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# *William of Ockham and Lorenzo Valla: False Friends. Semantics and Ontological Reduction\**

by LODI NAUTA

*At first glance, Lorenzo Valla has much in common with William of Ockham. Both see language as the key to an understanding of the world, criticizing realist ontologies which admit of various abstract entities. Modern scholars have therefore often argued that Valla's transformation of medieval metaphysics and logic is nominalist in spirit and continues Ockhamist nominalism. The article criticizes this widely held interpretation. At closer inspection, Valla's views on ontology and semantics are very different from Ockham's. Apart from the obvious differences in cultural background, they show widely different approaches, methods, and arguments at a more philosophical level.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Lorenzo Valla's attack on scholastic-Aristotelian logic and metaphysics in his *Repastinatio dialectice et philosophie* has frequently been associated with medieval nominalism.<sup>1</sup> It is not difficult to see why. Valla's attempt to simplify medieval logic and metaphysics seems obviously related to similar attempts by nominalists such as William of Ockham. Both Ockham (ca. 1285-ca. 1349) and Valla (1407-57) admit of only substances and inhering qualities, reducing the ten Aristotelian categories (quantity, relation, time, place, etc.) to these two.<sup>2</sup> Both thinkers show an aversion to abstract entities of various kinds, and attack *one* as a transcendental term, criticize the notion of privation, equate action with passion, and reject the additional moods of the first figure of the syllogism. Already in his *De veris principiis et*

\*A shorter version of this article was read at the RSA conference at Scottsdale, Arizona, April 2002. I am grateful to John Monfasani, Paul Grendler, Robert Black, and an anonymous reader for their criticisms and helpful suggestions.

<sup>1</sup>Valla's *Repastinatio* exists in three versions, of which the first differs greatly from the last two. The first was probably conceived when Valla lectured at Pavia in 1431-33 (see Grendler, 210-11) and finished at the court of Alfonso of Aragon, probably in 1439. The text was thoroughly revised by Valla in the 1440s. This second revision was complete by 1448. He continued to work on the text, resulting in a third version, probably left unfinished at his death in 1457. Only the first version enjoyed a limited circulation in Valla's lifetime. For my purposes the differences between the versions are of no great importance, and I quote from all. In what follows I refer to volume and page of Zippel's edition (Valla, 1982). Zippel's first volume contains Valla's third version (and variant readings from the second version); the second volume contains the first.

<sup>2</sup>Valla often treats action as a third, separate category, but he is doubtful about its status. He thinks for instance that it should not be termed an accident (*ibid.*, 1:127-28). See below n. 93.

*vera ratione philosophandi contra pseudophilosophos*, published in 1553, Mario Nizolio (1488-1567) frequently mentions both names in his praise of nominalist philosophy.<sup>3</sup>

It is therefore not surprising to find various references to Ockham in the source apparatus to the modern critical edition of Valla's *Repastinatio*, which suggests that he was following in Ockham's footsteps. The editor even speaks of Valla's "occamismo."<sup>4</sup> Other scholars too have emphasized that, in spite of the obvious differences in background and thinking between Ockham and Valla, there are structural similarities at a deeper level. W. Scott Blanchard has argued in a recent article 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."<sup>5</sup> Fubini writes that in the *Repastinatio* "L'impronto del nominalismo occamista è qui evidente."<sup>6</sup> The best developed articulation of this position is by Eckhard Kessler, who speaks of "Vallas Anknüpfung an Ockham" (Valla's linking up to Ockham). He has argued that "the Ockhamist interpretation of Aristotle's *Organon* was the foundation of Valla's reform."<sup>7</sup> Likewise, Donald R. Kelley has written on Valla's "rhetorical nominalism." According to him, the rejection by Valla of the traditional transcendentals was "much in the fashion of William of Ockham, who had a similar aversion to arbitrary abstraction." "Like Ockham, Valla was almost unutterably literal-minded, and he tended to regard philosophy as the science of terms, not things. Like Ockham, too, he had a principle of economy, a grammatical kind of 'razor.'"<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup>See the index in Nizolio, 2:225 and 227.

<sup>4</sup>Zippel, 1:lxxxviii and xci. Based on Zippel's *apparatus criticus*, Mack has listed the similarities but is careful to add that the "easiest way to explain these similarities is through similarity of purpose. Both Ockham and Valla were concerned to simplify Aristotle's logic and metaphysics wherever possible. It must nevertheless be counted at least possible that Ockham was a source" (Mack, 93-94). See also Camporeale, 117, who writes that Valla's position on modal propositions reflects "considerazioni già avanzate da Ockham nella *Summa Logicae*." Laffranchi offers a reliable but flat exegesis of Valla's work, following Zippel's references without much debate.

<sup>5</sup>Blanchard, 179.

<sup>6</sup>Fubini, 303: the stamp of Ockhamist nominalism is in evidence here. Compare 305: "egli si avvale come falsariga del nominalismo occamista."

<sup>7</sup>Kessler, 1988, 63 and 55. See also Kessler, 1990, 147-64 and Kessler, 1987, 9-49. He points to fundamental differences between humanists and nominalists, e.g., in Kessler 1981, 285-313.

<sup>8</sup>Kelley, 30-31. See Trinkaus, 1970, 1:150-55.

Others have been more skeptical. In particular, John Monfasani has maintained that “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.”<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Valla believes in the Augustinian notion of divine illumination, which squares oddly with his alleged nominalism. And the same holds true, according to Monfasani, for his “predestinarianism” which “put him in fundamental opposition to their [i.e., the Ockhamists] voluntarism.”<sup>10</sup> When pressed, we would better call him a realist, who believed in the eternal existence of the true ideas, rather than a nominalist.<sup>11</sup>

The aim of this article is to question the dominant interpretation of Valla’s thought. It will confirm Monfasani’s basic view that the differences are more striking and significant than the alleged similarities by making a comparison between Ockham and Valla, which no scholar has offered so far. In addition, it should be remembered that nominalism is a slippery concept, and can be applied to various disciplines and themes. Valla’s views of theological issues such as predestination and free will may place him outside the camp of nominalists, but it is not thereby ruled out that he was a nominalist in his thinking on language. One could even be a nominalist on the issue of universals without being committed to a nominalist program of ontological reduction of the ten Aristotelian categories. In the Middle Ages the two issues — universals and ontological reduction — were independent, at least in principle. One could deny the existence of universals, yet accept the independent existence of entities such as relations and quantities over and above individual things (as John Buridan, 1300-58, did), or, vice versa, one could be a realist on universals but an advocate of a reductionist program of some sort (as Walter Burley, ca. 1275- 1344/45, was).<sup>12</sup> Consequently, Valla’s project in the *Repastinatio* could still turn out to be “nominalist” in spirit, even if he were a realist on universals or a believer in the Augustinian doctrine of divine illumination. Thus, some of Monfasani’s points, while valid in themselves, may still not convince someone who argues for a structural similarity between Ockham and Valla in their treatment of the relationship between language and the world.

The question of Valla’s relationship with medieval or, more particularly, Ockhamist nominalism touches on the larger issue of the possible links between scholasticism and humanism, and is therefore far from trivial.

<sup>9</sup>Monfasani, 1984, 191, rpt. in Monfasani, 1994, VI. Compare Monfasani, 2001, 234. I am grateful to Fosca Mariani Zini for a copy of this volume.

<sup>10</sup>Monfasani, 2000, 5.

<sup>11</sup>Monfasani, 2001, 235. Valla’s highly favorable opinions of Plato (for which see Zippel, 1:xcvii, n. 1) could also be taken as squaring oddly with his alleged nominalism.

<sup>12</sup>McCord Adams, 1:287; Spade, 100.

Humanists claimed to have forged a radical break with the past, and many modern scholars have believed them. Yet, we also know that there often was more continuity than is superficially evident. If the dominant interpretation of Valla is valid, it would perhaps be a confirmation of the thesis, defended by Kessler and others, that the antischolastic polemics of the humanists should be seen as a transformation of the scholastic-Aristotelian tradition with the aid of elements from classical thinking rather than as a revival of classical antiquity in place of scholasticism.

In the case of Valla's *Repastinatio*, however, the traditional methods of *Quellenforschung* are of limited use. Valla mentions the name of Ockham only once, and in a disparaging way.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, their education, sources, interests, and intellectual background differ so widely that a comparison often amounts to a comparison of like with unlike. Ockham was deeply involved in a critical, yet constructive, reinterpretation of Aristotle's philosophy, commenting on several of the latter's works. He followed the scholastic modes of thinking and argumentation, and concentrated on issues which were then discussed in the universities. Valla, on the other hand, despised scholasticism. He never took a university arts course. His knowledge of medieval logic was superficial and must have been attained by personal reading.<sup>14</sup> Given all this, it would be odd indeed if Ockhamist philosophy turned out to be an important point of departure for Valla, and hence historians of logic may consider the argument here developed to be a fight against windmills, constructed by literary historians and Neo-Latinists.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, it is clear at least that Valla envisaged his dialectic as a comprehensive work of logic, corresponding roughly with the Aristotelian 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 propositions and with commonplaces, to the *De interpretatione*, the *Topica*, and the *Rhetorica*; the third, which deals

<sup>13</sup>In his famous letter to Giovanni Serra from 1440 (or perhaps 1439 as Monfasani, 1987, argues) he brackets Ockham with several other medieval "dialecticos" in a list of medieval scholastics (Valla, 1984, 201), but I do not interpret this to mean that "Valla claims to have read Ockham," as Mack, 93, writes. Ockham was certainly not viewed as a theologian by Valla, in spite of Zippel's note "e.g., Ockam" to Valla's words "ecclesiastici nostri" (Valla, 1982, 1:32). Monfasani, 1993, 257, points to the virtual absence of Ockhamist theologians among Italian Franciscans, so it is small wonder that Valla did not consider Ockham as a theologian.

<sup>14</sup>See the rather vague formulation "Porphyrius . . . ipseque Boetius ac ceteri quos legi" (Valla, 1982, 1:291).

<sup>15</sup>Nevertheless, Biard and Vescovini, 33-34 write that one finds "une certaine influence de Blaise de Parme dans la *Repastinatio* . . . en dépit d'orientations fort différentes," but they do not substantiate this claim and, indeed, I do not see much in Biagio's *Questiones super Tractatus Logice Magistri Petri Hispani* to support it. Biagio died in 1416.

with the combination of propositions into various forms of argumentation, to the *Analytica Priora* and, to a lesser extent, *De sophisticis elenchis*.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, his project is only intelligible within the limits of this Aristotelian corpus of texts and Porphyry's *Isagoge* (all in Boethius' translations) alongside Boethius' own commentaries. It is a point of contention whether Valla knew anything about later developments of medieval logic. It is likely that he read Peter of Spain's *Summulae* (not later than 1230), Paul of Venice's *Logica parva* (ca. 1400),<sup>17</sup> and the logical commentaries by Albert the Great (1200-80), and he may have been familiar with the works of Ralph Strode (d. 1387?) and Albert of Saxony (d. 1390) as well as with some rules concerning *obligationes*.<sup>18</sup> Yet, the absence of verbal borrowings or quotations from medieval logicians suggests a general lack of knowledge (and of interest) on Valla's part, and renders a search for his sources almost impossible.

This however has not hindered scholars from postulating similarities between Valla's thought and medieval nominalism (especially Ockham's philosophy) on a "deeper" level of basic convictions concerning the relationship between language and the world, rather than on the level of textual and terminological correspondences. It is with these attempts to link Valla's re-laying (*repastinatio*) of the foundations of the study of language with Ockham's reformation of traditional logic and especially metaphysics, that this article deals.

