The Price of Reduction: Problems in Valla's Epicurean Fideism[1]

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Introduction

If there is one theme which ties Valla's works together it is his attempt to answer that crucial question which so many humanists from Petrarch onwards had to face: how to combine Christian faith with the rich culture and thought of pagan Antiquity.[2] It is not surprising that this theme, perhaps more than other aspects of his work, has dominated modern scholarship on Valla, with his *De vero bono* as centrepiece.[3] In this dialogue, published as *De voluptate* in 1431 when he was still in his mid-twenties and revised two years later under the title *De vero bono*, Valla presents a discussion between an 'Epicurean', a 'Stoic' and a 'Christian' on the age-old question: What is the highest ethical good? The result of this confrontation between pagan and Christian moral thought is a combination of Pauline fideism and Epicurean hedonism, in which the Christian concepts of charity and beatitude are identified with hedonist pleasure, and the philosopher's concept of virtue is rejected. The least one could say is that Valla had a keen eye for publicity in taking Epicureanism (in a rhetorical rather than historical sense to be discussed later in this article) as a stepping stone for the development of a Christian morality based on the concept of pleasure, and repudiating the traditional synthesis between Stoicism and Christianity, popular among scholastics and humanists alike. But Valla's move was of course much more than a publicity stunt, and testified to a deeply felt concern for rescuing Christianity out of the hands of theologians and philosophers, who in his view had contaminated religion and morality by dogmatically imposing their abstractions and theories on the multifarious and concrete experience of human life.

The outline of Valla's programme is clear enough and has been expounded by many scholars over the years, but the precise interpretation of the *De vero bono* has proven highly controversial from the first day of its appearance. It has given rise to a wide range of interpretations, dependent on which interlocutor one accepts as Valla's mouthpiece (and this, in turn, often depends to a no negligible extent on the scholarly background and personal beliefs of the critic). Did Valla embrace a Christian Epicureanism or – should we say – an Epicurean Christianity?[4] Was Valla seriously advocating a form of hedonism, or is the position of the Epicurean spokesman only a ploy in a literary game, a guise under which Valla brings home his own peculiar interpretation of the Christian faith? Does Augustine stand behind his vision of beatitude or is Valla subtly transforming the teachings of the church father to suit his own point? Much nineteenth-century scholarship, which often made a point of stressing the pagan and secular side of Renaissance humanism, associated Valla's own position with the hedonistic, naturalistic Epicureanism as advocated in book II,

[1] This article is part of a much longer chapter on Valla's moral thought to appear in my forthcoming book *In Defense of Common Sense. Lorenzo Valla's Humanist Critique of Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*. I am grateful to the participants of the conference *Ethik – Wissenschaft oder Lebenskunst? Modelle der Normenbegründung von der Antike bis zur Neuzeit*, Munich 4-6 Nov. 2004, and especially to Jill Kraye, Eckhard Kessler, Sabrina Ebbersmeyer and David Lines (who also kindly checked my English).

[2] Trinkaus 1970; Witt 2000; Guidi 1999.

[3] Gaeta 1955, 15-53; Di Napoli 1971, 137-246; Fois 1969, esp. 95-167 and the literature cited in n. 5 below.

[4] Cf. Di Napoli 1971, 246.

while later scholars, emphasising Valla's devout Christianity (albeit perhaps of a somewhat unorthodox kind), regarded the position of the 'Christian' in book III as the sole expression of Valla's own view. In more recent times it has been argued that Valla's essentially Christian vision allows room for 'Epicureanism' of some sort, but it is a moot point whether Valla has successfully combined into one vision the Pauline, other-worldly perspective with the hedonism of Epicureanism.[5]

The *De vero bono* has understandably been considered as the principal source of Valla's moral and religious views, but it should not be forgotten that the *Repastinatio* too contains an extensive discussion of these same themes. This discussion is based on *De vero bono*, and because Valla himself refers the reader to this work for "fuller treatment",[6] it may be reasonable to expect that Valla did not do more than extract and distil some salient points from the *De vero bono* for incorporation in the *Repastinatio*. Yet, the chapter in the *Repastinatio* (i.e. book I, chapter 10 in the later versions) deserves a full consideration on its own. Not only does its sheer length – in the later versions it is the longest chapter in the entire work (together with II, 22 which however is a long extract from Quintilian) – indicate that Valla deemed such an incorporation necessary as an essential part of his campaign against philosophy and rationalist theology, it also can help us to analyse the tensions within Valla's discussion and how he tries to resolve them, since the *Repastinatio* offers less hermeneutical problems than the highly rhetorical dialogue of the *De vero bono*. True, the *Repastinatio* is a highly rhetorical work too, but its style and genre clearly offer less hermeneutic problems in extracting Valla's own position than the dialogue between the three interlocutors in the *De vero bono*. We may take Valla's words at face value here, as he speaks in his own voice. An examination of Valla's chapter from the *Repastinatio* reveals, I believe, tensions which have not been properly addressed by modern scholars: the identification of the virtues with feelings; the vacillation on the question whether virtue resides in action, motive or the underlying reason; the ambiguous relationship between will and reason; the conflicting statements about virtues as momentary passions rather than habits; the ambivalence of the terminology of cause and end in the description of charity; the semantically different spheres of terms which, on Valla's account, are identical (*voluptas*, *charitas*, *fortitudo*, etc.); the arguments he offers as a critique of Aristotle's notion of virtue as a mean between extremes. I cannot agree therefore with much contemporary scholarship on Valla which depicts him as a highly consistent thinker, whose opinions would express "una logica unitaria" and "il rigore argomentativo" or "an extraordinary inner consistency in his conception of man and his religious vision".[7] Of course, my aim in discussing some of these problems in this paper is not to discredit Valla as an innovative scholar, but by offering a critical assessment of Valla's *Repastinatio*, I hope to give a more balanced picture of his philosophical achievements and limitations.

The context of Valla's discussion is conventional enough, being a discussion of the soul. Ethics of course was not an autonomous subdiscipline of an academic subject – as it is now – but had firm roots in ideas on the human soul and human

[5] The literature on Valla's moral and religious thought is vast. For discussions see for instance Mancini 1891; Gaeta 1955; Gerl 1974; Di Napoli 1971; Fois 1969; Radetti 1955; Trinkaus 1970; Camporeale 1972; Vickers 1986; Lorch 1985; Lorch 1991; Laffranchi 1999.

[6] "[U]berius tractavimus in libris *De vero bono*"; "et si hec in libris *De vero bono* tractavimus, non tamen hic otiosa erunt"; "latius de his in alio opere disseruimus" (Valla 1982, 417, 73, and 98).

