing the hylopmorphic account of the scholastics by an Augustinian one. In this article his arguments on the soul's autonomy, nobility and independency from the body are studied and analysed. His critique of Aristotle's opinions on natural phenomena as being untrue to what we observe will also be briefly studied. His arguments do not show him always to be deep or consistent thinker, but the critical review of Aristotelian philosophy proceeds from some philosophically interesting assumptions. Moreover, from a broader historical perspective his undermining of Aristotle's authority may be regarded as a contribution to the final demise of the Aristotelian paradigm, even though the humanist critique was just one factor in this process.

Keywords

Lorenzo Valla, soul, humanism, Augustinianism

1. Introduction: An Archcritic of Aristotelian Philosophy in our Midst?

Today one no longer needs to excuse bringing humanism into a discussion on Aristotelian traditions regarding the *scientia de anima*.¹ Humanists contrib-

¹ See Dennis Des Chene, *Life's Form. Late Aristotelian Conceptions of the Soul* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2000), 11 n. 3 on the term "*scientia de anima*". The term "*psychologia*" was coined by the German humanist Joannes Thomas Freigius in 1575 (Kathleen Park and Eckhard Kessler, "The Concept of Psychology", in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. C. Schmitt, Q. Skinner and E. Kessler (Cambridge/New York, 1988), 455-463, 455.

uted significantly to the rediscovery, dissemination and understanding of a great number of important texts on natural philosophy, medicine, and mathematics. Through textual studies, they also influenced scientific practices and techniques, as well as fostered new ideas on scientific methodology.² Humanists interested in Aristotelian psychology turned to the Greek text of the *De anima*. New translations were made, though older ones, particularly that of William of Moerbeke, remained in use.³ They also explored the ancient commentary tradition on Aristotle, editing and translating the works of, for example, Philoponus, Simplicius and Themistius.

Lorenzo Valla (1406-1457), however, is not generally associated with natural philosophy or psychology. Certainly, Valla was one of the most important humanists of Quattrocento Italy. His *Elegantiae linguae Latinae* became an international bestseller and gave the humanist programme some of its most trenchant and combative formulations. Valla has long been understood to be an extremely hostile critic of all things Aristotelian—someone who accused the entire *natio peripatetica* of presenting a skewed picture of the supernatural and natural world, and of man. This picture, he implied, was based on their complete misunderstanding of Latin and of the workings of language more generally. Valla thus attacked the Aristotelian-scholastic tradition *tout court*, disproving of their language, methods and approaches.⁴

² See Ann Blair and Anthony Grafton, “Reassessing Humanism and Science”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53 (1992) 529-540, and Anthony Grafton and Nancy Siraisi, “Introduction”, in *Natural Particulars. Nature and the Disciplines in Renaissance Europe*, ed. A. Grafton and N. Siraisi (Cambridge, 1999), 1-21, for a resumé of the historiographical debates, with further literature. For an excellent survey see Luca Bianchi, “Continuity and Change in the Aristotelian Tradition”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. J. Hankins (Cambridge, 2007), 49-71, as well as his *Studi sull’Aristotelismo del Rinascimento* (Padua, 2003). Cf. also Stephen Menn, “The Intellectual Setting”, in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Garbers and Michael Ayers (Cambridge/New York, 1998), 33-86, esp. 78 n. 35.

³ Eugenio Garin, “Le traduzioni umanistiche di Aristotele nel secolo XV”, *Atti dell’Accademia fiorentina di scienze morali ‘La Colombaria’* 16 (1951) 55-104; Ferdinand E. Cranz, “Perspectives de la Renaissance sur le ‘De Anima’”, *Platon et Aristote à la Renaissance: XVIe Colloque international de Tours* (Paris, 1976), 359-76; Charles B. Schmitt, *Aristotle and the Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1983), 64-88; Ferdinand E. Cranz and Charles B. Schmitt, *A Bibliography of Aristotle Editions, 1501-1600*, 2nd ed. (Baden-Baden, 1984), 165-67; Park and Kessler, “Concept of Psychology”, 458. In the fifteenth century *De anima* was translated by the Byzantine émigrés George of Trebizond and Johannes Argyropoulos; at least five more translations into Latin followed in the sixteenth century.

⁴ A critical discussion of Valla’s programme is presented in my forthcoming book *In Defense of Common Sense. Lorenzo Valla’s Humanist Critique of Scholastic Philosophy* (I Tatti Studies in

Although such an attitude, which is not only specifically anti-Aristotelian but also generally anti-philosophical, may not initially seem useful for considering transformations in Aristotelian psychology, there are several reasons why it is interesting to bring Valla into the picture. Valla did in fact write about the soul—namely in the context of his attacks on Aristotelian-scholastic thought. As he himself observes, his reformation of Aristotelian metaphysics and dialectics had to include moral and natural philosophy; indeed the chapter on natural philosophy in his *Dialectica* is among the longest in the work.⁵ These are not the most widely studied parts of Valla's corpus, and it is worthwhile to explore both his treatment of these themes and their relationship to his broader critical aims. My contribution, however, is limited to his remarks on the soul.

Various scholars have argued that Valla's criticisms of Aristotelian natural philosophy helped pave the way for innovation in the philosophy and science of the later Renaissance. For instance, Charles Trinkaus has stressed the nature of Valla's empiricism, which appeals to common sense and observation. Though careful to avoid securing "a place for Valla in the history of natural science", Trinkaus concedes that Valla, "does have a place as part of the internal dissidence within the dominant natural philosophy of his own age, the late middle ages and the Renaissance".⁶ Other scholars have located Valla more firmly within the tradition of dissident thinkers, which finally culminated in the rise of the new science of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Gianni Zippel thus has suggested that Valla foreshadowed Renaissance naturalism in formulating positions which "prelude late-Renaissance solutions of Telesio".⁷ Zippel views Valla's position as "the first conscious anticipation in

Renaissance History I, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., March 2009). This article is based on parts of chapter 4. Some of the same ground is covered in Lodi Nauta, "Lorenzo Valla's Critique of Aristotelian Psychology", *Vivarium* 41 (2003), 120-143. I shall refrain from giving extensive documentation here. See esp. C. Vasoli, *La dialettica e la retorica dell'Umanesimo* (Milan, 1968), 28-77, P. Mack, *Renaissance Argument. Renaissance Argument. Valla and Agricola in the Traditions of Rhetoric and Dialectic* (Leiden, 1993), M. Laffranchi, *Dialettica e filosofia in Lorenzo Valla* (Milan, 1999); L. Nauta, "William of Ockham and Lorenzo Valla: False Friends. Semantics and Ontological Reduction", *Renaissance Quarterly* 56 (2003), 613-651; idem, "Valla's Critique"; idem, "Lorenzo Valla and the Rise of Humanist Dialectic", in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. J. Hankins (Cambridge/New York, 2007), 193-210.