Because it is almost impossible to pin down Valla's medieval sources, Valla and Ockham are compared on those issues where the two have often been bracketed together. The primary focus therefore falls on book 1 of the *Repastinatio*, which deals with ontological reduction — an issue that most scholars have considered as the most significant similarity between Valla and Ockham. First, the status of the categories and abstract terms is considered,

<sup>16</sup>See Valla, 1982, 2:363 and 2:446, and Perreiah, 12. Compare Kessler, 1988, 55 and Monfasani, 1990, 195 (rpt. in Monfasani, 1994, V).

<sup>17</sup>Kessler's suggestion that Valla read scholastic logic through the nominalist lens of Paul of Venice should be qualified (Kessler, 1988, 63, repeated by Fubini, 300). Paul of Venice was metaphysically a realist (see Conti, 1-9), and there is no evidence at all that Valla would have distilled nominalist assumptions from Paul's logical works. Paul's *Logica parva* is edited by Perreiah in Paul of Venice, 2002.

<sup>18</sup>Mack, 90-92; Camporeale, 122-24; Monfasani, 1984, 189-91. Zippel notices that the library of the Visconti at Pavia was accessible to scholars and contained a number of relevant scholastic works, which Valla could have studied there (Zippel, 1982, 1:civ). An alternative could be Santa Maria sopra Minerva and its library, an important religious and theological center of the Dominicans in Rome (see Trinkaus, 1993, 284, n. 8, based on a suggestion from Camporeale). The latter is highly implausible: as a teenager in Rome, Valla surely did not study scholastic texts, but composed his controversial comparison between Cicero and Quintilian.

next the individual categories, and finally something will be said about universals.

## 2. CATEGORIES OF TERMS OR THINGS?

Ockham's ontology admits of only substances and inhering qualities, denying that terms in each of the distinct categories necessarily signify distinct entities such as quantity and passion. This does not mean that Ockham wants to get rid of the categorical system. As long as one realizes, he says, that categories do not describe things in the world but categorize *terms* by which we signify real substances or real inhering qualities in different ways,<sup>19</sup> the categories can be maintained and the specific features of, for example, relational or quantitative terms can be explored. The distinction between categories, Ockham says, following Aristotle, is taken from "the different questions which can be asked about a substance," giving categories of simple terms as answers to these questions: "What is it?," "Of what quality?," "How much?" etc.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, Ockham's rejection of a realist interpretation of the categories is accompanied by a wish to *defend* them as distinct groups of terms, which should not become blurred.<sup>21</sup> He takes this to be the correct interpretation of Aristotle's words: "Aristotle does not mean that there are as many things as there are significant terms," for the "teaching of the Peripatetics holds that the ten genera are ten terms designating the same things in different ways . . . ; despite their distinction there is an identity among the things they designate."<sup>22</sup> There is no fatherhood besides fathers and children, no similarity besides similar things, no doubleness besides doubles.

While Ockham's rejection of a realist interpretation of the categories is accompanied by a wish to defend the categories as categories of various modes of signifying things, Valla seems to deny any room for the categories except substance, quality, and (in some passages) action. All terms falling under categories other than substance and quality signify substances and qualities,

<sup>19</sup>Ockham, 1974a, 167-68, trans. Ockham, 1974b, 168.

<sup>20</sup>Ockham, 1974a, 116-17, trans. Ockham, 1974b, 130.

<sup>21</sup>For example Ockham, 1974a, 167-68, trans. Ockham, 1974b, 168, Ockham, 1978b, 158-59, Quodlibet IV, quaestio 32: "Ad propositum dico quod substantia, qualitas, quantitas sunt distincta predicamenta, quamvis quantitas non significet rem absolutam distinctam a substantia et qualitate, quia sunt distincti conceptus et voces easdem res diversimode significantes" (quoted by Leff, 208, n. 412). Compare Moody, 132 and 172-73.

<sup>22</sup>Ockham, 1974a, 165 and 167, trans. Ockham, 1974b, 166 and 168. See Brown, 120: "'Similarity' does not itself signify a further really existing quality in the white subjects. If this were the case, argues Ockham, the distinction of the categories would be obliterated, since the category of relation would be reduced to the category of quality."

and many of Valla's discussions turn on the question whether a term signifies the substance, the quality, the action, or a combination of these.<sup>23</sup> The grammatical point of view is obvious (nouns, adjectives, or adverbs and verbs). Thus, there is no need to keep the categorial system.

Valla's statements about the categories, however, are not entirely free from ambiguity. On the one hand, we find statements which favor a terminist interpretation, that is, categories as categories of terms, not things. He writes, for example, that categories are principal terms or appellations for signifying things.<sup>24</sup> The context of this statement, however, is a consideration of the terms *categorie* and *predicamenta* as translations of Greek terms. At some point, he also makes a distinction between reality and the way we talk about reality, saying that "voces" (names) are subsumed under categories, while "res" (things) are not.<sup>25</sup> However, there are also statements which suggest a more realist interpretation of the categories, for example, that there are three categories (substance, quality, and action) which comprise all "things" (res) as their elements, or that the "individuals" (singula) of categories are "things" (res).<sup>26</sup> For Valla there are only things which can readily be perceived and talked about; ordinary sense and its linguistic counterpart — our common way of talking — are our guides here. Hence, there cannot be more categories than these two because only they refer to actually existing things (substance and quality, perhaps action as a third category). The very fact that he so radically reduces the categories to really existing things shows that he differs from Ockham's terminist approach.<sup>27</sup>

### 3. ONTOLOGICAL REDUCTION: ABSTRACT AND CONCRETE TERMS

An important element in Ockham's program of ontological reduction is his treatment of the distinction between abstract and concrete terms such as *fatherhood/father* and *similarity/similar*. Ockham urges us to resist the temptation to reify these abstract terms. Valla too discusses the distinction, and he is said to have followed Ockham in the latter's attack on this distinc-

<sup>23</sup>See for example Valla, 1982, 2:443: "Etenim multa sunt nomina in quibus discernere predicamentum difficile est." Other examples are found at 2:431, 433, 436 and 442-43.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 1:8: "'dictiones,' sive 'appellationes' quedam principales in significando."

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 1:124; compare 1:134: "Homo est animal rationale mortale, idest his nominibus appellatur" and 1:44 (on the term "usia"): "hec tam diversa, quibus cuncte res et cuncta predicamenta distinguuntur, uno nomine appellare, immo confundere?"

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 2:363 and 1:15; compare 1:10: "genera . . . principalissima."

<sup>27</sup>Hence, I am sceptical of Kessler's claim about "Valla's Anknüpfung an Ockham," i.e., "seine Übernahme des zeichentheoretischen Ansatzes zum Verständnis der Logik" (Kessler, 1988, 63; a similar position is found in Fubini, especially 300-06).

tion.<sup>28</sup> Both thinkers warn us against reifications of abstract terms: the abstract term often does not signify something different from what the concrete term signifies. Thus Ockham writes that the terms of many such pairs are synonymous: *father/fatherhood*, *similar/similarity*, *cause/causality* and so forth. Similar formulations can be found in Valla, e.g., when he says that “album” (white), “honestum” (honest), “utile” (useful), “commodum” (suitable), “equum” (equal), “eternum” (eternal), “infinitum” (infinite), “falsum” (false), and “verum” (true) are the same as their abstract counterparts. The bracketing of these two thinkers, however, is unjustified on closer inspection.

Ockham points out that we are tempted to reify abstract terms because the syntactical differences between abstract and concrete terms wrongly suggest a uniform semantic difference.<sup>29</sup> Abstract and concrete terms often have the same stem (“bravery/brave,” “wisdom/wise”); the abstract term often has more syllables than the concrete; and the abstract often is a noun and the concrete an adjective. These regularities are then falsely taken to reflect a semantic difference: abstract terms signify abstract entities such as bravery and wisdom, and concrete terms the individuals which exhibit those abstract entities, signifying in addition that abstract entity itself. Thus, the abstract term *redness* signifies the abstract thing redness, and the concrete term *red* signifies red things and in addition the quality redness. For *redness/red* this account holds true. In Ockham’s ontology, redness is a thing in itself, separate from red things. But the account does not hold true for a host of other terms. In order to see why, a crucial distinction which Ockham makes between absolute and connotative terms must be introduced.

An absolute term signifies each of its referents in exactly the same way. Thus *animal* signifies cattle, donkeys, men, and other animals; it does not signify one thing primarily and another thing secondarily.<sup>30</sup> Connotative terms, on the other hand, signify something primarily and another thing secondarily. Thus, the term *black* signifies black things and also signifies (or connotes) blackness, for which it normally will not stand in propositions. Ockham maintains that absolute terms are only to be found in the categories of substance and quality. In the category of quality they are represented by

<sup>28</sup>See Zippel’s note: “Cf. e.g., Ockam . . . ubi tamen hec metaphysicae distinctiones, ut apud Vallam, in dubium revocantur” (Valla, 1982, 1:21); Mack, 60: “a doctrine which Ockham also attacked.”

<sup>29</sup>Ockham, 1974a, 16-17, trans. Ockham 1974b, 56.

<sup>30</sup>Ockham, 1974a, 35-37, trans. Ockham, 1974b, 69-70. See Panaccio, 1999, 56: “Consider ‘horse,’ for example. According to Ockham, it signifies nothing but horses; and every horse it signifies equally: it can stand for any of them in propositions such as ‘Every horse is a mammal,’ ‘Some horses are white,’ or ‘Bucephalus is a horse.’”

abstract terms such as *whiteness*, *blackness*, *heat*, *sweetness*, *odor*, and *flavor*, since for Ockham these terms signify nothing else but the qualities in question. Their corresponding concrete terms (*white*, etc.) in the category of quality are connotative terms, and so are all the terms in the remaining categories (*quantity*, *relation*, *time*, *place*, etc.). The class of connotative terms, therefore, is a large one, comprising all concrete qualitative terms such as *red* (but not its abstract counterpart, *redness*, which refers to the real inhering quality), all relative terms (e.g., *similar*), quantitative and dimensional terms (*figure*, *length*, *height*, etc.), and various kinds of other terms such as *true*, *good*, *one*, *potency*, *act*, *intellect*, and *will*. All these terms do not signify things distinct from individual substances and inhering qualities.

In his critique of his realist opponents (most prominently Duns Scotus, ca. 1265-1308, and Walter Burley, ca. 1275-1344/45), Ockham uses connotation to argue that many abstract terms are synonymous with their concrete counterparts, thus obviating the need to look for abstract entities that are the referents of those abstract terms.<sup>31</sup> Many abstract terms stand for nothing other than their concrete forms: "divinity" (*deitas*) is synonymous with its concrete counterpart "divine," "fatherhood" with "father," "humanity" with "man." In other words, we should not take those abstract terms as absolute terms (that is, terms signifying substances or inhering qualities), for there are no such things as fatherhood and humanity. Such abstract terms are connotative terms. They are, therefore, different from the pair "whiteness/white": these terms are not synonymous, for "whiteness" is an absolute term signifying only the real inhering quality whiteness and nothing else. Indeed, Ockham distinguishes four different modes of relations between the signification of the concrete and its corresponding abstract term, but his general conclusion is that we need not posit abstract entities. Only individual substances with their qualities are to be admitted. The semantic distinction between abstract and concrete terms can always be analyzed without the introduction of these entities.