[7] Fubini 1990, 368 and Trinkaus 1970, vol. 1, 130. Similar evaluations are frequently expressed by other scholars.

physiology, and moral questions pertained not only to ethics but also to what we would now call philosophical anthropology, psychology, pedagogy and, of course, theology and religion.[8] Moreover, as one of the subjects of the *studia humanitatis*, moral philosophy was an integral part of the study of the classics, as the latter was generally believed to give moral guidance in life.[9] It is only logical therefore that Valla's treatment of the virtues and related moral issues is set within the context of his discussion on the soul. In the first version of the *Repastinatio* the ethical questions are intermingled with his treatment of the soul in his chapter 'Quid sit anima hominis et bruti'. Revising the text in the 1440s, Valla gave the virtues their own chapter, and greatly expanded it by adding and developing his critique of the Aristotelian notion of virtue as a mean between two extremes and his own notion that we should love God not on account of himself but as efficient cause. He added further semantic and grammatical observations on Latin and Greek terms, which also testify to his wider reading in the Aristotelian corpus and in the Greek New Testament, and he devoted two pages to Lactantius' criticism of the equation of the highest good with pleasure. By the time of the third revision the chapter has grown from eight pages in the first edition to 24 (in Zippel's critical edition).[10]

These additions and digressions sometimes obscure the drift of his argument. In the first version there is still a recognisable order of discussion. Valla starts with the four cardinal virtues – prudence, justice, fortitude and modesty. One virtue, *fortitudo*, is singled out as the only true virtue, which is then equated with several other concepts: delight, love, pleasure and, finally, charity. This account cuts through the traditional distinction between the four cardinal virtues and the triad of theological virtues: faith, hope and love. After a brief discussion of the latter, he touches on the love of God, who should not be loved *propter se* but as efficient cause, but he decides not to develop this idea here, referring the reader to the *De vero bono*. In the last paragraphs Valla criticises the Aristotelian notion that virtue is a disposition or habitus, and closes off by stressing the soul's noble status, which should be compared with a heavenly fire rather than with a *tabula rasa*. The same ideas are presented in the later versions, but the order is less tight: the section on virtues and habits has moved forwards, the critique of virtue as a mean between two extremes is inserted before the treatment of love, and the four cardinal virtues are less clearly discussed in consecutive order; besides, there are many minor shifts and additions. In what follows only some of these themes will be discussed; the others will be dealt with in my forthcoming book.[11]

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[8] For a masterful survey of Renaissance ethics see Kraye 1988. Renaissance texts are translated in Kraye (ed.) 1997. Lines 2002 is a meticulous study of the reception of Aristotle's *Ethics* in the Italian Renaissance.

[9] On the debate whether reading the classics implied an enhanced preoccupation with morals in Renaissance classrooms, see in particular the sceptical conclusions drawn by Black (in Black and Pomaro 1999, and in Black 2001) from his extensive MSS research on schoolbooks extant in Florentine libraries. The glossing in copies of widely read schoolbooks is overwhelming grammatical and philological in character with only a tiny role for moral philosophy and other subjects. On Boethius, for instance, he writes that 'it is clear at least that Renaissance teachers and pupils did not significantly look to Boethius for moral inspiration and guidance' (Black and Pomaro 1999, 23). Cf. Nauta 1999.

[10] Valla 1982, 2 vols. Vol. 1 (pp. 1-356) contains Valla's third version, including a critical apparatus which lists variant readings from the second version. Vol. 2 (pp. 357-598) contains the first version.

[11] See above n. 1.

The virtues

The introductory paragraphs make some programmatic claims about the virtues.[12] First, virtues are nothing else but affects, that is, feelings of love, delight, desire or their opposites sorrow, fear, annoyance, and it is these feelings rather than anything else which are to be judged as virtuous or vicious. Second, while it is traditionally held that there are four virtues, there is really only one. This turns out to be a programmatic statement, for even though Valla continues to discuss the traditional four as well as some of the Aristotelian moral virtues, here he already prepares the ground for his central claim that there is basically one, Christian virtue. The third claim is that virtues, being affects, are located in the rear part of the soul, the will, while the domains of knowledge, truth and opinion reside in the other two faculties, memory and reason. This is not to say that the will is independent from the intellectual capacities. The affects need reason as their guide, and the lack of such a guidance result in vice. But in general he stresses the will-based origin of our moral behaviour, as is clear from his treatment of the first of the four cardinal virtues, prudence.

Prudence

Prudence is relegated to reason and memory, since it is not a virtue but rather the science of virtue. "What should be praised or blamed is action, proceeding from cognition and understanding through good will", Valla writes, echoing Cicero's *De officiis*: "all the praise that belongs to virtue lies in action".[13] This separation of prudence (and *sapientia*) from the sphere of moral acting has frequently been described as 'anti-intellectual'.[14] But we should not forget that an emphasis on the will as the seat of morality does not necessarily entail a depreciation of reason, and Valla frequently refers to reason and prudence as the will's guide. He also writes that virtue is to live by the precepts of wisdom (*ex preceptis sapientie vivere*),[15] which too suggests a close connection between reason or wisdom and the actions of the will.

In equating wisdom with prudence Valla seems to have been inspired by Cicero, who in his *De officiis* had coupled the terms at the beginning of book I. After having listed the four virtues as four different aspects of the nature and power of that which is honourable, Cicero says that these four "are bound together and interwoven", but that "certain kinds of duties have their origin in each individually".[16] Thus the peculiar function of the first virtue, "in which we placed wisdom (*sapientia*) and good sense (*prudentia*)", is to investigate and discover what is true (*cognitio veri*).[17] This may take the form of "either taking counsel about honourable matters, that pertain to living well and blessedly, or in the pursuit of knowledge and learning".[18] One should, however, not become totally engrossed in one's studies, without taking into consideration the practical achievements, for "all the praise that belongs to virtue lies in action". Knowledge and learning must serve the public good. At the end of book I,

[12] Valla 1982, 411 and 73-74.
[13] Valla 1982, 411; cf. Cicero 1991, 9 (*De officiis* I.19).
[14] Trinkaus 1970, vol. 1, 158; Zippel 1982, vol. 1, xc, who further discerns a development of "il progedire verso un netto indirizzo anti-intellettualistico e soggettivistico, che emerge dalla indagine sul rapporto tra volontà e ragione", but the passages adduced as evidence of a stronger emphasis in the later versions are already present in the first version.
[15] Valla 1982, 74.
[16] Cicero 1991, 7 (*De officiis* I.15).
[17] Cf. also Cicero 1991, 8 (*De officiis* I.18).
[18] Cicero 1991, 9 (*De officiis* I.19) for this and the following quotation.