⁵ Valla, *Repastinatio dialectice et philosophie*, ed. Gianni Zippel, Padua 1982, 2 vols (= Valla 1982), vol. I, 7.

⁶ Charles Trinkaus, "Lorenzo Valla's Anti-Aristotelian Natural Philosophy", *I Tatti Studies. Essays in the Renaissance* 5 (1993), 279-325, 322.

⁷ Zippel's introduction to Valla 1982, I, cxviii ("la prima consapevole anticipazione storica del pensiero di Bacone").

history of Bacon's thought", and claims that his interests in natural science were based "on a very precise inductive and experimental approach".⁸ Not dissimilarly, Riccardo Fubini placed Valla's *Repastinatio* in the tradition of "la via dell'empirismo razionalistico moderno", despite admitting its limited influence on Valla's contemporaries. This "road of modern rationalist empiricism... only much later in the age of Bacon and Descartes, would become the ambitious foundation of the New Science of knowledge".⁹

Valla has been linked not only to later developments in the Renaissance, but also to the so-called critical tendencies in later medieval thought, especially the nominalism of William of Ockham. Indeed, it has become something of an orthodoxy to call Valla a "nominalist" and an "Ockhamist" on account of his simple ontology and his critique of abstract terms. Moreover, Valla's account of the soul has been linked to Ockham, since both seem to reject species as a kind of intermediary in the process of cognition.¹⁰

The nature of Valla's general programme—an anti-philosophical crusade against the Aristotelian-scholastic worldview—is also valuable to the understanding of Aristotelian psychology because his agenda is carried out using some philosophically interesting ideas and approaches. After all, the history of philosophy is shaped not only by its practitioners but also by its critics. A modern historian can acknowledge and analyse ideas without necessarily endorsing them. Valla's strategy is to attack what he considers the "*fundamenta*" of the Aristotelian edifice.¹¹ This does not require an examination of each and every stone. Rather, for him it is sufficient to demonstrate that the foundations of the edifice are highly unstable; they were built upon the quicksand of a language and methodology largely unrelated to the ways in which people normally view and describe the world. Valla therefore strives to present an alternative to that scholastic approach, which he finds abstract, theoretical and rather unscientific. He wants to study words, propositions and argumentations as they occur in real life situations, understanding each in the original

⁸ Zippel's introduction to Valla 1982, I, cxviii and cxviii-cxx ("una più precisa impostazione induttiva e sperimentale della ricerca").

⁹ Riccardo Fubini, "Contributo per l'interpretazione della *Dialectica* di Lorenzo Valla", in *Filosofia e scienza classica, arabo-latina medievale e l'età moderna*, ed. G. F. Vescovini (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1999), 289-316, 316 ("via dell'empirismo razionalistico moderno").

¹⁰ Trinkaus, "Valla's Anti-Aristotelian Natural Philosophy", 301. For criticisms of this interpretation of Valla as a nominalist see Lodi Nauta, "William of Ockham and Lorenzo Valla" and idem, *In Defense of Common Sense*, ch. 1-3.

¹¹ See e.g. the title of the second version *Reconcinnatio totius dialectice et fundamentorum universalis philosophie*. Valla's text is extant in three versions (see below, section 2).

context from which it derives its meaning and function.¹² The basis for Valla's rejection of scholastic thought is thus two-fold: valid human knowledge requires both a common sense picture of the world and a language—that is, good classical Latin—which possesses all the resources and refinement necessary to describe that world. The latter, at least, was fairly typical of humanist tastes.

Significantly, Valla's objective was more than merely aesthetic; it constituted a serious philosophical message: the linguistic basis of law, theology, philosophy and in fact of all intellectual activities. The programme accordingly attempts to make the study of language into an incisive tool, one able to expose all manner of errors and misunderstandings. Valla also assumes that the use of language is far from harmless, since it is essential to thinking and writing. Consequently, whoever misunderstands either words or their use will inevitably fall prey to muddled thinking and empty theorizing. It is not necessary to agree with this as a diagnosis of scholastic thought, to allow that Valla's position is philosophically relevant.

This discussion of the soul is but one of the many questions and issues raised by Valla's position. The account is neither terribly profound nor relatively original. It is not even a particularly representative example of his general programme: the binding of philosophical speculation to what the senses can register and to that which a particular language—namely, classical Latin—can express through grammar. Nevertheless it contains some thought-provoking arguments and ideas. Valla's thorough simplification of the traditional picture may be regarded as one type of answer to the Aristotelian paradigm: one can also reform a paradigm by simply ignoring the questions and issues which form its core (which is not to say that this was Valla's only tactic.)

Before turning our focus to Valla's discussion of the soul, it may be helpful to introduce his *Dialectica*, in which his critique of Aristotelian-scholastic philosophy is mainly found.

2. Valla's *Dialectica*

Valla began his *Dialectica* in Pavia in the early 1430s; the first version is entitled *Repastinatio dialectice et philosophiæ* (the recultivating or resowing of the

¹² See Nauta, "Lorenzo Valla and the Rise of Humanist Dialectic", and idem, *In Defense of Common Sense*.

traditional ground of dialectic and philosophy).¹³ The work is no less ambitious than its title suggests. In Book I Valla attempts to undermine Aristotelian-scholastic metaphysics by criticising a number of its fundamental tenets. Some of the precepts which come under particular fire from Valla include: the ten categories—substance, and the nine accidental ones, including quality, quantity and relation); the six transcendental terms such as “good”, “one” and “true”; concepts—the predicables, such as genus and species, by which a thing can be defined and placed in the so-called tree of Porphyry; form and matter, and act and potency. According to Valla, whenever these terms, concepts, and distinctions are couched in ungrammatical or even rebarbative Latin, they complicate and confuse one’s understanding of the world, rather than enlighten or clarify it. Valla maintains that one’s understanding should be based on common sense and expressed in good, classical Latin. Book I further includes chapters on material and spiritual substance. The former constitute a critique of Aristotelian natural philosophy; the latter treat God, the soul and the virtues.

Valla follows this analysis with an attempt in Books II and III to convert the formal scholastic study of Aristotelian logic into a rhetorical-grammatical dialectic, one tailored to the practical needs of public debate, communication and argumentation. Seeking to considerably extend the range of admissible arguments, Valla draws upon Cicero, Quintilian and the Roman ideal of the orator. Accordingly, he is less concerned with the formal validity of argumentation, which he finds rather narrow if not insipid, and more concerned with its practical efficacy. Does it convince its audience? Thus Valla rejects the formal approach of the scholastics in favour of a dialectic based on real language, on arguments studied in context. And what counts as context for Valla is far more expansive than the single sentence structure of the scholastic example.