Valla makes a different use of the distinction between abstract and concrete terms.<sup>32</sup> For him the medievals (whom he does not identify as such) were wrong in thinking that the concrete terms refer to quality as well as substance in which quality inheres; in other words, that *red* signifies redness as well as red things in which the quality inheres.<sup>33</sup> Valla gives many examples in which such concrete terms signify the quality only, but it is important

<sup>31</sup>Ockham, 1974a, 16-35, trans. Ockham, 1974b, 56-69.

<sup>32</sup>Valla, 1982, 1:21-30.

<sup>33</sup>The following discussion is based on *ibid.* 1:21-30 and 2:373-77. In the first recension of the *Repastinatio* (*ibid.*, 1982, 2:373-74), Valla attacks their interpretation of abstract terms as if a quality can exist apart from a subject or can be invented merely by the mind. Valla thinks

to realize that he treats “concrete” terms as substantive adjectives (*the white, the black*), and surveys the range of uses of such terms as found in good Latin.<sup>34</sup> Grammar is Valla’s guide. A distinction should therefore be made between the singular and plural of these terms. Terms in the singular always signify the quality only and never suggest a substance. For instance, in Vergil’s line, “capreoli, sparsis etiam nunc pellibus albo” (goats, white-dabbled still, *Ecl.* 2.41), “album” (the white) is the same as “albedo” (whiteness). The fact that “album,” like its abstract counterpart, refers to quality only has a grammatical cause: such terms are always connected to verbs which suggest a quality, as in “album quidem delectat oculos” (the white delights the eyes).<sup>35</sup> “Album” cannot sensibly be linked to verbs such as to run, to sit, to throw, and so forth; such verbs need a corporeal subject such as men, horses, birds (as in “a horse runs,” “a man sits”). Typically scholastic examples such as “album volat” (the white flies) and “nigrum sedet” (the black sits) are repudiated for that reason. Valla gives a number of examples which illustrate this point: “honestum” and “honestas” “are the same,” because they both refer to the quality only; and the same holds true for “utile/utilitas,” “commodum/commoditas,” “falsum/falsitas,” “verum/veritas,” and so forth.<sup>36</sup>

After a brief digression he turns to the plural.<sup>37</sup> Whereas in the singular only a quality is signified, in the plural there is more variation. In some cases only the quality is signified as in “per opaca,” which is the same as “per opacitates” (through the darkness). In other cases the subject plus the quality is signified as in “frigida pugnabunt calidis” (the cold will fight the warm), in which “frigida” stands for “res frigide” (cold things), or “pinguia sunt pulchriora macris” (the fat are more beautiful than the lean), in which “pinguia” stands “res pingues” (fat things). Likewise in substantive adjectives such as “ferrea” (iron), “argentea” (silver), “lapidea” (stone), derived from corporeal things: they refer to substance plus quality (“res ferree,” iron things,

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this is ridiculous. One always thinks of a concrete subject when one thinks of, for example, a color. In later recensions Valla omits this critique, which reminds one of Bishop Berkeley’s in the seventeenth century, because it rejects any act of mental abstraction from particulars. As Mack, 60-61, rightly observes: “If he were to stand by this paragraph he would need to retract much of what he goes on to say about quality.”

<sup>34</sup>Examples are essential to Valla’s approach, as he himself makes clear in a different discussion: “Itaque non ratione nititur sed exemplo, nec lex est loquendi sed observatio” (*Antidotum II* against Poggio; ed. in Camporeale, 524). I shall therefore have to cite some of his examples in order to do justice to his position.

<sup>35</sup>Valla, 1982, 1:23: “hec nomina fere iuncta reperies cum verbis qualitibus servientibus.”

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 1:27.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 1:24-25.

and so forth). We never find these terms in the singular, except when used for the quality itself (“lapideum” refers then to the quality only). Therefore, only plural terms can be called “concrete” (in the sense of referring to substance plus quality). Moreover, we should apply it only to words of masculine and feminine gender, because masculine and feminine substantive adjectives signify a thing plus its quality, or rather man or woman plus quality, as in “pinguis” for “homo preditus pinguedine” (a man fat-ridden) and “multi sunt egroti” (many are ill). Neuter terms such as “album” refer to quality only.<sup>38</sup>

In the third version, Valla digresses on related points,<sup>39</sup> but enough has been said to see the differences between his account and that of Ockham. First, there are two points of detail. According to Ockham, concrete terms such as white refer to qualities as well as to substance, while Valla maintains that they refer to qualities only.<sup>40</sup> And because Valla does not seem to have any specifically realist opponents in mind, it is not surprising that for him, unlike Ockham, abstract terms are unproblematic.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, whereas Valla treats *whiteness/white* and *fatherhood/father* along the same lines (from his grammatical point of view they are not different), for Ockham they represent different cases: whiteness makes Plato white, but fatherhood does not make Plato a father, for while there is a quality whiteness, there is no such thing as fatherhood.

These points of detail may seem trivial, but they reflect entirely different interests and approaches. Ockham’s interest is semantic. More generally, Ockham is not interested in the grammatical features of Latin, let alone a particular form of Latin such as classical Latin, since for him the primary language is the mental language.<sup>42</sup> For him the primary language is the mental language of our concepts, which provides our spoken and written language with meaning. To quote a recent Ockham commentator:

The theory of signification and other semantical properties such as connotation or supposition thus turn out to be essential, in Ockham’s framework, to understanding the intellectual working of the mind. They are expected to provide a detailed account of how concepts, as natural signs, can be legitimately

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 1:27.

<sup>39</sup>E.g., possessive pronouns (meus, tuus, etc.), which are said of quality and action as well as of substance as in “mentiri non est meum”; substantive adjectives, which are grammatically incongruous with their subjects (“varium et mutabile semper femina”); words which signify qualities of actions as in “in apertum descendi,” and so forth.

<sup>40</sup>Valla, 1982, 2:374: “nec unquam substantiam innuunt.”

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.: “nulla lis est ea significare qualitatem.”

<sup>42</sup>McCord Adams, 1:291, n. 5 and chap. 9 *passim*, and Panaccio, 1999, 61-65. More on this in my conclusion.

assembled into mental propositions describing the world, which are the direct objects of belief and knowledge and the basic units of human reasoning.<sup>43</sup>

Ockham's conclusions about abstract and concrete terms must be seen against the background of his entire semantic apparatus, including the notions of signification, supposition, absolute and connotative terms, and exponibles — a machinery which was aimed to analyze and, ideally, reduce all sorts of complex linguistic expressions to the language of thought, that is, mental concepts.

This logical machinery is necessary because conventional language often misleads us.<sup>44</sup> Important and widely-used terms such as *tempus* (time), *motus* (movement), *mutatio* (change), *quies* (rest), *instans* (instant), and *punctus* (point) look like ordinary nouns; hence people are tempted to search for things behind these nouns, as if they are absolute terms signifying some one thing totally distinct from individual things. In Ockham's view, however, they are connotative terms, always signifying singular beings. They can be considered as abbreviations of longer expressions, in which the pseudo-name has to be analyzed in terms of singular beings (substances and their inhering qualities). For instance, "change is sudden" becomes "what is changed acquires or loses its whole form simultaneously and not part after part"; the noun "change" does not occur any more and we are therefore not tempted to look for an entity behind it. We can hardly do without these terms in philosophy, Ockham admits, but like all figurative expressions, we should take care not to interpret them in a literal way.

Valla's principal concern, on the other hand, is classical Latin, which he views as a natural reflection of what there is (substances and their qualities). Grammatical categories such as case, gender, and the ruling of words by particular classes of verbs are crucial in determining whether a term refers to the quality only or to the substance as well. Because it would be far from Valla's mind to aim at reducing ordinary language to a more transparent language reflecting mental concepts, he does not develop his aversion to abstract terms along Ockham's line. His concern is good Latinity, and the criteria to be applied are reason, *consuetudo* (linguistic usage), and *auctoritates* (the great classical Latin authors).<sup>45</sup> Hence, his discussion of terms such as "motus" and "mutatio" is not carried out under the umbrella of problematic,

<sup>43</sup>Panaccio, 1999, 53. Compare Ebbesen, 393: "One strange result of late medieval nominalism was that thought was often considered to be more genuinely language than speech."

<sup>44</sup>See Brown, 123-29.

<sup>45</sup>Valla backs up his arguments with an appeal to common linguistic usage, "to the way we speak," e.g., "ut apud Ovidium . . . et nos vulgo dicimus 'pinguia sunt pulchriora macris'" (2:377; compare 1:141: "An non hoc ipsi quoque vulgo notum est"). Compare Quintilian,

abstract terms. When Valla talks about these terms, he makes only a grammatical point, saying that there is no difference between “motus” and “motio” (movement), just as there is no difference between “cultio” and “cultus” (adoration), “usio” and “usus” (use), “agressio” and “agressus” (aggression), and a host of other terms, because linguistic practice does not show a difference in use, and hence in meaning. There is no inclination to view terms such as “motus” and “mutatio” as abbreviations which ideally should be reduced to other, more transparent expressions. These differences are viewed in a more general context in the conclusion.

#### 4. THE REDUCTION OF THE CATEGORY OF RELATION TO THAT OF QUALITY

In view of these different positions on the general status of the categories and the distinction between abstract and concrete terms, it is only to be expected that Valla and Ockham interpret the individual categories in a different way. Here too, however, Valla is said to have followed Ockham, for example, in his reduction of relation and quantity to quality.<sup>46</sup> These two categories shall therefore be discussed in some detail, preceded by a look at Valla’s brief remarks on the categories of position (*situm*) and having (*habere*).<sup>47</sup>

The category of position, such as lying and sitting, is either action because we always act, or quality because it tells us something about the qualities of bodies. The category of having (*habere*) as “armed,” “clothed,” “having shoes on,” should be reduced to the category of quality, “for although weapons, cloths and shoes are corporeal things, nevertheless they bring quality to man” (*qualitatem homini inducunt*). Valla refers to common linguistic usage (“*omnium sermo*”), arguing that terms such as “*armatus*”

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*Institutio oratoria* I.vi and Camporeale, 149-50. Though I fully agree with Tavoni that common usage refers to the Latin of the best authors rather than to the language spoken by ordinary people in the fifteenth century, it is interesting to notice that in listing “*loquendi usus*” (or “*consuetudo*”) with the “*maximi auctores*” and “*ratio*” (see for example 1:137), Valla seems to imply that the first need not to be identical with the second (though it should certainly not contradict it). He notices at times that something “is not said except perhaps figuratively” (*non dicitur nisi fortan improprie*; 1982, 2:435). Valla’s examples are often prefaced by “as we say,” “as we commonly say” and “as we are used to say” (2:434, 2: 435) without reference to literary examples. On the other hand, phrases such as “*dicimus*” are often followed by quotations from classical authors, e.g., i, 139. For Tavoni’s views see Tavoni, 1984, 145-46 and 1986, 199-216. See also Seigel, 163.

<sup>46</sup>Zippel, in Valla, 1982, 1:135, (“Ockam . . . *qualitatibus rerum naturalium relationem, antequam Valla, aequiparaverat*”) and *ibid.*, 1:142, (“Ockam . . . *quantitatem ad qualitatem individuae substantiae, ut postea Valla, reduxerat*”).

<sup>47</sup>Valla, 1982, 1:134-35.

