

RENAISSANCE TRUTHS

HUMANISM, SCHOLASTICISM
AND THE SEARCH FOR THE
PERFECT LANGUAGE



ALAN R. PERREIAH

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Humanism, Scholasticism and the
Search for the Perfect Language

ALAN R. PERREIAH

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ASHGATE

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Preface

In the first of his Tarner Lectures, published as *Dilemmas* (1966), Gilbert Ryle distinguishes between two kinds of conflict between theories. In the first and more familiar, two or more thinkers offer rival solutions to the same problem. One of them is right; the other is wrong. This kind of disagreement is straightforward and beneficial: it helps us to discern those arguments that support the surviving theory and to discard the others. Another kind of dispute arises between thinkers who hold rival solutions to different problems that seem nonetheless irreconcilable. A person who adopts one of the theories seems logically committed to rejecting the other despite the fact that the theories arise from different problems and are designed to serve different purposes. “In disputes of this kind, we often find one and the same thinker—very likely oneself—strongly inclined to champion both sides and yet, at the very same time, strongly inclined to repudiate one of them because he [or she] is strongly inclined to support the other” (Ryle 1966: 1). In these cases if we believe that something true is being claimed and defended logically on each side, we have no fundamental conflict of theory, but rather some diplomatic relations between theories that appear internecine and are in need of repair. I submit that the humanist-scholastic debates of the Renaissance and Reformation (Rummel 1995) leave us with the second kind of dilemma. In this book we explore some theories that have given rise to paradox and stand in the way of seeing how the two traditions—despite their protestations to the contrary—are complementary journeys to the same destination.

To offer a fresh perspective, I locate humanism and scholasticism within a new frame of reference suggested by Umberto Eco’s (1995) *The Search for the Perfect Language*. This fascinating and useful study of how modern thinkers sought to recover the purity of Adam’s language before Babel all but ignores two of the most important modern efforts to discover the perfect language, namely, those of humanism and scholasticism. In order to fill this gap we examine the work of three figures—Lorenzo Valla, Juan Luis Vives and Paul of Venice—on the topics of meaning and truth.

The first dilemma arises from a conception of language that some have proposed for the interpretation of renaissance humanism. That is the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis—the view that language structures the mind, determines thought and thus constitutes reality. We examine the nature of this idea and its attraction for modern as well as humanist writers. We question why modern scholars would want to adopt a thesis that entails the incommensurability of human

languages and renders impossible their mutual intelligibility, communicability and translatability. We show why Sapir–Whorf and its modern variants would defeat any reasonable effort to account for meaning and truth in renaissance language theory.

A second dilemma arises from Lorenzo Valla's famous endorsement of Quintilian's rhetorical philosophy. How could Lorenzo Valla have embraced Quintilian whose *Institutio oratoria* embodies so much of the Aristotelian thought that he so famously despises and expressly rejects in the scholastics? We trace Valla's attack on scholasticism and then show how his own views about meaning and truth are, in fact, quite close to those of the scholastic Henry of Ghent. In passing we observe that Valla is oblivious to the most important scholastic innovation of his time, namely, the theory of consequences (*consequentialiae*), and we show its relevance to the collection of arguments that Valla quotes *verbatim* from Quintilian.

A third dilemma relates to Vives. How could Vives, a paragon of humanist gentility and Christian charity, have authored one of the most scurrilous attacks ever mounted against scholasticism? We show that the work as commonly read not only contradicts Vives's motto “Without Complaint” (*sine querela*): it violates every principle of ethical criticism that Vives espouses and exemplifies in his other works. By displaying the work's sophistical nature and demonstrating that it is not a serious refutation of scholasticism, we show that these inconsistencies are only apparent and arise not from Vives's text but rather from the mistaken way that modern scholars have read it.