He continued to work on the *Dialectica*, undertaking a major revision in the 1440s while at the court of King Alfonso of Aragon. A second revision was cut short by Valla’s death in 1457. None of the three surviving versions of the text achieved a breadth of circulation remotely comparable to that of Valla’s handbook on Latin, the *Elegantiae linguae Latinae*. Nevertheless, Book I of the *Dialectica*—or *Repastinatio* as I prefer to call it, after the first version—is of special relevance for our purposes.¹⁴

¹³ Or perhaps rather: “cutting back”, “weeding out”, “*repastinatio*” being used in this sense by Tertullian in his *Exhortatio castitatis*; noticed by Erika Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance and the Reformation* (Cambridge, 1995), 156.

¹⁴ For the text see Zippel’s edition. Vol. 1 (pp. 1-356) contains Valla’s third version, including a critical apparatus which lists variant readings from the second version. Vol. 2 (pp. 357-598) contains the first version.

Here, employing an alternative ontology—a rather grand word which he would strongly dislike—Valla challenges that of the scholastics. His own is very simple: the world consists of things; these things can be analysed as substances with their respective qualities and acts.¹⁵ The primary things, therefore, are not substances, since substance cannot exist by itself; it is always already informed by quality. These are called things (*res*) by Valla, a simple common word which he obviously likes. The three categories into which a thing can be analysed are also called things: quality is a thing, action is a thing and substance is a thing. Hence, “thing” is a transcendental term, transcending the categories; in fact, it is the only transcendental term: the other five or six—good, one, being, and so forth—can all be reduced to thing.¹⁶ To another basic division, that between body and soul (or spirit), Valla adds a third class which he calls “animal”, consisting of both and rather similar to the Aristotelian notion of the composite.¹⁷

Valla does not arrive at this picture by systematically reviewing all of the doctrines of the scholastics, but by assuming that language gives us a direct approach to the world. Behind his triad—substance, quality and action—clearly lie the grammatical categories of noun, adjective and adverb, and verb. Hence, there is no need for other accidental categories such as relation, quantity, place or time. Grammatically, these too are qualities of things. Thus being two meters tall is a quality, as is being white or a father. This conclusion leads Valla to explore in detail the multifarious ways through which things are talked about, and many observations he makes here are pertinent and interesting.¹⁸

Not that there is a simple one to one relationship between language and the world. Valla notes many instances where the superficial grammar of an expression can mislead; a verb, for instance does not always refer to an action. And when one states that qualities are things which “are present to the substance”, this wrongly suggests that they can exist apart from one another, but, Valla says, “we cannot speak otherwise”.¹⁹ In general, however, the grammatical and semantical features of classical Latin offer reliable guidelines for expressing our views of the world, ourselves and our beliefs. In Valla’s mind the Latin of the

¹⁵ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 46-50, 110-115, 127-134, 134-156, and in fact passim. For a good discussion see Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, 22-116. A more extensive treatment can be found in chapters 1-3 of my *In Defense of Common Sense*.

¹⁶ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 11-21.

¹⁷ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 49, 422-424.

¹⁸ See esp. *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 134-156.

¹⁹ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 365.

great authors of antiquity is closely connected with the common speech of the people (*populus*). I shall not discuss his rationale,²⁰ but it is important to realise that, for Valla, classical Latin is not only a language suited for higher intellectual and literary pursuits such as oratory, poetry and composition, but also an instrument for speaking, writing and thinking about the world in general. It is semantically precise, syntactically complex and rich in vocabulary. Whoever lacks this *facultas loquendi* is bound to go wrong in speaking, writing and thinking.²¹ Throughout the discussion, Valla lets himself be ruled by this idea that good Latin is the perfect vehicle for expressing our common worldview, assuming that what common sense tells us is plain enough.

3. Valla's Discussion of the Soul

Having sketched some of Valla's main ideas, it is now possible to consider his discussion of the soul. This, together with his chapter on God, constitutes Valla's account of "incorporeal substance" (or spirit), which is followed by a long discussion of "corporeal substance" (body). Valla advances an understanding of God and the soul that is strikingly similar to his representation of a thing—by definition, consisting of substance, quality and action. Thus, as Valla says in the first version of his work, God is divine substance—the three Persons of which can be called qualities.²² Such a formulation could easily lead to accusations of Sabellian heresy, according to which each Person of the Trinity is merely a mode or aspect of the one Godhead. Though it was not his intention to give support to heretical views, Valla was duly lined up by later critics of Trinitarian theology such as Lelio Sozzini.

The same model of substance-plus-qualities is applied to the soul.²³ Valla compares both God and the soul to the sun—a favourite and traditional

²⁰ See Mirko Tavoni, *Latino, grammatica, volgare: Storia di una questione umanistica* (Padua, 1984), Silvia Rizzo, *Ricerche sul latino umanistico* (Rome, 2002) Mariangela Regoliosi, "Le *Elementie* del Valla come 'grammatica' antinormativa", *Studi di grammatica italiana* 19 (2000), 315-336, and Nauta, *In Defense of Common Sense* ("Conclusion").

²¹ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 5, 145, 278 and elsewhere.

²² *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 402-408. For Valla's controversial ideas on the Trinity see Salvatore Camporeale, *Lorenzo Valla: Umanesimo e teologia* (Florence, 1972); Charles Trinkaus, "Lorenzo Valla on the Problem of Speaking about the Trinity", *The Journal of the History of Ideas* 57 (1996) 27-53, and Nauta, *In Defense of Common Sense*, ch. 6.

²³ For his chapter on the soul see *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 59-73 (second and third version) and 408-419 (first version). I shall not treat the differences between them here.

analogy.²⁴ The sun is substance with three essential qualities (or, as Valla prefers to say, natural qualities): vibration, light and heat. These qualities are also found in the three Persons of the Trinity, as well as in the human soul—the three essential qualities of which are memory, reason and will. The activities of the soul are thus compared to the vibrating and radiant beams of the sun by which things are grasped, illuminated and heated.²⁵

sun	<i>vibratus</i>	<i>lux</i>	<i>ardor</i>
soul	memory	reason	will
God	<i>eternitas</i>	<i>sapientia</i>	<i>bonitas</i>

Using this model and argument, Valla stresses that the soul is a substance, not a quality. As he says: a substance—that is, a composite thing—is made of matter and form, and the soul is likewise a substance, being made of body (or rather essence) and form.²⁶

Valla thus does not accept the Aristotelian definition of the 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”). Though Valla quotes the definition, he does not really discuss it. This definition, however, was absolutely fundamental to the scholastics. Each word, as one scholar recently said, became “a site of contention, a ‘point of heresy’ dividing one school from another”.²⁷ In Valla’s account, form is the same as quality and the soul is simply not a quality—not of a human or an animal being; calling it a substantial form would not change

²⁴ On the place of the sun in Renaissance thinking, see Eugenio Garin, *La cultura filosofica del Rinascimento italiano* (Florence, 1961), 432-441; Charles Trinkaus, “Italian Humanism and Scholastic Theology”, in *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms and Legacy*, 3 vols., ed. Albert Rabil, Jr., (Philadelphia, 1988). Mario Fois, *Il pensiero cristiano di Lorenzo Valla nel quadro storico-culturale del suo ambiente* (Rome, 1969), 541 points to Tertullian, Lactantius and St Basil as possible sources.