however, Cicero defines the terms differently, now distinguishing between prudence and wisdom. Wisdom is called "the knowledge of all things human and divine", including "the sociability and fellowship of gods and men with each other" (that is, the virtue of justice), while prudence is defined as "the knowledge of things that one should pursue and avoid".[19] However we interpret this inconsistency on Cicero's part,[20] his lesson remains the same: "learning about and reflecting upon nature is somewhat truncated and incomplete if it results in no action". But in spite of Cicero's general tendency to subordinate pure enquiry to practical action (proceeding from enquiry and knowledge), he is willing to admit that a life, dedicated to learning, can also greatly "contribute to the benefits and advantages of mankind" by teaching and education.[21]

This last qualification is apparently lost on Valla, who is strongly opposed to the allegedly Aristotelian subordination of the practical to the contemplative life and of the moral to the intellectual virtues. Thus, Valla reverses the order of preference, especially when he interprets wisdom as the wisdom of the philosophers, which he invariably associates with vain and empty theorising about abstract matters. This, however, is difficult to square with his claim that prudence is the guide of the will.

Justice

After prudence comes justice (*iusticia*), which Valla distinguishes from right in the legal sense (*ius*).[22] Right is the *science* of doing rightly and the art of the equal and the good, while justice is *doing* rightly, that is, it is an action, right, good and equitable (*actio bona, recta et equa*). Belonging to prudence, right is the domain of lawyers and judges, "whence one speaks of the prudence of the legal experts". It concerns knowledge "which emanates from the truth" (by which Valla probably means that as science, based on reason and prudence, it concerns matters of truth and falsity, echoing Cicero's *De officiis* again). On the other hand, justice is action "which emanates from the will", and takes its name "from adhering to right and doing what right orders" (*iubet ius*). Thus, Valla is again at pains to set the sphere of knowledge apart from that of action. Because reason or prudence guides the will in its actions, as Valla has repeatedly said, it is a logical step for him to conclude that *ius* as the science of doing rightly takes the lead, and *iusticia* as action follows.[23] According to Valla, this is also confirmed by linguistic considerations: "iusticia" stems from "ius" rather than vice versa. "Iusticia" is derived from "iustus", which on its turn comes from "ius", like "onustus" stemming from "onus", "vetustus" from "vetus".

Because the power to choose is essential to moral behaviour, morality and laws apply only to the human world. Therefore, Valla rejects the jurists' notion of natural law (*ius naturale*), which they had defined as "that which nature has taught all animals".[24] It is ridiculous, he writes, to call animal behaviour such as copulating and fighting for food and mates a 'law'. Morality and law are essentially human affairs.[25]

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[19] Cicero 1991, 59 (*De officiis* I.153).
[20] See Cicero 1991, 60 note 1 by Griffin; and Cicero 2000, 153 and 155-156 (Walsh).
[21] Cicero 1991, 60 (*De officiis* I.155).
[22] Valla 1982, 412 and 74.
[23] "Illud a veritate manat, hoc a voluntate. Porro ius, idest scientia sive ars sive prudentia precedit, iusticia sequitur" (Valla 1982, 412). Cf. Cicero 1994, 41 (*De officiis* I.101): "Ita fit ut ratio praesit, appetitus obtemperet" ("reason therefore commands, and impulse obeys").
[24] Digest I, I, I, 2-4 (Ulpianus).
[25] This brief passage, which is even further reduced in the later versions, should be read against the background of Valla's earlier work, *De vero bono*, as well as the *Elegantiae* on which he worked

This may seem to come close to a conventionalist interpretation of law, and indeed Valla is often portrayed as a relativist and conventionalist.[26] This, however, should be qualified in an important sense: Valla insists that all human beings have the innate quality or power to choose what is right and act in accordance with it: "all nations discern that which is just, following the lead of nature (*natura duce*)".[27] This "natural reason" (*naturalis ratio*) is an essential part of men, which can and should be developed by education. Such an attitude may have been influenced by Quintilian's belief in the 'perfectibility' of our natural gifts. The entire project in his *Institutio oratoria* may be said to centre around the education of the ideal person, the *vir bonus*.[28] As has already been observed, Valla's usage of natural reason as the dux of the will fits uneasily with the independency and even primacy of the will as the node of our moral actions, vis-à-vis reason.[29]

Fortitude

For Valla, fortitude is the essential virtue as it shows that someone does not let himself be conquered by the wrong emotions, but acts for the good. As a true virtue of action it is closely connected to justice – in fact it is the genus of which justice is the species[30] – being defined as "a certain resistance against the harsh and pleasant things which prudence has declared to be evils".[31] It is the power to tolerate and suffer adversity and bad luck, but also the power to resist the blandishments of a fortune which is all too good, thus weakening the spirit. In Valla's portrayal of the strong man, the Stoic overtones are unmistakable, which is not surprising given the debt to Cicero's *De officiis* – a debt which is greater than the few quotations given by Valla suggest.

In his discussion of the four cardinal virtues and the obligations which are derived from them, Cicero gives a portrait of the wise, just and courageous man, a picture which in its essentials is taken over by Valla. It is a portrait of a man who faces all matters of life without fear and resists being afflicted and conquered by seductive pleasures or arduous hardship: "Both life and death, both riches and poverty, powerfully perturb all men. But as for those who look down with a great and lofty spirit upon prosperity and adversity alike (…), who then will fail to admire the splendour and beauty of virtue? (…) For no man can be just if he fears death, or pain, or exile, or need; or if he prefers their opposites to fairness".[32] Cicero's admonitions are clearly embedded in Stoic psychology, when he writes that our soul has two aspects, reason which commands and impulse which obeys:[33]

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during the same time in which the first version of the *Repastinatio* was written. This point will be developed in my forthcoming book (see n. 1).

[26] Zippel 1956, 108-109; Fubini 1990, 392; Trinkaus 1970, vol. 1, 130.

[27] Valla 1996, 58.

[28] Cf. Cicero 1994, 10 (*De officiis* I.22): "in hoc naturam debemus ducem sequi". On the Quintilian background see Cesarini Martinelli 1996, xcii, who also gives an excellent analysis of Valla's somewhat idiosyncratic relationship with Quintilian (lxxxix-cv).

[29] When Quintilian writes "Mihi ille detur puer quem laus excitet, quem gloria iuvet, qui victus fleat" (*Institutio oratoria* I.3.6), Valla notices: "Plus videtur esse in bona voluntate quam in bona memoria aut bono ingenio" (Valla 1996, 16).

[30] Valla 1982, 413 and 86.

[31] Valla 1982, 413.

[32] Cicero 1991, 76-77 (*De officiis* II.37-38).

[33] Cicero 1991, 39-40 (*De officiis* I.101-102), last line of which slightly modified.