(armed) and "indutus" (clothed) in no way differ in their signifying a quality than terms such as "corpulentus" (plump), "pinguis" (fat) and a host of other terms which clearly signify qualities of persons or things. This is in no way different from qualities of bodies, objects, and so forth (living things: "corpulentus," "pinguis," "succiplenus," "macer"; non-living things: "concava" of a column, and "rarus" of bread). This seems to presuppose a realist interpretation of the categories, and hence the necessity he felt to reject all of them except substance and quality, and sometimes action: in reducing all terms to the three which unambiguously describe real, concrete things in the world, Valla seems to interpret the categories as classes comprising things as their elements (compare n. 26 above).

Valla's remarks on relation are also brief. In the first recension of the *Repastinatio* he writes that terms such as "father," "son," "male," "female," "rich," and "poor" fall under quality.<sup>48</sup> He adds that we often find genus/species distinctions among relative terms. Take for instance the series "clericus" (cleric), "levita" (dean), "sacerdos" (priest), and "pontifex" (pope) in which "clericus" is the most general name and "pontifex" the most specific. Thus, "levita" is the genus of "sacerdos" and "pontifex" but a species of "clericus." These terms refer to substances (persons), but this does not mean, Valla seems to want to say, that they form a separate category of relations. These relations reside in their qualities of being a clergyman ("clericatus"), being a dean ("diaconium"), being a father ("paternitas"), and so forth.<sup>49</sup>

He makes similar points in the later recensions.<sup>50</sup> Terms such as "father" and "child" are relative, in the sense that being a father implies having children and vice versa, but the relationship is established on the basis of qualities: my relationship with my son is not founded on my being a man, but on my being a father, which is a quality. The fact that I can stop being a father,<sup>51</sup> brother, king, husband also shows that these are (non-essential) qualities.<sup>52</sup> Other examples which are cited in the chapter on non-corporeal qualities teach a similar lesson: that relative terms are nothing but qualitative terms, which usually signify qualities or the persons in which these qualities

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 2:425.

<sup>49</sup>Valla is careless in his formulations. He writes: "they *are* qualities," but what he means of course is that these (abstract) *terms* refer to qualities (ibid., 2:425).

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 1:135-36.

<sup>51</sup>This raises the question, which Valla does not treat, whether one stops being a father or mother after the death of one's children. This can only be decided by definition or by looking at the way people use these terms.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 1:126.

inhere, dependent on the grammatical structure of the expression.<sup>53</sup> “Whole / part” and “genus/species,” for instance, are clearly relative terms, but this does not mean that they signify anything but qualities, i.e., qualities of sub- and super-ordination of names according to their scope: “homo est species” means nothing more than that “hec substantia homo habet hanc qualitatem inferioritatis” (this substance man has this quality of inferiority).<sup>54</sup> These terms tell us something about the scope of signified objects, wide in the case of genus and less wide in the case of species.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, what is a genus (e.g., animal) in one instance can become a species in another (when predicated of a substance), which also show that these terms refer to qualities too.<sup>56</sup>

Valla adds other examples. In “Pater meus venit” (my father comes) the term “pater” refers to the substance, while in “Hic est pater meus” (he is my father) the same term refers to the quality of fatherhood only, because the substance is already understood by “hic.” Which expression I use is dependent on whether I want to emphasize his being my *father*. When I want to refer to that man who is threatening his wife I may say “maritus minatur,” without focusing on his being a husband, but when I say “Socrates est maritus Xantippes” (Socrates is married to Xantippe) the term “maritus” is used to signify the quality only, for the substance is already signified by “Socrates homo”; likewise with “rex imperat” (the king commands), referring to substance versus “tu rex” (you, king), referring to quality only, because “hic

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 1:124-26.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 1:125: “Nam cum dico ‘homo est species,’ ‘animal est genus,’ quid aliud dico quam ‘hec substantia homo habet hanc qualitatem inferioritatis,’ et ‘hec substantia animal habet hanc qualitatem superioritatis,’ sive quod significatio huius vocis capacior est et latior, huius restrictior et angustior?” This seems rather similar to Ockham’s position, as Kessler, 1988, 63, notices: “Notandum est quod ordo predicamentalis non componitur ex rebus extra sed componitur ex conceptibus sive intentionibus in anima, quae non habent aliquem ordinem nisi quod unum est communius et dicitur de pluribus, et illud vocatur superius; et aliud est minus commune et dicitur de paucioribus, et illud est inferius” (Ockham, 1978a, 36). However, Valla’s point is that terms such as genus/species and whole/part refer to qualities — or as he (loosely?) writes — *are* qualities: “Tamen, ut mihi videtur, hec sunt potius qualitates . . . cum dico ‘cornus est species arboris,’ significo qualitatem illius corporis.” (2:443). This would sound strange to Ockhamist ears. Moreover, in his critique of the tree of Porphyry (a diagram consisting of a hierarchy of genera and species descending from the most general genus, e.g., substance), Valla takes the tree as a classification of things and argues that it makes the wrong divisions, e.g., where to classify human beings, who are both corporeal and incorporeal? (Valla, 1982:1:46-49 and 2:389-91).

<sup>55</sup>Valla, 1982, 1:125.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 1:126: “genus, ut puta animal, fit genus sed species si ad suum superius referatur, ut puta ad substantiam,” and 2:423-24.

vir" or "ille homo" is already understood.<sup>57</sup> Valla seems to say that in these cases a consideration of the context in which an expression is uttered should decide to what the term refers.

Valla's general point is that all terms refer to substance, inhering qualities, or actions (or a combination of these three), denying any room for the other categories. Thus, relative terms usually refer to qualities ("fatherhood") or to the substance in which they inhere ("father").

Though the brevity of Valla's remarks on relation stands no comparison to Ockham's extensive discussions of this category in several of his works, superficially there are some similarities between their views. Both repeat Aristotle's simple point that relative terms "reciprocate," i.e., imply each other (*father* implies *child* and vice versa), but this was standard doctrine. Both think that relation is not an independent thing over and above individual things and individual qualities. For instance, the relation of similarity between two white things is established on the basis of the quality of being white they have in common (they are not similar on the basis of a further entity, i.e., similarity).

Apart from the many scholastic issues which Ockham discusses and which are understandably absent from Valla's account (for instance whether the term *relation* itself is a term of first intention), Ockham's treatment takes on a rather different character because his leitmotif is criticizing realist conceptions of the categories, while Valla's principal aim is to reduce all terms to three categories. Ockham's reduction of the category of relation to that of quality amounts to an elimination of entities such as fatherhood and so forth, which are admitted by realists as independent things over and above individual things and qualities.<sup>58</sup> But in contrast to Valla, who does not see any role for accidental categories except for quality and action, in Ockham's system this elimination is inspired by his wish to *defend* the categories as separate classes, as long as we take these classes to be classes of terms. If we were to admit of relations over and above particular things and particular qualities, they would be real accidental forms, so that different kinds of relation are just so many species of quality. The distinction between the categories of relation and quality would thereby be obliterated, since relation

<sup>57</sup>Likewise, Valla sees a distinction between "unus illorum ad me venit" and "hic est unus illorum": in the first expression "unus" signifies the substance (man), in the second the quality only (here the quality of company), since the substance "man" is already specified by "hic." Valla's terminology is often loose. He employs "significare," "notare," and "innuere" interchangeably (Valla, 1982, 1:126). I cannot see what evidence there is for Connell's statement, 5, that the *Repastinatio* makes "knowing, careful use of scholastic terminology and methods of argumentation" and that "Valla meant seriously to remake scholastic metaphysics on its own terms."

<sup>58</sup>Ockham, 1974a, 153-79, trans. Ockham, 1974b, 158-77.

would be reduced to quality, and this, according to Ockham, cannot be Aristotle's intention in having distinguished the ten categories. We should therefore interpret relation as a term expressing a relation between things. As such the category should be distinguished from the category of quality as well as from the other categories, for relative terms have their own distinctive properties, which Ockham, unlike Valla, is careful to consider.<sup>59</sup> There is nothing but substances and inhering qualities, and the terms by which we signify different aspects of a substance should be subsumed under different categories. Although for Ockham the referents of relative terms can be only individual substances and qualities, this does not mean that relative terms can be identified with qualitative terms. From Valla's grammatical point of view, however, they all refer to qualities; hence there is no use for a separate category of relation.

#### 5. THE REDUCTION OF THE CATEGORY OF QUANTITY TO THAT OF QUALITY

It is difficult to summarize Valla's long and sometimes rambling discussion of the category of quantity. His arguments are varied in quality and not always easy to understand. His main point is that quantity is not to be considered as a separate category, but should at best be regarded as a subcategory of quality. This, he writes, is confirmed by authorities, common linguistic usage, and reason.<sup>60</sup> As usual, his authorities are Cicero and Quintilian. It is a point of debate whether Valla's notion of quality derives from Quintilian's concept of quality as part of the rhetorical status theory classifying questions on which controversy can arise.<sup>61</sup> Quintilian had written:

In speaking of quality we sometimes use the word in its most general sense, which covers a number of different questions. For we enquire sometimes into the nature and form of things: as for instance whether the soul is immortal or whether god is to be conceived of in human form. Sometimes, on the other hand, the question turns on size and number . . . In all these cases we arrive at our conclusions by conjecture, yet each involves a question of quality.<sup>62</sup>

Elsewhere Quintilian had also argued that quantity is an aspect of quality:

<sup>59</sup>See Ockham, 1974a, 153-71 (especially 165-66) on correlatives of relative terms, contrariety exhibited by relatives, simultaneity of relatives, and so forth; trans. Ockham, 1974b, 158-71, especially 166-67.

<sup>60</sup>"Quam ego, immo maximi auctores aiunt esse qualitatem, et ipsa consuetudo optima testis affirmat nec ratio refragatur" (Valla, 1982, 1:137).

<sup>61</sup>See Camporeale, 162-66, and Mack, 50.

<sup>62</sup>Quintilian, 3:104-05.

As regards questions of *quantity, number, relation*, and, as some have thought, *comparison* . . . they must always be regarded as coming under *conjecture* or *quality*, as, for instance, when we ask with what purpose, or at what time, or place something was done.<sup>63</sup>

Quintilian seems to have confused the Aristotelian categories with rhetorical status, and while Valla keeps the metaphysical and rhetorical meaning of quality well apart, he was enough of a pragmatist or opportunist to quote Quintilian on quality when this suited his purpose.<sup>64</sup>

Common usage ("loquendi consuetudo"), Valla continues, also teaches us that quality is the overarching category. To someone who asks "what sort of land have you bought?" the answer will contain a descriptive phrase such as "oblongum ab initio, deinde latiore" (elongated at the beginning, then broader), "duorum iugerum longitudinis" (two iugera long), "incerte latitudinis" (of uncertain broadness). To the question what sort of horse ("qualem equum") I have to buy, the answer can be: "erectum" (erect), "sublime" (high), "lato pectore" (with a broad breast), "brevis alvo" (short-bellied), "parvo capite" (with a small head), "grandibus oculis" (with great eyes), etc.<sup>65</sup> Thus, answers containing quantitative expressions are answers to the question how a thing is qualified.

The same lesson can be drawn from a consideration of the terms "quotitas" and "quantitas," which correspond to "discrete quantity" and "continuous quantity." Both are to be subsumed under quality, which is confirmed by "the best authors and by reason." Words expressing how big ("quantum") or how many ("quotum") are for Valla on the same footing as other qualitative descriptions: "big," "small," "fat," "old" are all descriptions of a person, and there is no reason why we should single out the first two as being a separate category. Valla gives an host of other examples which shows the dependence of quantitative expressions on qualities.<sup>66</sup> We speak of a "magnus calor" (a great color), "parvum frigus" (short coldness), "longus sonus" (long sound), "brevis dolor" (brief sorrow). Because of this primacy of quality, some qualitative terms may be employed for denoting quantitative aspects of things, e.g., "equus" (in "danda est omnibus equa portio, id est equalis," an equal portion has to be given to all, which is equitable), "good"

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 1:455-56.