²⁵ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 71 and 410.

²⁶ Valla, *Repastinatio*, 46: “Quod cum ita sit, primum predicamentum (ut Boetio libuit) vocetur ‘substantia’. Nam corpus e materia constat et forma, sive essentia et qualitate, et item animam constare confitendum est”. Cf. 113: “et usitatus multoque accomodatius est vocabulum ‘qualitas’ quam ‘forma’, sicut ‘essentia’ quam ‘materia’”. In spite of Valla’s sensitivity to words, he struggles with “metaphysical” terms such as substance, essence, matter and quality: in the first version he talks of a thing in terms of “consubstance” existing of substance and quality; in the later versions this becomes substance existing of essence and quality.

²⁷ Des Chene, *Life’s Form*, 68 on *De anima* 412a20.

that fact.²⁸ This argument raises the question of the nature of the relationship between substance and quality: is the soul identical with its qualities—that is, with its powers—or are they ontologically distinct? The scholastics themselves were divided on this point. Augustinians had initially argued that the difference between the soul and its powers is merely verbal; the soul being identical to its powers, these names refer only to the diverse actions of a single entity. Once the writings of Avicenna and Averroes became known, scholastic authors began to accept the notion of an essential distinction between the soul and its powers. Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, for instance, described them as substance and its qualities or as essence and its accidents.²⁹ Nominalists, however, generally maintained the Augustinian line that no real difference exists.³⁰

Though his overall approach is more Augustinian than Aristotelian, Valla's description of the soul and its capacities as substance and its qualities unwittingly sides with Thomistic teachings against Ockhamist ones. Qualities cannot be absent from the substance, but are not identical with it. Nevertheless, Valla also says that it is one and the same soul which carries out all the functions assigned to its three powers: memory, reason and will. Memory, Valla says, comprehends and retains things. Reason examines and judges them. Will desires or rejects them. But, since one and the same soul does all this, it does in fact seem as though substance and quality are only different names for the soul's different actions.³¹ Valla does not draw out fully the consequences of

²⁸ Valla rejects the notion of substantial form (ed. Zippel, 112-113), but he too must formulate a kind of inseparability requirement in order to sort essential qualities out from accidental ones, which results in his distinction between "natural" and "non-natural" qualities (113). "Natural qualities" comprise *both differentiae* (in their strict sense: distinguishing species within a genus) and universal accidents, such as colour, shape, touch and weight. For his idea is that each thing must have some colour and shape, and hence be inseparable from its subject, just like heat in fire. But this coupling of different types of "natural qualities" is not unproblematic, for, unlike heat in fire, the existence of colour does not distinguish a species from other species: whiteness does not distinguish man from horse. Elsewhere, however, he gives the traditional, strict sense of *differentia*, viz. a quality which distinguishes a species from other species (169). See ch. 1 of my *In Defense of Common Sense*, and, more briefly, Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, 46-47.

²⁹ E.g. Albert the Great, *De homine* 1.73.2.2.2; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-I, q. 77, art. 6 ("Utrum potentiae animae fluent ab eius essentia"). See Pius Künzle, *Das Verhältnis der Seele zu ihren Potenzen* (Freiburg, 1956), 144-218.

³⁰ For Ockham's arguments concerning the soul and its faculties, see *In Libros Sententiarum* II.24 (Ockham 1981). Cf. Kathleen Park, "Albert's influence on late medieval psychology", in *Albertus Magnus and the Sciences*, ed. J. A. Weisheipl (Toronto, 1980), 501-535, 517-519 and Des Chene, *Life's Form*, 143-154 (on the late-scholastic debate).

³¹ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 66, 75, 410.

these various statements or of their apparent contradictions. He is very much concerned with the unity of the soul, yet he also speaks about its qualities in terms of autonomous powers which have the ability to act upon one another. The will, for instance, is said to teach the intellect—not the converse.³²

Therefore Valla is certainly a dualist; soul and body are very different substances. For this very reason Valla reacts against the Tree of Porphyry, which has substance at the top and its first *differentiae* as corporeal and incorporeal. Valla replaces this with multiple trees: one for body, another for soul, and even adds a third tree for “animal” which is the composite of the first two.³³ Valla must then account for how the gap between body and soul is bridged. The soul permeates the body, he says; it is present in the senses, in the heart and throughout the body. It is the soul that perceives. The soul (or rather its powers) therefore influences the body. The will, for instance, provides the body with its warmth, while reason gives the body its ingenuous system of humours (*solertam distributionem humorum*).³⁴ But the soul is also influenced by the body, e.g. a headache or drunkenness affects our mental capacities. When we are tired we become angry more easily. Valla does not delve far into how the two substances interact, which is hardly surprising given that to this day treatment of the subject remains tricky at best. But his contemporary philosophers did raise a question, one which Valla does not consider, concerning what the physiological dependency of the soul reveals about the ontological category in which it should be placed.³⁵

Valla, however, does make it clear that the soul must not be considered in the same manner as one would an ordinary thing. For example, rest and movement are not terms we can apply to the soul, nor, for that matter, to God.

³² *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 411 and elsewhere.

³³ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 46-50. Though he makes some interesting points, Valla's own proposal is not without its problems.

³⁴ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 71-72.

³⁵ See Kathleen Park, “The organic soul”, in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. C. Schmitt, Q. Skinner and E. Kessler (Cambridge/New York, 1988), 464-484, 468 and Des Chene, *Life's Form*, 71. On the late-scholastic question of whether soul is substance or accident see Des Chene, *Life's Form*, 67-102. Valla makes a brief remark on the status of animal soul—namely that it cannot be a quality, for one may ask: a quality of *what thing*? Therefore, it must be a substance, which implies that it is “created out of nothing, with divine aid”, rather than from “the potency of matter” (65:3-16, a section added only in the third version of the *Repastinatio*). The idea that a soul (of whatever type) would depend on or arise out of material body was an anathema for Valla. In general, scholastics were less adverse to it, since they generally distinguished between human soul (created by God) and other substantial forms (generated by natural processes).