> All action should be free from rashness and carelessness; nor should anyone do anything for which he cannot give a persuasive justification: that is practically a definition of duty. One must ensure, therefore, that the impulses obey reason, and neither run ahead of it, nor through laziness or cowardice abandon it, and that they are calm and free from every agitation of spirit. As a result both constancy and moderation will shine forth in their fullness.

Valla accepts this picture, stressing the need for self-restraint and steadfastness, explicitly loathing a slothful and petty mind, which he holds to be the cause of injustice. His analysis of injustice too closely follows that of Cicero in distinguishing two types of injustice: to inflict injury on others and to fail to deflect injury done to others. As Cicero argues: "Those injustices that are purposely inflicted for the sake of harming another often stem from fear; in such cases the one who is thinking of harming someone else is afraid that if he does not do so, he himself will be affected by some disadvantage. In most cases, however, men set about committing injustice in order to secure something that they desire".[34] While Cicero discusses these forms of positive and negative injustice as part of his treatment of the second cardinal virtue, justice, Valla links them to fortitude, for both inflicting injustice on others and failing to deflect injustice done to others are the result of a petty, mean mind, which lets itself be conquered by the wrong emotions. Imprudence and ignorance can hardly be an excuse for misbehaviour. We may temporarily be blinded by too strong a passion ("that is why we speak of 'blind love', 'blind avarice'" and so forth), but it lies in our own will to dispel those passions and be guided by reason:[35]

> Although the same qualities which I have called love, hatred and the others, when they are unjust are not only opposed to just love and just hatred, but they also press against the eyes of the soul and do not allow it either to remember the best precepts or if it remembers to distinguish between what is right and what is wicked. Therefore then he will be accused and chastised for imprudence, but nevertheless it is ultimately because the mind was weak.

In other words, we may be tempted to blame our lack of prudence, ignorance or strong passions which have made us temporarily blind; these however can never form a good excuse. In that case, we have not listened to reason, which tells us which passion of love, hatred or desire is morally right and which is wrong.[36]

Finally, the fourth virtue, *modestia* or *decorum*, underscores the mingling of the volitional and intellectual spheres. According to Valla it is partly prudence, which

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[34] Cicero 1991, 10-11 (*De officiis* I.24). The terminology is much the same. Cf. Cicero 1994, 10 (*De officiis* I.23): "Sed iniusticiae genera duo sunt, unum eorum qui inferunt, alterum eorum qui ab iis quibus infertur, si possunt, non propulsant iniurium. Nam qui iniuste impetum in quempiam facit aut ira aut aliqua perturbatione incitatus, is quasi manus adferre videtur socio; qui autem non defendit nec obsistit, si potest, iniuriae, tam est in vitio quam si parentes aut amicos aut patriam deserat". Valla 1982, 413: "Certe qui rapit, fraudat, furatur, iniuriam, contumeliam facit, is imbecillitate peccat, victus aut amore aut odio aut invidia aut cupiditate aut timore, quo vinci non debuit. Que qui superat, non nisi 'fortis' est. Et que altera species iniusticie dicitur, qui non propulsat ab oppressis cum possit iniuriam, an alia causa non propulsat nisi ob imbecillitatem, in quo uno virtutis ac vitii cardo versatur?"

[35] Valla 1982, 414. I borrow the translation from Trinkaus 1970, vol. 1, 159.

[36] "Quare odium, timor, cupiditas et si contingant preteritorum affectus, idem efficient quod amor; que, quotiens dux eis ratio sive prudentia aderit, fortitudo erunt, imbecillitas quotiens dux ratio presto non fuerit" (Valla 1982, 415). Cf. Cicero 1991, 21 (*De officiis*, I.49).

tells us what is appropriate for a person, place, time, cause; partly justice or fortitude, which is to act upon, and in which virtue solely resides.[37]

Fortitude as love and charity

Though my summary of Valla's account of the four virtues is all too brief, we are now in a better position to recognize the programmatic character of Valla's assertion that the four cardinal virtues, as traditionally distinguished, are really one: fortitude is the only true virtue, because virtue resides in the will from which our actions, to which we assign moral qualifications, proceed.[38] Valla's reductive strategy has a clear aim: to equate this essential virtue of action, fortitude, to the biblical concept of love and charity. This step requires some hermeneutic force, but the Stoic overtones of Cicero's account in *De officiis* have prepared – ironically perhaps in view of Valla's professed hostility towards Stoicism – the way for it, since the Stoic patience to endure hardship is easily linked to the Pauline message that we become strong by being tested ("Cum enim infirmior, tunc fortior sum", II Cor. 12:10). The labour, sweat and trouble we have to endure, though bad in themselves, "are called good because they lead to that victory", Valla writes, echoing St Paul.[39] Virtue, then, is not something to be aimed at for its own sake, since it is full of labour and hardship, but because it brings us to our goal. This is one of Valla's major claims against the Stoics and Peripatetics, who regarded – at least in Valla's interpretation – virtue as the end of life, that is, the aim to be sought after for its own sake. Because virtuous behaviour is difficult, involving harsh and bitter things, no one naturally and voluntarily seeks virtue as an end in itself. What we seek is pleasure or delectation, both in this life and – which is far more important – in the life to come.

At this point, we may raise the question whether Valla has not confused two senses of his central term 'love'. On the one hand it is identified with the virtue of fortitude (and charity), on the other hand with the goal to which that virtue leads. Valla's idea is that we have to suffer before we get what we want: this love for something can be strenuous and painful, and we have to endure hardship. But love or fortitude by which we are able to endure these hardships is of course not the same as the glorious feeling we have when that love is fulfilled. Valla however seems to blur the distinction, equating both kinds of love with charity, apparently thinking of one and the same love.[40] A critical reader may discern here a lack of terminological and analytical rigour, owing to Valla's decision to cut through a number of terms, bringing them all under one concept. Likewise, charity is described both as final end and as cause. It comes at the end of our life, when we will receive our reward of victory for having conquered hardship and the blandishment of a sensual life. As such it is clearly our goal and end, which we seek for its own sake. On the other hand, charity also comes at the start, for it is called the love which enables us to suffer hardship and courageously undertake things, and as such it is a source or cause rather than an effect. This love is the same as fortitude, but precisely this fortitude, while

[37] Valla 1982, 414 ("modestia"). In the later versions, where the remark is placed at the very end of the chapter, Valla uses the term "decorum" (97). Cf. Cicero 1991 (*De officiis* I.97 and I.142).