<sup>64</sup>Mack, 50.

<sup>65</sup>Valla, 1982, 1:137. On the importance of examples see n. 34 above.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 1:137-38. Compare 2:433: "Nam 'longitudinem syllabarum' et 'brevitatem' non negaverim esse quantitatis, sed nec invicem putaverim quempiam ita barbarum esse, qui has neget esse qualitates cum idem sit syllabam esse 'longam' quod esse 'tardam,' idem 'brevem' quod 'celerem.'"

and “bad” (as in “a good deal,” meaning “a big deal”).<sup>67</sup> Another illustration is offered by adverbs such as “sane” and “impense,” which indicate a certain quantity (“sane doctus,” fairly learned), but are derived from adjectives of quality (“sanus,” healthy). And “equalis,” in spite of generally being classed as a quantitative term, is often found to be subsumed under “similarity,” which is considered to be solely a qualitative term.<sup>68</sup>

Further evidence for the conjunction of quantity and quality and the latter for being the overarching class is derived from quotations from classical authors as well as from what the common people (“vulgus”) say: “What sort of voice does Stentor have?” The range of possible answers include quantitative terms such as “magnus,” “grandis,” “vastus” and their contraries.

Next, Valla speaks about dimension, surface, line, and point. It is difficult to get a clear picture of his final position. His overall aim is to refute the idea that there are such entities as lines and points apart from individual substances. He explicitly rejects the view that lines are longitudes without width and that points are indivisible quantities which occupy no space. He thinks it is ridiculous to hold that a multiplication of lines does not result in something wider than the original line, and that a multiplication of points does not lead to something bigger. He also holds that points are parts of a line and not, as Aristotle and his medieval followers thought, the terminations of a line, for how can terminations be without a place? This (quasi)-physical interpretation of points and lines is part of his general thesis that quantity is not a separate category but a part of quality. Among qualitative aspects of a body are measure, weight, as well as roughness, softness, and so forth. Valla’s discussion, however, lacks analytical sharpness and clarity. For instance, in the first version he holds that

a line is the space itself of a place but, for the sake of understanding, by means of a line drawn in black, or imagined in the mind, or in the corporeal thing itself as sketched out by pen or pencil, by which we might more easily measure the thing we are concerned with. Nor is there any color or width in it but only space by means of which we may examine what is extended from the place where it begins to the place where it ends, although it is not so much a space as a figure surrounding and indicating the space.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>67</sup>This is also clear from the use of adverbs, derived from adjectives such as “bonus,” “malus,” etc.: “per adverbium, ‘homo bene peculiatus,’ ‘bene nummatus,’ ‘bene litteratus,’ idest ‘valde’; et ‘homo male dentatus’ . . . idest ‘parum’” (ibid., 1:138).

<sup>68</sup>“Eneas fuit similis patri cum in ceteris, tum in statura longitudine et humerorum latitudine,’ idest ‘equali longitudine et latitudine’” (ibid., 1:139).

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 2:429: “Quantum ego sentio, ‘linea’ est spatium ipsum loci sed intelligendi gratia in modum lineae atramento ducte, apud animum figurata vel in re corporea, ut calamo penicillove adumbrata, quo commodius id de quo agimus metiri possimus. Nec in ea colorem

This is a confused statement, for first the line is called the space of a place, but then the line is said to be “not so much a space as a figure” which indicates the space, i.e., that which is enclosed by the line (which was called “place” in the first sentence). Moreover, this quotation is difficult to reconcile with his criticism of the Aristotelian definition of a line as something which has longitude without latitude. In the later versions his terminology continues to fluctuate. There he writes that we should define a line as the “longitude of a certain space” — in the first version this was “the space of a place” — which, for the sake of understanding, is drawn in the form of a real line.<sup>70</sup>

Regarding the point, too, he makes contradictory statements: he ridicules the definition of a point as an indivisible quantity, but he also writes that “the ‘point’ of space will be as small as the point formed by the pencil, especially because those who measure something by means of a line need the formation of the point, yet in such a way that it occupies no space and marks out more space than there is.”<sup>71</sup>

It is therefore not surprising to find scholars emphasizing different aspects of Valla’s account. Mack thinks that Valla “prefers a ‘common-sense’ view that points and lines are two dimensional marks on pieces of paper,” denying “existence to purely mental concepts.”<sup>72</sup> Trinkaus however argues that for Valla “measurement or diagramming . . . is a kind of language by which mankind may discover meanings or understanding of the spatial qualities of things” and that he distinguishes between “actual dimension and imaginary use of lines and diagram to aid in measurement, regarding points, lines and surfaces as “theoretical signs.”<sup>73</sup> And Kelley writes that “Valla had no use for mathematical fictions, such as infinitesimals, because they fall outside the range of ordinary human experience and so did not fit his grammatical scheme.”<sup>74</sup> According to Trinkaus, Valla’s position is the same as Ockham’s, for as Ockham writes in the *Summa logicae*: “it was the intention of Aristotle and of many others that quantity is not something distinct from substance

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aut latitudinem sed spatium modo, quo quid protenditur a loco unde incipit ad locum ubi desinit respicimus, licet non tam spatium sit, quam figura complectens ac signans spatium”; trans. Trinkaus, 1993, 311.

<sup>70</sup>Valla, 1982, 1:144: “linea est certi spatii longitudo, evidentie gratia in speciem vere linee descripta.”

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 2:429: “Erit itaque ‘punctum’ spatium tam exiguum, quam punctum penicillo formatum, presertim quod qui aliquid metiuntur ut linee, sic puncti formatione indigent, ita tamen ut nihil spatii occupet magisque spatium describat, quam spatium sit aliquod”; trans. Trinkaus, 1993, 311.

<sup>72</sup>Mack, 66.

<sup>73</sup>Trinkaus, 1993, 311-12 and 313, n. 50.

<sup>74</sup>Kelley, 31.

and quality, nor that point, line, surface and body are things that are totally distinct from each other according to themselves.”<sup>75</sup>

It is doubtful, however, that Valla’s position closely resembles Ockham’s. Superficially, there are some similarities. Like Valla, Ockham denies that quantity signifies something distinct from quality and substance:<sup>76</sup> hence Zippel’s note that “Ockham had reduced quantity to quality of an individual substance, as Valla later did.”<sup>77</sup> But again, Valla’s reduction is different in character from Ockham’s. Not only does Ockham devote far more attention to Aristotle’s natural philosophy — understandably so, given the differences in educational and intellectual background between Valla and Ockham — but also Valla’s inspiration is grammatical and rhetorical rather than logical, as he himself explicitly confirms.<sup>78</sup>

Ockham, on the other hand, does not start from a consideration of ordinary language. His reduction of quantity to quality, as part of his entire program of ontological reduction, is aimed at refuting explicitly realist interpretations of the categories. Quantity must be viewed as a way of signifying a substance: we use it to refer to substances and qualities, and connote how a substance is extended. Quantitative terms are, in Ockham’s terminology, not absolute terms, but connotative terms, signifying a substance and connotating parts extended in space.<sup>79</sup> The arguments by which he attempts to refute the realists are different in character to the arguments Valla formulates on the basis of grammatical expressions. Thus, whereas Valla tends to view lines, points, and surfaces as physical things, Ockham argues that mathematical objects are fictive in the sense that mathematical terms can be regarded as a kind of theoretical formalism, a language or tool of analysis rather than a description of objects. As A. Goddu writes:

mathematical terms such as ‘point,’ ‘line’ and ‘surface’ are fictive. The explaining propositions that render such terms are properly conditional, not assertoric in form. Euclid’s fifth postulate provides a good example. It should be rendered thus: ‘If two parallel lines were extended to infinity, they would never intersect.’

<sup>75</sup>Ockham, 1974a, 144, trans. Trinkaus, 1993, 312.

<sup>76</sup>Ockham, 1974a, 132-53, trans. Ockham, 1974b, 142-58.

<sup>77</sup>Zippel in Valla, 1982, 1:142 n.: “Ockam quantitatem ad qualitatem individuae substantiae, ut postea Valla, reduxerat.”

<sup>78</sup>“tum ex iis que attuli et ex communi grammaticorum diffinitione nominis quod significat ‘substantiam’ et ‘qualitatem,’ tum eorum auctoritate, qui tres status causarum fecerunt (quorum sunt Cicero et Quintilianus), apparet ‘quantitatem’ et ‘quotitatem’ venire sub ‘qualitatem,’ qui tertius status est post ‘coniecturalem’ ‘finitivumque’” (Valla, 1982, 2:428).

<sup>79</sup>Ockham, *Quodlibet* IV, quaestio 32, quoted by Leff, 208. See also Loux, 15-16, and McCord Adams, 1:169-213.

In Ockham's view, we need not assume the real existence of lines or suppose they can actually be extended to infinity. Mathematicians do not have to assume the real existence of lines to employ them usefully.<sup>80</sup>

By contrast, it was the very assumption of real existence of lines and points which made Valla decide that the abstract interpretations of mathematical terms did not make sense. For him points, lines, and surfaces are in no way different from bodies, and points are parts of a line.<sup>81</sup>

## 6. THE CATEGORY OF "PATI" (TO BE ACTED UPON/PASSION)

Another instance of apparent similarity in position is the equation of the category of being acted upon (*pati*) with action (*actio*) which is found in both Valla and Ockham.<sup>82</sup> The category of being acted upon, Valla says, is nothing else than to feel a passion, that is, to act in a certain way. The fact that there are passive verbs does not provide a counter-argument,

for the grammarians name these thus no more properly than what they call the 'accusative,' 'ablative,' 'dative' case, as if this is ever used for 'accusation,' for 'ablation,' or for 'dation,' and the 'imperative' mode as if it 'commanded' [imperet] or the 'optative' mode as if it always would 'choose' [optet] and the 'subjunctive' as if it did nothing but 'subjoin,' and 'gerunds,' as if they 'carry on' [gerant], and 'supine' as if they are lying 'supine' [resupina].<sup>83</sup>

We should be careful not to take grammatical terms literally. Valla continues his analysis by criticizing the application of this terminology to inanimate things:

Therefore, as I have said, to be acted upon is action because to feel passion from it is an action such as to understand danger, or it will be 'passion' itself which is now a quality, and indeed this occurs in animate beings. However in insensible things there is no passion because nothing is suffered but they act according to their own natures. For either you bend wood, or you throw a stone into the air, or you smother or extinguish a fire, or whatever body you may break suffers nothing by the very fact that it is affected by no passion, and that it never departs from its own nature, nor ceases to do what is natural to it. For a stone does not cease from the action of gravity but tends downward from the air, and fire upward, and as long as it lives it does not cease to vibrate, light, illuminate, heat, make, burn. And thus it is with the other things of which nature is their

<sup>80</sup>Goddu, 152.

<sup>81</sup>"nec negandum superficiem in qua sunt due dimensiones, longitudo ac latitudo, esse corpus" (Valla, 1982, 1:143).

<sup>82</sup>Zippel quotes Ockham's *Summulae in libros Physicorum Aristotelis*: "actio et passio eundem actum significant" (Zippel in Valla, 1982, 1:154).