(Accordingly, he finds the description of God as the unmoved mover both ridiculous and impious). 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 responsible for the diffusion of the heat, causing bodily effects. Nevertheless, the soul itself is in neither rest nor movement.³⁶

Yet even Valla cannot avoid terminology that treats the soul an object which is capable of various actions. Thus the soul, permeating throughout the body, is also present in the senses. Valla here emphasises that the soul can (and often does) actively participate in the process of perception, rather than being a mere passive recipient of an outside world acting upon it. He thus discusses the direction of perception: is it the power of the senses which actively go out to meet the objects (a position known as extramission) or, vice versa, are the objects sending forth their images to the (passive) senses (intramission).³⁷ Valla says that, because the soul is present in the senses, it is much easier for our soul to extend, by means of the eye's rays, to colours than it is for colours to come into the eyes. He clearly favours extramission, which he thinks does more justice to the autonomous status of the soul than the alternative theory. In spite of some ambiguous phrasing, Valla seems to suggest that the soul emits its rays via the eyes, which rays, when fallen on an object, are then reflected and received by the eye, the eye functioning as a kind of "mirror" (*ad oculum velut ad speculum*). The soul then does not see the rays or images carried through the medium, but rather sees the object in its own place, and, the sharper and brighter the rays, the better the object is seen. This discussion does not employ the term "species" or "phantasm". While the term "*imago*", which Valla does infrequently use here, is taken over from Lactantius, it does not function in the same way.

This choice of words may be a deliberate stratagem on Valla's part. He neglects to mention species and phantasms, and ignores the entire panoply of souls and faculties. Valla rejects the existence of a plurality of souls, or as he says "the vegetative, sensitive, imaginative and rational souls".³⁸ He further

³⁶ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 72. Valla criticises Aristotle here, but both were in fact quite aware of the danger of treating the soul as a thing. Before presenting his own theory of the soul, in book II of the *De anima*, Aristotle raised a number of pertinent questions in book I; he criticised Plato, for instance, for taking the soul to be a magnitude—not unlike the sort of criticism that Valla makes.

³⁷ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 155-156. Valla's explanation is rather obscure; see Nauta, "Valla's Critique", and idem, *In Defense of Common Sense*, ch. 4.

³⁸ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 409. The separate mention of the "imaginative soul" is odd, since imagination, as one of the internal senses, belongs to the sensitive soul.

rejects the *sensus communis*, omitting such faculties as the *vis aestimativa* and imagination.³⁹ The result is an uncomplicated, Augustinian depiction of the soul as a wholly spiritual and immaterial substance which was made in the image of God, and, though it is a unity, consists of memory, intellect and will. This representation does not explain a number of processes, including sensation and cognition.

This Augustinian representation and his rejection of the vegetative and sensitive souls do have some noteworthy consequences for his ideas about the soul of animals, the soul of plants, and about cognition. Of these, the first seems to be the most significant.

Men are not alone in possessing a rational soul; animals also do.⁴⁰ The debate over whether animals are capable of reason was, of course, longstanding. In classical Antiquity, as Richard Sorabji has shown, the case for animal reason was remarkably strong and diverse. Its arguments were based on the capacities which animals supposedly had in common with men—namely, perception, memory, preparation, emotion, some form of communicative speech, skills, virtues, vices and the liability to madness.⁴¹ For Valla the case for animal reason was different. It follows from the unity of the soul. Since the capacities of the soul are so closely connected, and since animals—like humans—have a will and memory, they too must possess a rational soul. As is typical of Valla, he also supports his position by introducing linguistic considerations, quoting Quintilian, his favourite author. The Latin rhetor, arguing that “animals have thought and understanding to a certain extent”, had regarded speech as the main difference between man and animals.⁴² Valla adds that *logos* had been confused by later philosophers who thought that “a-loga” means “without reason”, though initially it meant only “without speech”. The etymology of *logos* from *lego* (I speak, I say) is further evidence, says Valla. Thus, for him, the capacity to speak—rather than the predicate “rational”—distinguishes men from animals.

This line of argument further implies that animal souls are also created by God—thus a substance created from nothing, and not fashioned from pre-

³⁹) *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 73.

⁴⁰) *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 67-68.

⁴¹) Richard Sorabji, *Animal minds and human morals: The origin of the Western debate* (Ithaca, 1993), 30-96.

⁴²) Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 2.16.15-16, transl. Russell 2001, vol. 1, 373. Valla presents the same argument in his gloss to Quintilian; see L. Valla, *Le Postille all'Instituto Oratoria' di Quintiliano*, ed. L. Cesarini Martinelli and A. Perosa (Padua, 1996), 70, with the editor's comment on pp. lvii-lviii.

existing material. Valla claims that all schools of philosophers have denied this.⁴³ But what then is the difference between human and animal souls? Valla answers that the former are directly inspired by God, having been made in his image; animal souls do not share this honour. Moreover, though animal souls are created with divine aid, they are mortal. Valla thus safeguards the privileged position of the human soul. Nevertheless, his criterion for discriminating between the two is unclear. What he rejects is the notion that one can separate animal from human by distinguishing instinct from reason, which, as Valla writes, is “to take shelter under tricks of terminology”.⁴⁴ Instinct is nothing more than a sort of impulse (*impetus*), which men also possess when they are excited; hence they are called “*instincti*”. Impulse arises from the *will*, by which assertion Valla subverts the argument that the presence of instinct entails a lack of *reason*. Aristotle, therefore, was wrong, Valla continues, to claim that animals and young children lack the power to choose (*electio*) because they lack reason. This critique, however, misrepresents Aristotle—perhaps deliberately, since his opinion was actually that reason develops as children grow older—appetite being the primary faculty in the early years of their life. In fact, Valla elsewhere quotes Aristotle’s *Politics* on this tenet.⁴⁵

A second consequence of Valla’s rejection of the plurality of souls concerns the ontological status of plants. While animals are—so to speak—upgraded, plants are downgraded; they do not have a soul. Valla draws on the Stoics and Epicureans for support, claiming they too denied that plants have an ensouled principle, on the grounds that plants lack appetite, soul and reason.⁴⁶ His view was not uncontroversial. Later, Suarez, for instance, wrote that “certain moderns (so I am told) have dared to deny that the vegetative form, considered

⁴³ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 65.

⁴⁴ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 67 and 409. A common view, for which Avicenna was an important source, was that the seemingly rational behaviour of animals is due to the estimative faculty; Dag Nikolaus Hasse, *Avicenna’s ‘De anima’ in the Latin West: The Formation of a Peripatetic Philosophy of the Soul 1160–1300* (London/Turin, 2000), 127–53. Aquinas took up Avicenna’s idea that animals have a natural estimative faculty, which for instance enables a sheep to apprehend the danger of the wolf (Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-I, q. 78, art. 4.; cf. Sorabji, *Animal Minds*, 64 and 75, 86 and 113). In the source apparatus Zippel (67:21 ad loc.) cites 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”.