[38] Valla draws attention to his reduction of the traditional virtues to fortitude in the letter to Tortelli from 1441: "Vidisti in libris *De vero bono*, quod ad mores pertinet, me ab omnibus dissentire; quod etiam in libris *De institutione philosophie* [= *Repastinatio*] feci, in quibus unam feci virtutem, que est fortitudo, nihilque differre a prudentia malitiam, nec ullam differentiam inter cardinales theologicasque virtutes, et multa huiusmodi" (Valla 1984, no. 17, p. 215).

[39] Valla 1982, 415 and 88. The point is repeatedly made in these sections.

[40] Valla 1982, 85.

being a virtue, is not pursued for its own sake, as Valla explicitly holds against the 'Stoics'.

In positing pleasure as the overarching concept Valla tries – not for the first time in the history of ethical thought – to link earthly and heavenly pleasure. But it is not easy to apply the same model to both kinds of pleasure-seeking behaviour, which this is what Valla constantly suggests and what his examples and terminology have to bear out. As we have seen, for Valla true virtue cannot exist without the endurance of hardship; otherwise, there is no ground for rewarding people, and the promise of rewards for our virtuous behaviour is an essential argument against the Stoics' notion that virtue is its own reward. But many earthly pleasures are not accompanied by struggle and hardship: Valla's own example of the enjoyment of wine for instance does not fit this picture, and likewise with so many other pleasures we seek and come to enjoy without pain or trouble. Valla however could reply that this is only further confirmation of his central contention that pleasure rather than virtue is the *summum bonum*. Traditional virtues *may* be the road to pleasure but need not be so, for the question whether acts of enjoyment are virtuous often does not even arise in daily life.

If human beings naturally seek pleasure rather than virtue – which seems indeed a more realistic view of the matter – we obviously need criteria for deciding which pleasures ought to be pursued and which not. An Epicurean will answer: those pleasures which contribute to the ideal of tranquillity and a peaceful mind, which implies that we should exercise self-restraint and modesty, and this indeed is what Valla also suggests. But how can this self-restraint be reconciled with the pursuit of pleasure? In the last paragraphs of his *De officiis* Cicero attacked the Epicureans on this very point: "How can a man praise restraint when he places the highest good in pleasure? For restraint is hostile to the passions; but the passions are pleasure's adherents".[41] Cicero had no sympathy for Epicurus and his philosophy and was unwilling to consider the subtler aspects of its doctrines, but this is a relevant question.[42] *De officiis* looms large in Valla's discussion but this particular question is not addressed by him. His almost tacit assumption is that natural reason tells us which are illicit and bad passions and which good and virtuous ones, but as the criterion on which we base our choice is formulated in terms of achievement of enjoyment of pleasure, it is still unclear which are the passions to be avoided and which may be pursued. Moreover, passions in themselves, Valla holds, are not bad or good; it is the choice (*electio*) of acting on these passions which is to blame or to praise. This however is inconsistent with what Valla elsewhere states that virtues are the feelings or passions themselves.[43] (We will come back to this.) This tension surfaces most clearly in a passage added only in the third version, where Valla suggests, against Plato and other 'philosophers', that there are no evil pleasures. No pleasure can be evil in itself, because we naturally pursue and enjoy pleasure. Only our choice (*electio*) can be wrong in preferring short-term satisfaction over long-term pleasures as in a feverish man who drinks cold water which does not serve his health: "When we pursue worldly pleasures, we should not blame these pleasures but our choice, which makes us prefer these uncertain pleasures over certain ones, earthly over

[41] Cicero 1991, 146 (*De officiis* III.117).

[42] On Cicero's reporting of Epicurean ethics in the *De finibus* see Stokes 1995 and Gosling/Taylor 1982, 382 ff.

[43] Cf. for instance "nihil bene fieri aut male dicendum est, nisi affectu, nihilque aliud aut laudem meretur aut vituperationem, quam affectus" with "ita cum mundanas voluptates sectamur, non sunt ipse voluptates culpande sed nostra electio" (Valla 1982, 74 and 93).

celestial, transitory over eternal. This is what Plato seems to say when he maintains that the other pleasures are *eidola*, that is, simulacra of the true pleasure, shadowy and spurious".[44] Such a characterisation of earthly pleasure as shadowy and fake, however, goes against the hedonist position of the Epicurean which Valla also propagates. Valla tries to fuse a hedonist pursuit of pleasure, an almost Stoic exercise in self-restraint which serves that goal of pleasure, and a Christian, other-worldly perspective on human nature – a combination which renders it almost immune to criticism: we naturally seek pleasures, but if some pleasures do not serve the ultimate goal of the True Pleasure we just decide to call them shadowy and fake. Valla's answer will be that in preferring true, eternal and certain pleasures over false, transient and insecure ones, we follow our true nature, transforming the pursuit of earthly pleasure into that of heavenly beatitude with the aid of divine grace.

Virtues as affects versus habits

The criteria by which we know which pleasures are true and which are false are not spelled out by Valla, but without doubt our decisions (the *electiones* wrought by the will) should give preference to those actions which are conducive for attaining pleasures and, ultimately, the true pleasure, that is, beatitude in the life to come. This is consistent with an earlier remark that virtue resides in the will rather than in action or in habit (*habitus*),[45] though it leaves unexplained the role of reason as the will's guide. For Valla it is quite clear that virtue is not a habit but an affect which can be infused and effused, that is, acquired and lost in a moment's time, unlike sciences, arts and other domains of knowledge, which we acquire (and lose) slowly.[46] Virtue is the domain solely of the soul's will and *electio*. Thus for Valla, virtues are not like habits and hence should not be linked to sciences and arts, for the greatest virtue or vice may arise out of one single act. And because virtue is painful and vice tempting, one may easily fall down at once from the one into the other, unlike knowledge which does not turn into ignorance all of a sudden.

But if the path of virtue is a stony one, full of allurements and temptations, and one which requires fortitude in order to reach our true goal at last, does this not presuppose a virtuous character exhibiting a constant and firm mind? Valla himself describes virtue in terms of having a firm, stable and calm mind, which keeps its mental eye fixed on its goal.[47] One may wonder how this fits in with the great fluctuations which Valla allows to our moral behaviour in which virtues and vices, being affects, come and go "impetuously, as in flight" (*impetu quodam...'volatu'*).[48]

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[44] Valla 1982, 93; cf. 91: we suffer pain or minor evils in order to receive greater pleasure later.

[45] Valla 1982, 77.

[46] The terminology of "infundi" and "effundi" only occurs in the first version (418). If virtues are affects, as Valla holds, it follows that one may speak of "infused" and "effused" affects or emotions, which however sounds strange. It is only one of the odd consequences of his identification of virtues with affects.