<sup>83</sup>Valla, 1982, 1:154; trans. Trinkaus, 1993, 309.

efficient cause, or the cause of acting. For there is no final [cause in them] because they lack the purpose of mind.<sup>84</sup>

In addition, the terminology of being acted upon by an object is an abuse of words. The senses "receive" (contact) objects when looking at or feeling them, and if we want to use the terminology of being acted upon by the object, we should restrict it to those cases where we suffer a painful sensation (too loud a noise, too bright a vision, too much heat). When they exercise their normal functions, the senses must be said to act rather than to be acted upon.<sup>85</sup>

Ockham's treatment is on a par with that of the other accidental categories. As long as we take the category as one of terms rather than of things, we can employ this category as the one "containing all such verbs as signify that something has been acted upon."<sup>86</sup> As he writes in the *Summa Logicae*: "I think that Aristotle holds that all mental verbs in the active voice belong to the category of action and that all mental verbs in the passive voice belong to the category of passion."<sup>87</sup> He lists the various uses of the verb "pati":

In one sense it is used in the case where something receives something from something else. In this sense a subject suffers as does the matter receiving a form. In another sense the term is used more broadly to cover the first case as well as the case where something is moved without receiving something, as in local motion. In a third sense the term is common to the first two cases as well as the case where something is caused or produced. In the third sense the verb marks a category.<sup>88</sup>

Ockham does not have problems with the philosophical use of the term "pati" and its derivatives. In his commentary on Aristotle's *Categories* he lists several features of the categories action and passion, explaining why Aristotle had designated these categories by verbs rather than nouns.<sup>89</sup> Moreover Aristotle did not mean to speak about "pati" and "actio" as things distinct from absolute, individual things, but only as modes of predication.

This is explained by Ockham more fully in his natural philosophical works. As long as we keep Aristotle's true intention in mind, at least as Ockham interpreted it, we can accept statements such as "actio est in patiente" or "actio est passio." The verb "esse" (to be) in such a sentence should not be taken in the literal, strict sense ("de virtute sermonis"), but it means "praedi-

<sup>84</sup>Valla, 1982, 1:154; trans. Trinkaus, 1993, 321-22 (slightly adapted).

<sup>85</sup>Valla, 1982, 1:154; for a translation see Trinkaus, 1993, 301.

<sup>86</sup>Ockham, 1974a, 187, trans. Ockham, 1974b, 183.

<sup>87</sup>Ockham, 1974a, 187, trans. Ockham, 1974b, 183 (slightly adapted).

<sup>88</sup>Ockham, 1974a, 187, trans. Ockham, 1974b, 184.

<sup>89</sup>Ockham, 1978b, 296-98.

cari" (to be predicated).<sup>90</sup> The sentence "actio est passio" is literally false, but what Aristotle means by it is that "actio" and "passio" signify or co-signify the same thing just as in all the other relative terms. Elsewhere Ockham writes that the terms "actio" and "passio" signify the same act, but "actio" signifies that the act comes from the agent, while "passio" signifies that it is in the patient:

*actio* signifies the agent, although it signifies the act, and *passio* signifies the patient, although it signifies the same act, and thus they signify the same thing, although they signify at the same time distinct things. Hence *calefacere* and *caleferi* are distinct terms and not synonymous, even though they signify the same thing, viz. warmth. But the first signifies that the warmth comes from the "calefiens," and the other that it is in the patient.<sup>91</sup>

There are several other places where Ockham treats these categories, but enough has been said to indicate the similarities and differences with Valla's account. Both deny the existence of a final cause (*causa finalis*) in inanimate beings,<sup>92</sup> and both deny an independent existence of the category of passion; but while for Valla this implies a total lack of function for such a category, for Ockham it is a mode of signification and as such can be accepted and its specific features explored. Because the categories do not reflect distinctions in the real world, the category of action does not have a different ontological status than passion: like the other accidental categories they categorize terms by which we can talk about individual things and their inhering qualities. In contrast, Valla accepts the category of action as one of the three existing categories, though at times he tends to reduce it to quality.<sup>93</sup>

Furthermore, Valla's criticisms are made possible because he takes the terms "pati" and "passio" in their "common" sense and then concludes that they are wrongly used by philosophers. While realizing the differences between philosophical and ordinary usage, Ockham does not have any problems in using such philosophical terms in a non-ordinary, philosophical sense, and accepts philosophical uses of them (e.g., great and small are passions of time, concepts are passions).<sup>94</sup>

<sup>90</sup>Ockham, 1984c, 459-60.

<sup>91</sup>Ockham, 1984b, 333-34.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 228.

<sup>93</sup>See n. 2 above.

<sup>94</sup>Panaccio, 1974, is a definitive refutation of the idea, once defended, that Ockham was an ordinary language philosopher *avant la lettre*.

## 7. THE NOTION OF PRIVATION

Another example of a seemingly similar position is the question of privation. Both thinkers, Zippel notices, denied that privation was a principle of natural things.<sup>95</sup> This suggests that Valla's discussion must be placed against the background of medieval debates about privation as a third principle of generation, next to form and matter, and indeed it is inserted in his discussion of change of qualities (Valla's word for forms).<sup>96</sup> Since generation consists in matter's receipt of a form of which it was previously deprived, privation and possession are key concepts in the Aristotelian account of generation. These concepts were introduced by Aristotle in his *Categories*, where they are listed as one of the four ways in which things are said to be opposed: as relatives, as contraries, as privation and possession, as affirmation and negation (11b17ff.). Aristotle adds that privation is only spoken of when it is natural for a thing to have it, for example in the case of people who lack vision at a time they naturally should possess it: "For it is not what has teeth that we call toothless, nor blind what does not have sight, but what has not got them at the time when it is natural for it to have them. For some things from birth have neither sight nor teeth yet are not called toothless or blind."<sup>97</sup> Thus we should not speak of privation in the case of plants or babies not yet born.

Valla discusses privation in the chapter on the reduction of the nine accidental categories to two: quality and action. He briefly discusses form, which he now prefers to call "quality," distinguishing natural from non-natural qualities. A natural quality, such as color, form, touch, and weight, cannot be absent from a substance, while a non-natural one can be absent; for example, the color red in an apple or heat in an iron bar.<sup>98</sup> A non-natural quality can be substituted for another one (a particular color) but not the natural ones (color as such). At this point he comes to speak about privation, a notion which is introduced by scholastic philosophers ("isti") "where nothing is substituted [for something which has been removed]."<sup>99</sup> But "if it

<sup>95</sup>Zippel in Valla, 1982, 1:n. 114: "Contra privationem utpote principium rerum naturalium scripserat Ockam, antequam Valla."

<sup>96</sup>The impression of being a digression is enhanced by Valla's own words after the brief section on privation: "Sed ut eo redeam unde egressus sum" (Valla, 1982, 1:115).

<sup>97</sup>12a26-35, trans. Ackrill in Aristotle, 1963, 33 (slightly adapted).

<sup>98</sup>Valla, 1982, 1:113-15. Compare Mack, 45-47.

<sup>99</sup>Valla, 1982, 1:114, trans. Trinkaus, 1993, 314. Trinkaus offers no critical discussion and leaves out some problematical sentences. Nor does he notice that paragraph 7 (see below) occurs only in the third recension. He links Valla's discussion to his elimination of the category of "where" (ubi) and the medieval debates on space and vacuum. Valla's discussion, however, is stimulated by his consideration of *quality*, as he himself notices at the end of chap. 12 (Valla, 1982, 1:112).

is nothing," Valla objects, "what is gained by constituting a third [thing] along with form and matter, as if it actually is something? For they want it to be as if nothing, and yet as if something." They think, for example, that the absence of vision in a blind person or in infants not yet born or in cubs of a beast just born, is to be viewed as privation (for there is no vision), yet it is still something, i.e., the potency to see. Valla seems to disagree with this, but his discussion is far from clear.<sup>100</sup> For him such eyes do not have the potency to see and cannot even be called eyes, "just as a man who is now dead or is still in the womb of the mother does not yet have a soul." (Valla is not concerned about the heterodox implications of his analogy.) If they cannot be called eyes, it makes of course no sense to talk about privation of vision.

Valla's claim is implausible and certainly goes against common practice; we do not deny that a blind person has eyes. He ignores here (though not elsewhere)<sup>101</sup> the useful distinction among people who have lost sight at a time they naturally possesses it, unborn babies who do not have sight but normally will develop it later, and things which do not have sight because they are not built that way (plants).

In the next sentence, however, he writes that an eye, which is not yet perfected, possesses the power of reaching towards vision ("potentia perveniendi ad visionem") rather than the power to see ("potentia videndi"), and he calls such a power "a quality."<sup>102</sup> The same can be said, he concludes cryptically, of "a dark place and the other senses, whether lost or not yet developed (*perceptis*) or in bad condition but curable."<sup>103</sup> One may rightly ask whether this power of reaching toward vision does not play a similar role as the potency to see in the account he had just criticized.

<sup>100</sup>Valla writes: "Nam eam quasi nihil et tamen nonnihil volunt esse: ut in oculo videndi defectum, qualis est vel in eo qui amisit visum, vel in eo qui nondum adeptus est, quales infantes nondum editi et catuli ferarum statim editi, quibus nullus dum visus sit et tamen in oculo naturalis potentia videndi (videlicet quod oculus sit natura aptus ad videndum). Cum et visu orbatus et visum nondum adeptus nihil cernant, visio nulla erit, privatioque ipsa nihil erit" (Valla, 1982, 1:114; I put a full stop after "videndum.") Because he then continues with "Potentia autem videndi est in oculo bene affecto, non autem in extincto aut nondum absoluto, ut neuter possit vocari oculus," I think the preceding sentences contain the opinion to be criticized. The construction is far from clear.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 1:68: "quasi idem sit inanimatum, quod brutum et puer. An si puer nondum perfectam rationem, continuo et nullam habet; et si non semper eligere bene scit, protinus nihil bene eligit?"

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 1:114: "in oculo orbato inest quedam qualitas que et a cernentibus agnoscitur et tactu sentitur" (an eye which is deprived [of vision] has a certain quality which is observed by those who see [the senses?] and perceived by touch) — a problematic sentence which Trinkaus, 1993, omits.

<sup>103</sup>Valla, 1982, 1:114: "Idem dico de loco tenebroso, idem de reliquis sensibus vel amissis, vel nondum perceptis, vel male affectis sed reparabilibus."

In the third recension Valla adds a new passage, which emphasizes the way we talk about negative things such as blindness:

privation is almost nothing else than negative statement. What else is a blind person than 'not endowed with sight'? deaf, than 'not having hearing'? dry soil than 'not having moisture'? empty and closed space than 'not containing anything nor open'? For if privation for the most part is nothing but the force of denying, just as negation constitutes nothing, so [privation] is not able to constitute anything. Therefore, if privation constitutes [anything at all],<sup>104</sup> it will be a quality, as I just showed<sup>105</sup> of the senses and of darkness which either signifies nothing other than 'not light,' or the quality of the place as 'obscurity' as 'shadow' as 'opacity.' The following verse from Genesis proves this: 'And darkness was over the face of the abyss.'<sup>106</sup>

Valla's suggestion that privation almost always amounts to denying something ("dark" is "not light") is aimed at undermining the notion of its ontological significance. There is no darkness, blindness, emptiness as such; we use negative statements only to say that something is not the case or that something is lacking, implying that it may become the case or may possess it later. The association of privation with quality (Valla's word for form), however, is not entirely felicitous, since quality is also the name of really existent accidents inhering in things.<sup>107</sup> And indeed in different, i.e., grammatical contexts, Valla treats "obscurum/obscuritas" on the same level as a really inhering quality such as "whiteness."<sup>108</sup> Valla does not clearly distinguish here between the grammatical concept of quality from the ontological one. His entire account lacks rigor.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 1:115: "ut negatio nihil constituit, ita nec illa constituere poterit; si constituit, ergo qualitas erit." I depart from Trinkaus, 1993, 314, here who translates "just as negation constitutes nothing, so [privation] is not able to be constituted. Therefore, if constituted, it will be a quality."