⁴⁵ *Politics* VII.15, 1334b22 (not 1334a17–18 as given by Zippel), quoted at *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 62. Cf. *Politics* I.13, 1260a12–14 (reason may be complete or incomplete). This is part of Aristotle’s reply to Plato who had said that some people never acquire reason and others only late (*Republic* 441A–B). See Sorabji, *Animal Minds*, 70.

⁴⁶ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 60.

absolutely [*praecise*], is a soul; and consequently they deny that plants are alive".⁴⁷ Valla is correct that Stoics and Epicureans generally denied an "ensouled" principle to plants;⁴⁸ the question of how plants live if not by the presence of a soul, however, remains. Valla's argument drives him to the brink of concluding that they actually do not live, but there he seems to hesitate, perhaps because such a statement would contradict the ordinary usage of the word "live". Hence, if they must be said to live at all, it can only be said "metaphorically" (*metaphorice*), just as we use "living" (*vivus*) in other metaphorical expressions such as "flowing water" (*aqua viva*) and "glowing sulphur" (*sulphur vivum*).⁴⁹ References to plants as "living" in the bible and in Gregorius of Nyssa ("they do live but they do not sense") make him conclude that plants may be said to live not by having a soul but by their *viriditas* (greenness or, rather, liveliness or power to grow). If by *viriditas* Valla means the power to grow, as the quotation purportedly suggests, his position may be said to come close to Aristotle's after all, who had assigned souls to plants on account of their capacity to feed and reproduce their organic structure.⁵⁰

A third consequence of his Augustinian picture concerns cognition. Since he does not accept the view that objects act on the senses with efficient causation to produce cognition, he cannot accept an abstractionist account of any kind. His Augustinian picture would entail that the soul, as an autonomous spiritual substance, is capable of directly perceiving universals and ideas. And indeed there is one notorious passage in which he seems to accept the Augustinian doctrine of divine illumination. It is however an isolated passage, and it remains unclear how Valla envisaged the process of cognition.⁵¹

4. The Place of Valla's Critique within Late-Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy

Valla's critique of the Aristotelian-scholastic *scientia de anima* is characterized by a return to an Augustinian picture of the soul as a wholly spiritual and immaterial substance which was made in the image of God, consisting of memory, intellect and will. His basic conviction is that the soul is a much

⁴⁷ Quoted by Des Chene, *Life's Form*, 25 n. 31, and cf. 57 n. 10.

⁴⁸ On ancient arguments for denying souls to plants see Sorabji, *Animal Minds*, 97-104.

⁴⁹ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 60.

⁵⁰ *De anima* 410b10-15, 416a6-7.

⁵¹ See Nauta, "William of Ockham and Lorenzo Valla" and idem, *In Defense of Common Sense*, ch. 2.

more noble thing than the hylomorphic account of Aristotle implies, at least as Valla understands that account. He stresses, therefore, at various places the soul's dignified nature, its immortality, unity, autonomy and superior position vis-à-vis the body and vis-à-vis animal soul, comparing it to the sun's central place in the cosmos.⁵²

He does not attempt, however, to get a clear picture of Aristotle's position. He cites various works of Aristotle, especially in the later revisions of his work when he has become acquainted with the Aristotelian works more thoroughly, but his use of them is highly selective. We find quotations from *De anima*, *De generatione animalium*, *De partibus animalium* (called *De membris animalium*), the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics*.⁵³ He thinks the Aristotelian account defends a plurality of souls, and that Aristotle holds a composite nature of the soul consisting of a rational and an irrational part (here he quotes the *Politica*). He attacks Aristotle for his view that the soul is mortal, though he also notes that other statements of Aristotle favour immortality (of the rational part, which strongly presupposes a composite nature, which Valla rejects).⁵⁴ Another example of a rather tendentious handling has already been mentioned, i.e. where Valla suggests that Aristotle held the view that animals and young children lack the power to choose (*electio*) because they lack reason. But Aristotle's opinion was clearly that reason develops as children grow older; appetite is the primary faculty in the early years of their life. Earlier Valla himself uses a quotation from Aristotle's *Politics* which reflects his knowledge of Aristotle's true intention, but Valla does not apply that knowledge in this case. He thus gives priority to his polemical aims rather than applying his impressive skills in philology, Greek and Latin scholarship to Aristotle's text.

While Aristotle is at least cited, the same cannot be said of the scholastics. Valla neglects even to mention Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, William of Ockham, John Buridan, Albert of Saxony or other medieval scholastics in his book, though there is evidence which suggests he had some familiarity with them and their works.⁵⁵ He omits discussion of the wealth of questions that

⁵² *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 71.

⁵³ I have not yet found out which translation he used; it is not the Moerbeke translation or the version of Moerbeke used by Aquinas. Valla used Leonardo Bruni's translations of the *Ethics* and *Politics* when they became available to him in the 1440s.

⁵⁴ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 61-62.

⁵⁵ In a letter to his friend Serra Valla lists some scholastic authors: "aut illos dialecticos, Albertum utrunque, Strodem, Occam, Paulum Venetum" (Valla, *Epistole*, ed. O. Besomi and M. Regoliosi (Padua, 1984), 20). This list too does not necessarily imply that Valla was well acquainted with their works, as I have argued in my forthcoming book against a number of Valla

scholastic authors posed on the soul, its powers, and on the processes of cognition and sensation, and poses no argument against the panoply of the soul's faculties and functions. If he is acquainted with concepts such as sensible and intelligible species, intuitive and abstract cognition, he prefers to be silent about them. Thus, primarily by neglecting the processes of sensation and cognition, he succeeds in simplifying them.

This simplification, particularly the notion of direct perception, has led scholars to liken Valla's position to Ockham's rejection of sensible species as intermediaries in the process of perceiving. But, as I have noted, Valla's discussion does not contain the term "species" or "phantasms", nor does it mention Ockham's notions of intuitive and abstract cognition. Ockham may have suggested, as Eleanore Stump writes, that for intuitive cognition "there are *no* mechanisms or processes. There is just direct epistemic contact between the cognizer and the thing cognized".⁵⁶ Direct cognition cannot be explained, precisely because it is direct and thus defies further analysis. Such assumptions may also account for Valla's omission. But it is nevertheless important to realise that, unlike Ockham, he does not seem to be motivated by epistemological considerations. Valla rather is concerned with the intramission theory of perception, which he feels would jeopardize the soul's noble and autonomous nature. That age-old debate on intramission versus extramission is in fact the direct context of his remarks, and his question about the direction of perception unrelated to Ockham's theory. Hence it incorrect to claim, as Trinkaus has done, that Valla "is undoubtedly referring" to the scholastic controversy about the existence and nature of sensible species.⁵⁷ Valla would agree that there is direct contact between cognizer and object, and that—insofar as it is direct and immediate contact—it requires no explanation. However, he would not allow, as Ockham does, that there are two souls—a rational and sensitive one. Valla is quite firm on the point of one soul. Thus Ockham's theory would be as unacceptable to Valla as any other scholastic theory.