[47] Valla 1982, pp. 86-87 on fortitude. Cf. once again Cicero's *De officiis* which inspired Valla in giving this sketch: "For it must be held that a brave and great spirit will little value things that appear to most men distinguished and even splendid, disdaining them with reason firm and steady; while a man of firm spirit and great constancy will endure circumstances that seem harsh, many and various as they are in the lives and fortunes of mankind, without departing from man's natural state, from the worthy standing of a wise man" (Cicero 1991, 27, *De officiis* I.67). The difference is of course that Valla interprets 'the natural' in Christian terms of ultimate pleasure while Cicero defined it essentially in terms of our social-political role in society and civil affairs.

[48] Valla 1982, 79. In conversation Jill Kraye has reminded me of St Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus which may for Valla have been the paradigmatic case of a sudden leap from vice to virtue.

Valla's target here is Aristotle who had well recognized the importance of a conscious and well-reasoned choice as basis of our behaviour, arguing that "acts done on the spur of the moment we describe as voluntary but not as chosen",[49] but, then, Aristotle had not identified virtues as affects, as Valla does. For Aristotle, virtues are inner states or attitudes (*hexeis*), developed by habit and experience, "in virtue of which we stand well or badly with reference to the passions, e.g. with reference to anger we stand badly if we feel it violently or too weakly, and well if we feel it moderately".[50] Hence, it is not the passions or affects we call good or bad, but these inner states, manifested in our acts:[51]

> neither the excellences nor the vices are *passions*, because we are not called good or bad on the ground of our passions, but are so called on the ground of our excellences and our vices, and because we are neither praised nor blamed for our passions (for the man who feels fear or anger is not praised, nor is the man who simply feels anger blamed, but the man who feels it in a certain way), but for our excellences and our vices we *are* praised or blamed.

Another important argument is then given why virtues and vices are not passions: "in respect of the passions we are said to be moved, but in respect of the excellences and the vices we are said not to be moved but to be disposed in a particular way". This is also why deliberation and choice are so important, for these enable us to resist impulses and strong emotions.

Valla consciously distances himself from Aristotle in identifying virtues directly with the affects (passions) rather than with habits or dispositions. But in rejecting such a useful distinction between passions (which move us) and virtues (which dispose us to act in a certain way), his position becomes muddled, and we are now in a better position to see why. His basic idea is plausible enough and bespeaks a common sense attitude. We often feel a strong desire for something and, once in possession of it, derive pleasure from it. Now the question arises: to what element should we assign the moral qualification 'good' or 'bad'? What exactly is virtue? We may distinguish between the following elements, which Valla does not list as such but which feature in his discussion.

(a) the affect or emotion (*affectus*)
(b) the will (*voluntas*) or the choice it makes (*electio*)
(c) reason which supervises the will (*ratio* as the *voluntatis dux*, the will's guide)
(d) the action (*actio*), by which we attempt to secure the good, that is pleasure
(e) the final result, pleasure (*voluptas*)

On the one hand, Valla is resolute in identifying virtues with affects (position a), which is confirmed by the statement that only the affects merit praise or blame.[52] On the other hand, he also writes that affects – as feelings of love and hatred, which indeed may arise or disappear in us on the spur of the moment – cannot be called

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In addition, Cicero's *De officiis* is close to Valla's wording: "Here we must first of all weigh up the spirit in which each man has acted, his devotion and his goodwill. For many men do many things out of a certain rashness, failing to use their judgement, or maybe inspired by a frenzied or sudden impulse of the spirit towards everyone, like a gust of wind (*quasi vento impetu*; *De officiis* I.49)".

[49] *Nicomachean Ethics* III.2, 1111b10.

[50] *Ibid.*, II.5, 1105b25-28.

[51] *Ibid.*, 1105b29-1106a2; next quotation from 1106a4-6; cf. 1111b10-19.

[52] Valla 1982, 74: "Nihil bene fieri aut male dicendum est, nisi affectu, nihilque aliud aut laudem meretur aut vituperationem, quam affectus".

good or bad in themselves, but only the will, that is, the will's choice (b). This is underscored by Valla's remark that virtue resides in the will rather than in the action.[53] In addition, in his discussion of the soul he frequently calls reason the will's guide, and also says that the affects should follow reason, so that reason ultimately has an important role to play in virtuous behaviour, even though he also explicitly denies that the will is determined by reason.[54] Finally, pleasure, delectation or beatitude is also called virtue by the equation of virtue with love and with charity.[55]

This indecision (or, to use a less neutral term, this inconsistency) is caused by Valla's eclecticism, which tries to bring into one picture Aristotelian ethics, the Stoic virtues of Cicero, the biblical concepts of charity and beatitude, and the Epicurean notion of hedonist pleasure – with their different terminology, definitions and philosophical context. In his urge to simplify the rich terminology derived from these traditions, Valla's idea of pleasure as the reward of our virtuous behaviour is linked with notions with which it is not easy to square. Thus, fortitude as true virtue is not easy to combine with the notion that virtues come and go, "as in flight". In spite of his strong aversion to virtues as habits, his own sketch of the strong person (*fortis*), enduring hardship and resisting the wrong emotions, requires something of the stable and resolute character which Aristotle had defined as an "inner state or attitude" (*hexis*), being the condition of making choices and deliberation and developed by habit and experience. As Aristotle sums up: "Excellence, then, is a state concerned with choice, lying in a mean relative to us, this being determined by reason and in the way in which the man of practical wisdom would determine it".[56] These elements – choice, reason and a constancy and firmness of mind – are present in Valla's account as well, even though their precise interrelationships remain somewhat obscure.

The *Repastinatio* and the *De vero bono*

Without offering a full discussion of the *De vero bono*, we may finally ask what our analysis of the arguments of the *Repastinatio* has taught us about this Christian-rhetorical position of Valla as developed in this dialogue, which has been considered an important but also an ambiguous statement on moral and religious questions due to the genre of the Ciceronian-Augustinian dialogue and its rhetorical procedures. No reader can fail to notice the highly rhetorical character of the *De vero bono*, and the positions, therefore, defended by the interlocutors, cannot be taken at face value. Appealing to Cicero's declaration of the orator's eclectic freedom to use arguments from whatever provenance, the interlocutors remind each other and the reader that their speeches are developed for the sake of debate rather than as defences of historically accurate positions. They frequently state that they act and argue in oratorical manner (*oratorio more*), that they speak under false pretences (*simulate loqui*), and discrepancies between speaker and speech are admitted.[57] Addressing the Epicurean speaker, Vegio, the Christian spokesman, Antonio da Rho, says:[58]

[53] *Ibid*, 77.
[54] *Ibid*, 75: "quod si posset imperare ratio voluntati, nunquam profecto voluntas peccaret".
[55] *Ibid*., 85.
[56] *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.6, 1106b36.
[57] Valla 1970, 22, 107, transl. Valla 1977, 90 and 261; cf. Valla 1970, 3, 14 and 20, transl. Valla 1977, 53, 75 and 87. It must be ironical therefore what Valla writes in the introduction: "I introduce as interlocutors on the subject very eloquent men who are also my good friends, assigning to each a discourse according to his character and position and consistent with the conversations they recently held among themselves" (1970, 3, transl. 1977, 53).
[58] Valla 1970, 106-107, transl. Valla 1977, 259-261.