<sup>105</sup>"ostendebam modo" (Valla, 1982, 1:115). Valla probably refers to the quotation which I just quoted (1:114, lines 25-27). Trinkaus, 1993, 314, uses the future tense ("I will show now").

<sup>106</sup>Valla, 1982, 1:115: "Quod si privatio plerunque nihil est aliud quam negandi vis, ut negatio nihil constituit, ita nec illa constituere poterit; si constituit, ergo qualitas erit, quemadmodum ostendebam modo de sensibus atque de tenebris que aut nihil aliud significant quam 'non lux,' aut qualitatem loci ut 'obscuritas,' ut 'umbra,' ut 'opacitas.' Quod probat illud ex *Genesis*: 'Et tenebre erant super faciem abyssi,'" trans. Trinkaus 1993, 314 (slightly adapted).

<sup>107</sup>Compare the expression "in oculo orbato inest quedam qualitas que et a cernentibus agnoscitur et tactu sentitur," which surely does not suggest a merely linguistic interpretation of privation (Valla, 1982, 1:114).

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 1:22.

The idea that privation is hardly anything but the force of negation recurs in book 2 of the *Repastinatio*, where Valla criticizes Aristotle's account of the four ways in which things are said to be opposed. Relatives such as "father" and "son" should not be subsumed under "opposed things,"<sup>109</sup> and among the other three there is much more overlap than Aristotle's fourfold division suggests. Contraries such as good and bad can also be considered under the rubric of privation ("malum" being the privation of "bonum"), privation ("blindness") under the rubric of contraries ("blindness" against "vision") or under the rubric of negation. Here Valla remarks: "I call anyone blind whoever lacks vision, irrespective whether he [naturally] possesses it or not."<sup>110</sup> This is clearly different from Aristotle's notion of privation in the *Categories*, where it is limited to those cases where something is lacking at a time it would normally be present. It is also difficult to reconcile with Valla's categorical statement in book 1 quoted above that an eye which is not yet perfected has the power of reaching toward vision.

It is not possible here to summarize Ockham's frequent and extensive discussions of privation, particularly in his natural philosophical works (including his commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*). Essentially, he treats it on a par with abstract terms, which do not stand for anything distinct from concrete, individual things.<sup>111</sup> Privation stands for the matter which is deprived of a form and connotes the non-existing form, as Ockham writes in his *Brevis summa libri Physicorum*.<sup>112</sup> Thus "blindness" stands for the eye which lacks vision and connotes the non-existing form (of vision). Privation can only be called a principle of generation in the broad sense of describing the phase of generation as that which precedes the introduction of a form, and as such it enters into the account of generation as matter's receipt of a form

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., 1:235-36: "Nam unam vocant 'ad aliquid,' 'πρός τι,' ut 'duplum,' 'dimidio,' 'pater' 'filio': que non video quid habeant oppositionis, potius quam appositionis. 'Amicus' enim 'amico' . . . cognatum quiddam potius habent, quam contrapositum." By taking the term "oppositio" in a literal way, Valla is right to question the appropriateness of the label in the case of relatives, but in other cases he admonishes *not* to take terms literally, for instance grammatical terms such as "ablative" (as if it is ever used for "ablation"), "accusative" (as if this ever used for "accusation") and "supine" (as if they are lying, *resupina*); Valla, 1982, 1:154.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., 1:236: "'Cecum' appello quicumque caret visu, sive illum habuit sive non habuit"; compare 2:497.

<sup>111</sup>Ockham, 1974a, 34, trans. Ockham, 1974b, 68.

<sup>112</sup>For example Ockham, 1984a, 23: "privatio non concurret ad generationem tamquam aliquid distinctum realiter ex parte rei, sed concurret tamquam pars definitiva transmutationis quae tamen supponit pro eadem re pro qua supponit materia, connotando formam non existentem." See further the index to this volume which gives dozens of references to "privatio," for example to quaestio 113: "Utrum privatio sit alia res a materia et forma secundum intentionem Philosophi," and quaestio 114: "Utrum haec sit concedenda de virtute sermonis 'materia est privatio'" (Ockham, 1984c, 698-706).

which it lacked. It can be translated into a longer expression which omits the term “privatio,” so that we should not be tempted to ask “quid rei?” (what is the thing which corresponds to the name?) but only “quid nominis?” (what does it mean?).<sup>113</sup>

Because Aristotle frequently speaks of three principles of generation — matter, form, and privation — and seems to think of privation as a negative principle in a real ontological sense, Ockham has to reinterpret all such expressions. He follows his usual strategy of distinguishing the imprecise meaning from the strict meaning. Something may be true according to the imprecise, non-literal meaning of the terms, while false when taken strictly (“de virtute sermonis” or “de proprietate sermonis”). When we take into account Aristotle’s original intention, we shall see that he did often not speak about things at all but only about words (or terms of second intention). Thus, the expression “privation is a principle” does not say something about a real thing distinct from matter and form but about the term “privation” of which “principle” is predicated.<sup>114</sup>

In commenting on the *Categories*, Ockham basically follows Aristotle in holding that there can never be privation of x at a time when x would naturally not be present: babies are not called toothless, even though they do not have teeth.<sup>115</sup> But he interprets the terms “possession” and “privation” as opposite names or terms rather than as ontological things or principles as they were for Aristotle.

As we have seen, Valla does not make such distinctions: “I call anyone blind whoever lacks vision, irrespective whether he [naturally] possesses it or not.” For him eyes which do not have the potency to see cannot even be called eyes, “just as a man who is now dead or is still in the womb of the mother does not yet have a soul.” This is difficult to square with Ockham’s exegesis of the same passage. Both thinkers, however, may be said to de-ontologize the notion of privation, refusing to see it as more than a negative expression. Valla speaks of privatio as a “negativa oratio,” Ockham as a “nomen privativum.” In a rambling passage, Valla tends to equate privatio with quality: for example, the “obscurity of a place” means the absence of light (“non lux”). When we substitute quality with form, according to Valla’s own account, we get something equivalent to Ockham’s treatment of a negative expression as standing for the thing which lacks the form, while connoting the non-existent form. Apart from anything else, the difference between Valla and Ockham is that the latter tries to safeguard Aristotle by

<sup>113</sup>Brown, 121.

<sup>114</sup>For example Ockham, 1984b, 165-68; see also the index to the volume.

<sup>115</sup>Ockham, 1978b, 308.

carefully distinguishing between the figural and literal sense, while Valla does not allow Aristotle such a way out.

Of course, Valla never discusses the issue in Ockham's terms. His brief and rambling remarks are no match for Ockham's extensive discussions. Valla was groping towards what we may call a "de-ontologization" of the notion of privation, but he lacked Ockham's fine-grained semantic and logical apparatus.

## 8. UNIVERSALS

It has recently been said that Valla's "notorious simplification of the Aristotelian predicaments (or categories) and the universals in fact continues late medieval developments in the logic of William of Ockham."<sup>116</sup> As has been shown here, however, Valla's ontological reduction is entirely different in kind to Ockham's. What about universals? Valla does not discuss the question of universals in the *Repastinatio* nor in his other works. He certainly rejects abstract terms such as "deitas" and "entitas" but his reason is that they are incorrectly formed from nouns ("deus" and "ens"); he admits of terms such as "divinitas," "humanitas," "falsitas," "veritas," which are correctly formed from adjectives ("divinus," "humanus," "falsus," "verus"). This, however, does not mean, as Monfasani tentatively suggests, that he accepts the independent status of universals as traditional realists did. Neither does the use of a noun, which stands for an entire class, imply the independent existence of a universal corresponding to that noun.<sup>117</sup> He simply does not address the ontological question, let alone do so as Ockham does in various writings.<sup>118</sup>

Monfasani has suggested that it would be reasonable to argue that Valla was a realist, for whom the eternal existence of true ideas which we have of things reside in the God's mind, but he admits that the text is too brief to settle the question. The text, however, is not only too brief; it is also too ambiguous. In his attack of the transcendental term "verum" (true), Valla writes that truth properly is knowledge or cognition, "as if the light of the mind."<sup>119</sup> This light of the mind comes from within, not from without like

<sup>116</sup>Blanchard, 179.

<sup>117</sup>For the rejection of terms such as "deitas," see Valla, 1982, 1:30-36 and 2:371-72 and for the use of a noun to stand for an entire class ("in solidu et, ut sic dicam, 'totaliter,' ut 'homo,' ut 'equus est species animalis'") see 1:188 and 2:456. Monfasani writes that "Valla souscrit aux universels — à condition qu'ils soient correctement formés à partir d'adjectifs et non à partir de noms" and "En vérité, Valla souscrit même à une sorte d'universel vague formé" (Monfasani, 2001, 234).

<sup>118</sup>Belief in an independent, real status of universals is, according to Ockham, the "pessimus error in philosophia" (Ockham 1978c, 363).

<sup>119</sup>Valla, 1982, 1:19: "Verum' sive 'veritas' est proprie scientia sive notitia cuiuscunque rei, et quasi lux animi, que ad sensus se porrigit."

solar light. The sun is compared to God, who makes intellectual vision possible:

Just as the sun shows and exhibits the colours of bodies to the eyes, so too God shows and exhibits the qualities of things to the mind. Plato proposed this theory somewhat differently in the *Republic*, where he says that truth is like the sun, knowledge and cognition like authentic vision.<sup>120</sup>

Unlike Plato's account, in which the truth is compared directly with the sun, Valla holds that God is not identical with the truth or knowledge ("veritas est scientia sive notitia," truth is science or knowledge), but that he is the *source* of the truths in our minds, just as the source of physical light is in the sun: "Thus, truth and falsity are in us, that is, in our soul; but the source of our truth is in God, just as the source of light is in the sun."<sup>121</sup> It is we who ascribe predicates of true and false to things such as bread, wine, and prophets according to our experience. In the next sentence, however, Valla identifies truth with God, while he had compared God with the *source* of truth in the previous sentence: "The source of falsity, however, is in the obstruction of the divine source, just as the source of obscurity is in the removal of the sun, as God is properly truth just as the sun is light, which is what Plato also held."<sup>122</sup>

It may seem trivial to distinguish between God as source of truth and as truth, but Valla's comparisons hinge on it, and it is therefore confusing to start saying that God is the medium which enables us to see truth and then to say that God is the truth.<sup>123</sup> And while Valla first writes that Plato held a similar though somewhat different theory, he drops this qualification "nonnihil diverse" only a few sentences later.

Valla nowhere explains the mechanism of divine illumination, but his insistence on the fact that it is the human mind which forms true or false statements seems to rule out the possibility that we see the true concepts or

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., 1:19: "quanquam ut sol oculis colores corporum, ita Deus menti rerum qualitates ostendit et exhibet. Hoc nonnihil diverse protulit Plato in libris *De re publica*, cum ait veritatem esse velut solem, scientiam notitiamque, veluti sincerum aspectum"; trans. Monfasani, 2000, 5-6.

<sup>121</sup>Valla, 1982, 1:20: "Itaque in nobis, idest in animo nostro est veritas et falsitas: sed fons veritatis nostre in Deo, sicut nostre lucis in sole"; trans. Monfasani, 2000, 5.