Valla's account does contain some echoes of certain scholastic debates—namely on the relationship between soul and its powers and on the ontological

scholars, some of them going so far to say that the *Repastinatio* makes "knowing, careful use of scholastic terminology and methods of argumentation" or that "Valla meant seriously to remake scholastic metaphysics on its own terms" (W. J. Connell, "Lorenzo Valla: A Symposium. Introduction", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 57 (1996), 1-7, at 5.

⁵⁶ Eleanore Stump, "The Mechanisms of Cognition: Ockham on Mediating Species", in *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, ed. P. V. Spade, (Cambridge/New York, 1999), 168-203, 184; cf. 194-95.

⁵⁷ Charles Trinkaus, "Lorenzo Valla's Anti-Aristotelian Natural Philosophy", 301.

status of the soul. Nevertheless these are very faint; it is doubtful that he did more than leaf through some of the scholastic works. As I have argued elsewhere, in spite of the common interpretation of Valla as a rhetorical follower of Ockham, no more than this same glancing knowledge is present in Valla's entire critique of Aristotelian-scholastic metaphysics and dialectic.

But if one scarcely engages in critical discussion of a paradigm, can one transform it? Some modern historians make much of Valla's approach in his chapter on the natural world.⁵⁸ As mentioned in the introduction, they argue that Valla foreshadowed the later developments in natural philosophy which helped to dismantle scholasticism. (Foreshadowing, however, does not necessitate influencing.) Frequently appealing to daily experience and observation, Valla's approach shows a kind of naïve empiricism. He rejects or qualifies a number of fundamental tenets of Aristotelian natural philosophy—namely that movement is the cause of warmth, that one movement is always caused by another, that elements can be transformed into one another, that each element has its own proper qualities (fire is warm and dry, air warm and moist, etc.), that pure elements exist, and that the combination of warmth and humidity is sufficient for the generation of life.⁵⁹ Valla's rejections often have the character of a *reductio ad absurdum*; if Aristotle's theory were true, one would expect quite different phenomena than those one observes. For instance, Aristotle's argument for the existence of a fiery sphere below the moon claimed that "leaden missiles shot out by force liquefy in the air".⁶⁰ Valla counters this by appealing to common experience. In daily life, we never see balls—whether leaden, iron or stone shot out of a sling or a cannon—heat up in the air; even the feathers of launched arrows do not catch fire.⁶¹ Later Galileo would use a similar argument.⁶² However, does this warrant the conclusion that Valla occupies a place in the tradition of Renaissance naturalism or in early modern science?

Valla's appeal to the senses rather has a polemical aim of showing that Aristotelian natural philosophy makes, as he believes, gratuitous assumptions about things which transcend the boundary of sense and introduces terms and concepts which are far removed from our daily, ordinary picture of the natural

⁵⁸ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 98-110. See above n. 6-9.

⁵⁹ Cf. Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, 69, who lists a number of points on which Valla contradicts Aristotle, but natural philosophy falls outside the scope of his study. For discussion see Nauta, *In Defense of Common Sense*, ch. 4.

⁶⁰ *De caelo* II.7, 289a26-28.

⁶¹ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 98-99.

⁶² Trinkaus, "Lorenzo Valla's Anti-Aristotelian Natural Philosophy", 288 n. 15.

world. His “empiricism” is not an invitation to collect as much data as possible and investigate the workings of nature but rather serves as a curb on speculation, as an antidote against what he sees as the presumptions and pretensions of the philosophers, who are too inquisitive about God’s artistry (*artificium*). For Valla it should be enough to know that God made the stars, the heavens and the elements at the beginning of time: we will learn about his artistry in the next life. God did not need the spinning of the spheres in order to create the elements and give them their place. He is not bound by the principle that nothing can arise out of nothing, as is shown by the nature of fire. But Valla was smart enough to use the Bible as source of positive knowledge about nature when it suited him: the biblical account of the creation of man from mud, which is soil soaked in water, is presented as evidence against the view that the human body consists of all the four elements.⁶³

To evaluate Valla’s relationship with later Renaissance naturalist thinkers, let us briefly consider his argument that animals also have a rational soul.⁶⁴ This argument does not rest on a consistently naturalist approach towards men as part of the natural world. Valla still adheres to an Augustinian account of the creation of man’s soul, a reflection of the Trinity. As mentioned above, Valla rather inconsistently ascribes to animals a soul similarly created by divine aid. Moreover, a theory of cognition is conspicuously absent from his work. A theory of cognition, however, was of central concern to the scholastics and to those early modern philosophers, such as Telesio and Hobbes, advancing toward a mechanistic-naturalist philosophy. Hobbes reduced sense perception to local motions in the body caused by external objects. The understanding is thus nothing but a special form of the imagination which man shares with animals.⁶⁵ Telesio had previously argued that the intellect is a continuation of the senses, and that the difference between man and animals is thus of degree only—“human spirit being more fine and copious than that of other animals”.⁶⁶ Therefore, since Valla does not present any serious alternative

⁶³ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 98 (God’s artistry), 100 (spinning of spheres), 102 (nature of fire), 109 (four elements).

⁶⁴ The term “naturalism” however is rather vague and should be used with caution; for some pertinent comments see Bianchi, “Continuity and Change in the Aristotelian Tradition”, 68.

⁶⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 2, ed. Molesworth, 11. For Hobbes’ debt to Renaissance naturalistic thinkers see Cees Leijenhorst, *The Mechanisation of Aristotelianism: The Late Aristotelian Setting of Thomas Hobbes’ Natural Philosophy*, (Leiden, 2002).

⁶⁶ Quoted by Karl Schuhmann, “Hobbes and Telesio”, *Hobbes Studies* 1 (1988), 109-133, 116 from Telesio’s *De rerum natura iuxta propria principia*. Telesio distinguished between an intellectual, immortal soul (only in men) and an organic soul (*spiritus*); see Daniel P. Walker, *Spiritual*

for the scholastic and naturalist accounts of sensation and cognition, it is by no means intuitive that he should be regarded as having “a place as part of the internal dissidence within the dominant natural philosophy” of his own age.⁶⁷

Furthermore, hardly any evidence suggests that Valla is on the road to an “empirismo razionalistico moderno”.⁶⁸ Valla writes that one and the same soul retains, judges, and wills. This is reminiscent of Descartes, who states likewise in the *Meditations*.⁶⁹ But Descartes came to his dualism by another road—by rethinking the scholastic theories and notions. Moreover, Valla’s work has no equivalent for Descartes’ clear and distinct ideas or for his method of doubt. Valla and Descartes thus appropriated Augustinian representations of the soul in diverse manners.