> Vegio, although your speech was more adapted to the perversion of souls (I am not yet judging between you), yet which of us doubts that you have not been yourself, since usually not only do you live but also speak differently from the way you have just spoken? (...) I am not so ignorant of your ideas, or so far from them, as to be able to persuade myself that you think what you have been saying. I suspect you of having spoken not seriously but playfully (as you usually do) in the manner of Socrates, whom the Greeks called eiróna (....) You, as I said, were a simulator or an ironist.

And the Stoic speaker too is not really considered as a defender of the Stoics, but rather as a most scrupulous believer in the Christian faith. It should therefore not surprise that the 'Stoic' position has hardly anything to do with historical Stoicism, and while the Epicurean's defence of pleasure and the mortality of the soul are clearly truly Epicurean tenets, other parts of his speech, such as his praise of the rational nature of the cosmos, is alien to historical Epicureanism. This is signalled by the Epicurean speaker himself, deriving support for his eclectic procedure in Seneca who was a very keen supporter of the Stoic sect but at the same time drew so many ideas from Epicurus himself "that it sometimes seems that Seneca was an Epicurean or that Epicurus was a Stoic".[59]

What then did Valla himself believe? Scholars may still disagree about a number of details,[60] yet most of them today are inclined to accept the Christian position as reflecting Valla's own point of view, which does not mean, however, that the 'Stoic' and 'Epicurean' positions are entirely rejected. They are stages of the plot or necessary steps in a dialectical movement – rather like thesis ('Stoicism') and antithesis ('Epicureanism') – resulting in the synthesis of the Christian position, which is given an highly oratorical presentation in the form of the imaginary voyage of the soul to heaven where it enjoys the ultimate pleasure and is received by Jesus himself.[61] Adopting the Epicurean notion of pleasure as the universal motivation of human behaviour, the Christian transforms the theme of earthly pleasures into that of heavenly pleasure, that is, beatitude. As participant in the dialogue, Valla expresses his sympathy for Vegio's case, and also in the introduction to the dialogue Valla (as author) declares that he prefers the Epicureans, even though they too will eventually be sacrificed for the higher aim of celestial beatitude: "we shall destroy our enemies – that is, the philosophers – partly with their own swords, partly by inciting them to civil war and mutual destruction".[62] And "since the Stoics assert more bitterly than all others the value of virtue, it seems to me sufficient to single out the Stoics as our adversaries and to assume the defence of the Epicureans" (*assumpto patrocinio epicureorum*).

From the way 'Stoicism' and 'Epicureanism' are used, it is clear that for Valla they are simply labels of which the former designates any kind of abstract rationalism, conveyed in dialectical argumentation, of the philosophers (among whom Aristotle is

[59] Valla 1970, 14, transl. Valla 1977, 75.
[60] But not all such issues of contention are details: Augustine's influence on Valla, for instance, is differently assessed (Marsh 1980, 77; Trinkaus 1970, vol. 1, 140; Fubini 1990, 368-376).
[61] On the role of imagination in Valla see Nauta 2005.
[62] Valla 1970, 2, transl. Valla 1977, 51; see also: "although I disapprove of both sides, I make my decision in favor of the Epicureans (not in favor of you, Vegio, nor against you, Catone, who are each bound by your faith to another army) and against the Stoics" (1970, 109, transl. 1977, 265; cf. 1970, 22, transl. 1977, 91).

also included), and the latter, by contrast, a realistic view of human nature, based on empirical observation of human behaviour, exemplified by individual cases and expressed by rhetorical methods.[63] Nonetheless, Valla's defence of the Epicureans should be qualified in two respects. First, comparing the Stoics to the Pharisees and the Epicureans to the Sadducees, the Christian speaker undoubtedly expresses Valla's view when he rejects the Epicureans for having "denied the Resurrection and the existence of angels and spirits" and the soul's immortality.[64] Secondly, this pagan view of human destiny has serious consequences for the acceptability of the Epicurean notion of pleasure. Arguing that pleasure rather than virtue should be desired for itself "both in this life and in the life to come", the Christian spokesman in effect qualifies the Epicurean position by distinguishing strictly between the two kinds of pleasure: earthly and heavenly pleasure, the former being called the mother of vice, the latter of virtues. "Whatever is done without hope of the later pleasure and in hope of the present pleasure is a sin". We should therefore abstain from the pleasure here below, Antonio says,[65]

> if we want to enjoy the one above. We cannot enjoy both of them, because they differ from each other as do heaven and earth, soul and body. Our pleasure here is more uncertain and deceptive; that pleasure above is certain and stable. Indeed a kind of worthy[66] pleasure is not lacking in this life, and the greatest such comes from the hope of future happiness, when the mind, which is aware of right action, and the spirit, which unceasingly contemplates divine things, consider themselves a kind of candidate for the heavenly, represent to themselves the promised honors [...].

This is a crucial but also highly ambiguous statement, or rather it is crucial because it is such an ambiguous statement. It brings out the same tension within Valla's position, which we have also met in the *Repastinatio* where the argument is presented in a non-dialogical, less overtly oratorical and more argumentative form without labelling the positions as 'Stoic' or 'Epicurean'. The Christian Antonio seems to vacillate here between, on the one hand, an appraisal of the Epicurean realist vision of man, according to which man is universally motivated by the enjoyment of pleasure rather than the attainment of an abstract ideal of virtue, and, on the other hand, a rejection of this hedonist principle, at least when it is not accompanied by an upward gaze and the hope of beatitude. The hedonist principle seemed to offer an empirically convincing explanation of man's condition, apparently applicable in both domains, but the Christian transformation of earthly into heavenly pleasure has made it doubtful whether the principle can bridge heaven and earth, for we are now advised to "abstain

[63] Cf. Gerl 1974, 97-118 and Marsh 1980, esp. 74-75: "Valla's Epicureanism opposes Stoic abstract rationalism and its dialectical method by proposing an inductive empiricism which examines the lives and behavior of men by the practical and flexible methods of rhetoric" (74). The superiority of rhetoric to dialectic (or philosophy) is of course a theme which runs as a *basso continuo* throughout the *De vero bono* (see e.g. Valla 1970, 113) and indeed Valla's entire oeuvre.