<sup>122</sup>Valla, 1982, 1:20: "Falsitatis vero in obstructione divini fontis, sicut obscuritatis in subductione solis, ut proprie Deus sit veritas sicut sol lux, quod Plato modo sentiebat"; trans. Monfasani, 2000, 5-6.

<sup>123</sup>In his excellent article, Monfasani, 2000, 1-23, points out a number of inconsistencies in Valla's theological thinking, though not this one. He writes that for Valla "this interior light is God himself," while on Valla's distinction between light and the source of light ("in animo nostro est veritas et falsitas; sed fons veritatis nostre in Deo, sicut nostre lucis in sole") God is rather the source of this interior light.

universals as reflections of the eternal ideas present in God's mind.<sup>124</sup> As the source of our light, God simply enables us to form true judgments. Monfasani is correct in noticing that the passage on God and the mind is difficult to square with Ockhamist nominalism,<sup>125</sup> but it is even more correct to say that Valla's brief and ambiguous remarks do not fit into the medieval discussions about universals at all. Moreover, in other equally brief passages on the soul and the process of cognition, Valla does not refer to God and eternal exemplars, even though he employs the same comparison of the soul to the sun. He then simply writes that the intellect ("which is the same as reason") is born from memory and examines and judges the "things which memory has comprehended and retained."<sup>126</sup>

## 9. CONCLUSION

Although no one would deny the large differences in intellectual and institutional traditions in which Valla and Ockham worked, it has often been said or argued that Valla's transformation of traditional logic and metaphysics continues late medieval and in particular Ockhamist nominalism. This article has offered an antidote to this view. The main points of the argument can be summarized as follows.

First, Valla's ontology admits of substances, qualities, and (in some passages) actions only. These are the only three categories which he accepts. Thus, the number of categories is dependent on what really exists, and Valla may have been inspired by the grammatical categories of noun, adjective (and adverb), and verb. In order to show that there are no other categories, Valla has to show that terms refer to one of these three categories, or a combination of these;<sup>127</sup> hence, his recurrent question: to what does this term refer? Ockham's ontology is even more narrow: only substances and qualities exist. But for Ockham this does not mean that the categories are only two in number, since for him the categories categorize terms with which we describe things, not things. Both thinkers hold that all terms ultimately refer to

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., 6: "[w]hat is not clear is whether the divine light provides the true concepts of things, i.e. reflections of the ideas in the mind of God, or whether it simply enables true judgements in us. The latter is probable, but Valla's words do not rule out the former." Monfasani, 2001, 235, is more positive about the possibility of Valla as a believer in eternal, true ideas in God's mind.

<sup>125</sup>And even with "Aristotelian and Thomist abstractionism," he writes (ibid.), but this is less difficult in Albertist epistemology, in which the active intellect's light is dependent upon a higher light (see Owens, 448).

<sup>126</sup>Valla, 1982, 1:410, and compare 2:66-67. In Nauta, I have examined his ideas on the soul.

<sup>127</sup>See above n. 23.

substances and qualities (and in Valla's case, also to actions), but draw different conclusions about the status of the categories.

Second, for Valla the point of departure must always be ordinary usage, that is, the Latin language of the great classical authors. A good, adequate description of the world requires a sound grasp of all the semantic and grammatical features of the Latin language.<sup>128</sup> In some cases Valla admits that linguistic expressions do not always reliably reflect the way things are, for instance when he writes that it is "incorrect" (*improprium*) to say that a quality is present in a substance, "but we cannot speak in any other way."<sup>129</sup> He also argues that grammatical categories of noun, adjective, and verb — in spite of superficial appearances — do not always refer to, respectively, substance, quality, and action: a verb such as "caleo" signifies a quality rather than an action. In that case an equivalent expression may be found which fits the facts better, as in "bonus scriptor est" (he is a good writer) for "hic bene scribit" (he writes well), for "bene scribere" refers to a quality rather than to an action.<sup>130</sup> And some terms should not be taken literally — names of the cases, for instance: "'accusative,' 'ablative,' 'dative' case, as if this is ever used for 'accusation,' for 'ablation,' or for 'dation.'"<sup>131</sup> This is merely confirmation that only knowledge of the meaning and uses of words in classical authors can help to avoid misunderstanding. In general, natural language is a reliable reflection of reality.

Ockham's objectives are entirely different. As a logician he is interested in the logic of natural language rather than in the grammatical features of one specific type of language, classical Latin. The primary language for Ockham is the mental language of our concepts, from which spoken and written language derive their meanings. As a nominalist, who admits of only singular entities, Ockham has to explain generality in thought and language without having recourse to universals. As Panaccio writes: "Ockham intended to achieve just that by founding external language on mental language and then by explaining the representational capacities of the latter exclusively in terms of various meaning relations linking certain singular entities in the mind — the concepts — with their singular referents."<sup>132</sup> Ockham has to approach the mental language through a consideration of features of external (i.e. spoken and written) language, in order to filter out those features which suffice to signify reality. It has been argued that Ockham transfers "more grammatical

<sup>128</sup> See for instance Valla, 1982, 2:435: "ut vim orationis verborumque assidue promam et quomodo intelligendum sit, doceam."

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 2:365: "sed aliter loqui non possumus."

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 1:130-31 and 2:443-45.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 1:154.

<sup>132</sup> Panaccio, 1999, 54.

accidents from Latin to mental language than would be necessary to signify the way things are,"<sup>133</sup> but even though in the final analysis mental language would bear close resemblance to natural language, it is obvious that this is a vastly different approach to language to Valla's.

Third, an important consequence of Valla's insistence on the use of ordinary usage (*consuetudo*, which is the Latin of the best authors) is his refusal to acknowledge types of discourse which take terms in other senses than classical Latin allows. His aversion to abstractions and abstract terms leads to a dismissal of scholastic jargon but also of mathematical and juridical language, as soon as they go beyond *consuetudo*.<sup>134</sup> For this reason he rejects Aristotle, Boethius, and the scholastic tradition almost tout court.

Working in the scholastic traditions and commenting on the Aristotelian texts, Ockham has to develop a completely different attitude towards the *auctoritates*, when faced with problematic, abstract terms. He is not so much worried about possible violations of the rules of classical Latin, but rather the ontological commitments which his realist opponents draw from encountering terms such lines, points, motion, succession, instant, etc. in the Aristotelian texts. This is a recurrent theme in his writings: "some lean too much on the peculiarities of speech found in philosophy books. This is a source of error for many" and "such a production of abstract nouns from adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions, verbs, and syncategorematic terms creates many difficulties and leads many into errors."<sup>135</sup> Ockham ascribes these errors to the distance which separates modern readers from the original context in which these terms were used and understood: ancient writers and their audience were well aware that terms such as *instant*, *point*, *motion*, and *change* should not be taken literally ("de virtute sermonis"), but readers in later periods no longer realized this.<sup>136</sup> He also points to the common habit among ancient thinkers of adapting themselves to other people's ways of speaking: "So if you find in the works of Aristotle or the doctors that 'scientia est de rebus' (science is about things), you must say that they are using the significate for the sign according to their common way of conforming

<sup>133</sup>McCord Adams, 1:297.

<sup>134</sup>Valla, 1982, 1:145: "ubique philosophi cavillantur, imprimis naturam verborum depravantes." Poets, on the other hand, are allowed much more freedom. They have a "summa dicendi licentia" (1:59 and 2:434).

<sup>135</sup>Ockham, 1974a, 170-71, trans. Ockham, 1974b, 170-71 and Ockham 1944, 46, which is a compilation from the *Expositio in libros Physicorum Aristotelis*. Though Ockham was almost certainly not its compiler, "almost every line was written by Ockham" (Boehner in Ockham, 1944, 29). I take the trans. from Brown, 127.

<sup>136</sup>Ockham, 1930, 54: "et hoc, quia temporibus eorum satis fuerunt talia nota, quod non erant vera secundum proprietatem sermonis, quamvis aliqui posteriores hoc ignaverunt" (quoted by Brown, 125).

themselves to other people's ways of speaking."<sup>137</sup> Incorrect translations and the difficulty of translating Greek expressions into Latin are also mentioned as sources of misinterpretations.<sup>138</sup> In order to avoid realist ontologies, caused by mistaken semantic assumptions (i.e., that any distinct noun corresponds to a distinct thing corresponding to it), Ockham suggests that

in modern times because of the errors which have arisen from the use of such abstract names it would be better for the sake of the unskilled if we did not use such abstract nouns in philosophy but only the verbs, adverbs, conjunctions and prepositions as they were originally instituted; and it would also be better if we did not make up such abstract terms and use them. Indeed, if the use of such abstract terms as 'motus,' 'mutatio,' 'mutabilitas,' 'simultas,' 'successio,' 'quies' and such expressions were cut out there would be *relatively* little difficulty with motion, change, time, instant and such issues.<sup>139</sup>

He realizes of course that this solution is not feasible. Even Ockham cannot do without such terms (for instance "time"): "because I must speak as do the many, I choose to use their language, never intending, however, that time is some one thing totally distinct from all permanent things."<sup>140</sup> Technical language or technical uses of common words are therefore permitted provided that one interprets them in the correct way, and for this correct understanding knowledge of logic is crucial, for "those who are ignorant of logic uselessly fill innumerable volumes on these issues, inventing difficulties where none exist."<sup>141</sup>

Thus, Ockham's hermeneutic approach to Aristotle is entirely different from Valla's. Moreover, Ockham's suggestion that we should stick to words as they were originally instituted is not motivated by aesthetic sensibilities or normative preference for a particular form of Latin, but a consequence of his campaign against realist interpretations of Aristotle. One of the results of these differences is that, whereas Valla would have no problems with perfectly classical Latin words such as *motus*, *successio*, *quies* and *mutatio*, Ockham would have preferred to abolish these terms for philosophical reasons. In general, for Valla ordinary linguistic usage is well adapted to express

<sup>137</sup> Ockham, 1984a, 9.

<sup>138</sup> Ockham, 1974a, 170-71, trans. Ockham, 1974b, 171.

<sup>139</sup> Ockham, 1944, 47, quoted and trans. by Brown, 127.

<sup>140</sup> Ockham, 1944, 100, quoted and trans. by Brown, 127. Kelley's judgment, 31, therefore that "Like Ockham, Valla was almost unutterably literal-minded" is not adequate.

<sup>141</sup> Ockham, 1974a, 31, trans. Ockham, 1974b, 66. He often defined and used terms in accordance with contemporary practice, for instance on passion: "It should be noted that although this term can be used in a variety of senses . . . nevertheless, as logicians usually use the term a passion is not something outside the mind" (ibid., 1974a, 104, trans. 1974b, 121).

the common sense view of the world, while for Ockham language is not such a reliable and direct guide.<sup>142</sup>

The conclusion must be that there is no structural similarity between the thinking of Ockham and Valla. What they do have in common are general attitudes such as an aversion against arbitrary abstraction, a preoccupation with the multifarious workings of language, the conviction that language must be the *point de départ* for any kind of philosophizing, the recognition that language sets traps for us. They were not alone, however, in sharing these convictions, nor are these typically nominalist tendencies. The differences in intellectual context, personal motivations, aims, and especially their contrasting methods and arguments are far more important and striking than these superficial similarities.

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<sup>142</sup>Valla's position on *res* as the central term to describe things in the world seems to imply that "if everything which can be named is a thing, then there is a thing which corresponds to every name," as Mack, 39-40, has argued, an implication which of course would be totally oppose Ockham's campaign against the crude, semantic assumption that each term names a thing.

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