We should, therefore, resist the temptation to assess Valla, an early critic of Aristotle, in terms of the agendas of later critics. Valla was not developing an alternative to Aristotelian *natural philosophy*, and hence did not—as is often claimed—contribute to a “new mentality” or “a new mental environment”, at least insofar as “mentality” cultivated mathematical, empirical, naturalist and mechanist strands of thought in the Renaissance.

But even though his attitude and position on natural philosophical themes usually do not bear any structural likeness with those of later naturalist philosophers, yet it can be argued that Valla gave vent to a sentiment which ultimately eroded faith in the Aristotelian system. Valla rightly saw that Aristotle’s conclusions could not be made to square with everyday observations. Moreover, with hindsight we can see that *any* undermining of the faith in scholastic-Aristotelian world view contributed to its demise and finally to its replacement by a different, mechanistic one. Valla surely contributed to this

and *Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* (London, 1958), 190-194. Against hermetic teachings, Patrizi argues that animals have a rational soul; *Nova de universis Philosophia*, discussed by K. Schuhmann, *Selected papers on Renaissance philosophy and on Thomas Hobbes*, eds. P. Steenbakkers and C. Leijenhorst (Dordrecht, 2004), 157-170, 164.

⁶⁷ Trinkaus, “Lorenzo Valla’s Anti-Aristotelian Natural Philosophy”, 322, but he is careful to admit that “it would be hard to outline his own natural philosophy in positive terms” (324); moreover, Valla “is pre-Copernican, pre-Keplerian, pre-Galilean” (322-23). It is much more difficult to agree with Trinkaus that Valla’s criticisms of Aristotelian doctrines “are the result of both his familiarity with natural phenomena and his knowledge of scholastic teachings, together with his concentrated thinking about them” (325).

⁶⁸ Fubini, “Contributo per l’interpretazione”, 316.

⁶⁹ *Repastinatio*, ed. Zippel, 75. Cf. Descartes, *Meditation* VI: “it is one and the same mind that wills and understands and has sensory perceptions”; R. Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, transl. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch, 2 vols. (Cambridge/New York, 1984-85), vol. II, 59.

necessary preparatory stage of doubting the Aristotle's authority. Though he does not mention Valla, Menn's judgement on humanist anti-Aristotelianism may be applied to Valla too: "though their first steps towards a new philosophy were stumbling and may be compared unfavourably with the accomplishments of late scholasticism, we may see with hindsight that their bold experiments prepared the way for the emergence of mechanical philosophy and science".⁷⁰

In short, Valla's critique proved a necessary step in dismantling of a dominant paradigm; it helped to undermine faith in Aristotle and the Aristotelian-scholastic approach. His rejections are often based on linguistic grounds, and extend to philosophical speculation and theorizing, as well as many scholastic entities, distinctions and terms. While this is typical of a humanist, Valla's critique went well beyond the usual diatribe on their opponents' so-called barbarous and ungrammatical Latin. Language, for Valla, cannot be abstracted from the living context in which it functions and from which it derives its meaning and power. Words and arguments should not be taken out of context, for doing so alters their normal, common meaning—consequently giving rise to philosophical problems where none previously existed. This, according to Valla, is precisely what the philosopher does. Philosophical speculation—with its technical abstruse, vague and esoteric vocabulary, with its tendency to disregard the grammatical rules and conventions of the Latin language—soon takes on a life of its own. Leaving the world of common experience far behind, the philosopher employs terminology which can only be handled and understood by other philosophers. Against this, Valla champions the ordinary conception (or "folk" conception as modern philosophers would say) of the world and of the way it is reflected in classical Latin. He thus takes issue with what he considers the philosophers' *facta*, their abstractions and theories, which take concepts and terms out of their 'ordinary' semantic network. Hence, Valla's critique of scholastic thought is essentially a critique of their language, consciously and deliberately so. This important insight can also be found in many later philosophers, and is prominent, for instance, in

⁷⁰ Menn, "Intellectual Setting", 47. In this sense then Fubini may be said to be right. A related but by no means identical factor in the decline of Aristotelianism is what has been called "hermeneutic hypertrophy": an immense increase of knowledge—or even overkill—of Aristotle's works and its late-antique and medieval commentators, well attested by a huge number of editions, translations and commentaries. This ultimately led to a watering down of the contours of what was once a powerful paradigm. See L. Bianchi, *Studi sull'Aristotelismo del Rinascimento* (Padua, 2003), 136. Of course, external factors (e.g. discoveries of natural phenomena) were also very important.

the work of Thomas Hobbes. (But, one may add, scholastic philosophers were the first to recognize the potential fallacies which arise from their technical terminology.)

Thus, in fighting the Aristotelian paradigm, Valla often appealed to common sense and everyday experiences and observations. For him, the wisdom of the common people took priority over philosophical analyses. Philosophical analysis is doomed to failure because its aims at refining ‘folk’ notions by speculative argument, empty theorising, and making unwarranted claims which transcend the boundaries of sense experience and common sense. It is not difficult to throw doubt on the legitimacy of this contrast. The concerns and questions of philosophers are simply different, and aim at the elucidation and analysis of concepts. Thus, for those following the Aristotelian dialectical method, common opinions, common-sense intuitions, and some daily observations *are* important, but only as a starting point for rational criticism, reflection, and generalization. By this process one arrives at a correct account of the phenomenon. Valla, however, would retort, that this later stage of rational criticism and reflection has degenerated into a language game which hardly bears any relationship to the world it allegedly attempts to analyse. One may turn up one’s nose in contempt of such convictions, but this particular conviction does in fact surface at various points in history and undeniably has philosophical relevance.

Valla’s importance should not, therefore, be sought at the level of argument; frequently his engagement with philosophical enemies or straw-men pierced little more than skin-deep. Rather, his importance lies in recognizing that a complete change of paradigm was required. This is far from easy to accomplish, as his work bears out—particularly in his chapter on the soul. Valla may have thought that his Augustinian representation of the soul was more simple and truer to both human experience and Christian faith. Nevertheless he is unable to avoid making a number of statements which, on closer analysis, are not so simple, common or straightforward. Even “common sense” is shot through with philosophical assumptions, and thus it continues—fortunately—to be the job of the philosopher to articulate and analyse these assumptions and convictions.⁷¹

⁷¹) I am grateful to Pamela Zinn for stylistic suggestions.

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