[64] Valla 1970, 109 and 107; transl. Valla 1977, 265 and 261.

[65] Valla 1970, 110, transl. Valla 1977, 267.

[66] Kent Hieatt and Lorch translate "probabilis" with "probable" (Valla 1977, 267), Fubini, pointing to Cicero's *De officiis* I.29.101, proposes "degno di approvazione" (worthy) (Fubini 1990, 355, n. 47). But cf. Quintilian 2001: "Acceptable style (*Probabile*) is defined by Cicero..." (VIII.3.42, transl. Butler).

from the pleasure here below if we want to enjoy the one above".[67] Not only is the Epicurean notion of pleasure revalued, but also the notion of virtue (*honestas*):

> But beyond doubt the main condition for obtaining happiness is the possession of a sense of virtue (*honestas*), by which I mean [says Antonio] Christian virtue, not the virtue of philosophers. I do not deny that many things in their writings are fruitful and salutary, but these things acquired value and began to bear fruit only after Christ (...) cleansed the face of the earth of the thorns and weeds with which it was filled and made it ready to bear fruit.

Before Christ's advent humans affairs "were empty and worthy of punishment" (*inanes et supplicio digne*), and indeed the pagans, not worshipping God, "had to admit, conquered and compelled by the Epicurean arguments, that debauchery, adultery, profligacy, and almost every kind of disgraceful action cannot be condemned and must be numbered among the goods".[68] After the coming of Christ, however, the virtues are valuable as steps towards beatitude, that is, if not considered as ends in themselves having their own reward as philosophers had wrongly held.

Perhaps, then, the tension is finally resolved, as both the 'Stoic' and 'Epicurean' standpoints are revindicated by a Christian vision of man, and many scholars argue therefore that there is no inconsistency. The Epicurean picture is valid for the period antedating the coming of Christ. In his unredeemed state, man is rightly be considered as a pleasure-seeking animal, who is governed by self-interest and utilitarian motives. After Christ's coming we have a different picture: repudiating Epicurean pleasure, we should choose the harsh and difficult life of the Christian *honestas* as a step towards heavenly beatitude. Such an interpretation is advocated, for instance, by Giorgio Radetti and Charles Trinkaus.[69]

In doing justice to crucial stages in the dialectical movement of the dialogue, this interpretation has much to its credit, but it is too neat. Such terms as 'transformation', 'transfiguration' or 'revindication' conceal the basic tension in Valla's vision, which, if the above analysis of the argumentation in the *Repastinatio* is correct, can hardly be credited with "an extraordinary inner consistency", "una logica unitaria" or a "rigore argomentativo" as critics have maintained. For even if we take 'Epicureanism' in the rhetorical way it was employed by Valla – that it, as a crowbar to crush 'Stoic' rationalism rather than as a historically and doctrinally accurate description of the ancient sect – the term is clearly meant to designate an empirically accurate depiction of men, and not only of unredeemed men before the advent of Christ. The positive evaluation of pleasure as the fundamental principle in human psychology – which is confirmed and underscored by the terminological equation of 'voluptas', 'beatitudo', 'fruitio', 'delectatio' and 'amor' – is therefore difficult to reconcile with such apodictic statements that there are two pleasures, one being the mother of vice and the other of virtue, that we should abstain from the one if we want to enjoy the other, and that this natural, pre-Christian life is "inane and worthy of punishment" if not put in the wider perspective of human destiny. We are commanded to live the arduous and difficult life of Christian *honestas*, ruled by restraint, self-denial and modesty, and at the same time to live the hedonist life, which consists of the joyful, free and natural gratification of the senses. As noticed above, it seems that

[67] Valla 1970, 110, transl. Valla 1977, 267 for this and the following quotation.
[68] Valla 1970, 111, transl. Valla 1977, 269.
[69] Radetti 1955 and Trinkaus 1970.

Cicero had such an apparent inconsistency in mind when he attacked the Epicureans: "How can a man praise restraint when he places the highest good in pleasure? For restraint is hostile to the passions; but the passions are pleasure's adherents" – a question which Valla does not address.[70]

Some have argued, however, that Valla's original and important contribution to ethical and religious thought should not be sought in detailed argumentation, close reading of the ancient sources and philosophical rigour but in the fusion of oratory and theology, in which philosophy and rationalistic theology are replaced by eloquence and poetry; argumentation by persuasion; abstract and general maxims by concrete, individual experiences. Consequently, we should realise that the *De vero bono* is a literary work, written by Valla as "a man of letters", not as a philosopher,[71] and that, in the words of one critic, "we are on the wrong track if we expect Valla to spell out his conclusions in rational terms", for Valla leaves us "throughout, enmeshed in the ambiguity of a drama whose tension is partially created by the wonderful rhetorical tool of irony".[72]

This is sound advice, but we should not forget that the recurrence of much of the argumentation of the *De vero bono* in the non-dramatic and non-literary genre of the *Repastinatio* suggests that form and content are not so totally intermingled that they cannot be separated at all. It is one thing to aim at a replacement of philosophy by oratory (which the *De vero bono* seems to do), but another to *argue* for that position, and we have seen that the *Repastinatio* offers plenty of evidence of Valla himself spelling out in rational argumentation his conclusions about the superiority of oratory to philosophy. It is therefore surprising that scholarly debate has so long been concerned with the question which personage reflects Valla's own views, for in the *Repastinatio* the arguments, put in the mouth of both the Epicurean and Christian speaker, surface prominently. It is, as we have seen, the combination of a defence of an Epicurean life and Pauline fideism which characterizes both works, and it depends on the scholarly, cultural and (a)religious background of the critic how this combination is described and evaluated: as a juxtaposition of two inconsistent elements or, as Valla himself claims in the introduction to the dialogue, as a gradual development or transformation of the one into the other (*ut ex priore ad sequens gradum quendam fecisse videamur*).[73] But whereas the tensions and possible inconsistencies may be ascribed to the literary character of the dialogue, in which particular positions are developed by individual speakers as parts of a master plan of the author, the unadorned style and non-dialogical nature of the *Repastinatio* does not offer such an escape. The critical analysis of the later work therefore has helped, I hope, to bring into focus these tensions more clearly.

[70] Cicero 1991, 146 (*De officiis* III.117).
[71] Trinkaus 1970, vol. 1, 146.
[72] Lorch 1991, 110.
[73] Why does Valla write "I shall *seem* to have gradually moved from the first to the second" (Valla 1970, 1, transl. Valla 1977, 49) rather than "I moved from the first to the second"? Without doubt, as orator it is much more convincing to start with a description of the life we live here on earth, and then to project the elements of this life onto the next life.

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