A fourth dilemma concerns the relation of scholastic logic to other languages commonly used in everyday communication, including classical Latin and the vernaculars. As we know, scholastic dialectic endured for more than 300 years as an essential component in the university curriculum; it was a prerequisite for advanced study and for the education of clergy, notaries, physicians and lawyers. How could this logistic system expressed in a “rebarbative” Latin possibly serve the educational needs of thousands of students who came to the university knowing little Latin and speaking primarily their native vernaculars? We take up this question in Chapter 6 where we argue that the scant vocabulary, simplistic sentences and repetitive arguments that fill scholastic logic texts are, in fact, place-holders for natural language sentences that students could translate into their own vernaculars. Scholastic logic remained resilient and durable in the university because in addition to teaching logic it served a practical purpose. It was a pivotal or translational language that students needed to negotiate between their own vernaculars and the sophisticated Latin of advanced study. Despite unrelenting humanist protest, it remained in demand because it empowered undergraduates with the dominant language spoken not only in the university but in commerce and the professions.

Closely related to the last is a fifth dilemma, namely, the role of dialectic in humanism and scholasticism. More pointedly, how can the seemingly unbridgeable chasm between scholastic “formal logic” and humanist “informal logic” be bridged (Ashworth 1988; Jardine 1988)? Modern formalizations of scholastic logical syntax have exaggerated this difference and given credence to humanist charges of “scholastic formalism.” When its semantics are properly understood scholastic logic has an essential connection with ordinary language. Problems of interpretation can be resolved only by defining principles of formality that would be acceptable to both parties. The best approach is to take the work of each tradition on core topics that any logic or grammar must account for. These are the basic units of language that add formal structure to material content. We explore these elements in both traditions and point out their similarities and differences. But scholastic logic and humanist grammar can take us only so far in the analysis of meaning and truth. Just how far they go I have tried to delineate in the following chapters.

We do not treat many topics that specialists in various fields would likely regard as essential to the matters we discuss. These include: syllogistic theory, modal logic, quantification, mental language, *insolubilia*, *sophismata* and a host of other topics. All are well represented in the available literature. We focus on only four areas of theory that have often been lost in the great sea of technical concepts and specialized vocabulary relevant to the study of language theory in the Renaissance. The topics that afford some useful points of comparison between humanism and scholasticism and enable us to interpret the concepts of meaning and truth in both traditions are: (a) meaning (*significatio*), (b) reference (*suppositio*), (c) inference (*consequentiae*) and (d) proof (*probatio*).

Acknowledgements

My research on Paul of Venice and humanist–scholastic relations has continued for many years, and my debt is great to far more friends and colleagues than can be named here.

Professor Paul Oskar Kristeller, whom I met midway through my study of Paul of Venice, encouraged me to undertake a census of manuscripts of Paul’s authentic works and to produce a critical edition of the *Logica Parva*. Both proved to be formidable tasks as I located more than 80 manuscripts of that work and had to select those that were representative. While working on those projects I kept an eye on the literature that inspired this study. I became convinced that both humanists and scholastics labored under two burdens that were in conflict. The first was to practice their own discipline and follow its consequences wherever they led. For humanists this meant cultivation of the *studia humanitatis*, classical philology, textual criticism, moral philosophy and, in the sixteenth century,

scriptural interpretation. For scholastics it meant the development of logic, natural philosophy and a system of thought that supported the Church's official stand on matters of faith and morals. The second burden was the professional responsibility to maintain an ideology appropriate to their practical concerns about reputation and negotiations with the real world. This included fierce competition between humanists and scholastics in the publishing market. The tension between the theoretical demands of their respective disciplines and the practical demands of their professions—what I call “the conflict between philosophy and ideology”—both created the humanist–scholastic debates and obscured the real achievements of both traditions in the process.

Several foundations have supported my research. The Council for Philosophical Studies awarded me a Fellowship to participate in the Philosophy of Language Institute held at the University of California-Irvine in 1971. There the lectures of W.V.O. Quine, Paul Grice, Peter Strawson, Saul Kripke, Gilbert Harmon and Donald Davidson first suggested to me that scholastic logic is less like a system of formal logic and more like a theory of logical form. I pursued this idea with grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, (1974), UCLA (1978) and Harvard University (1979). In 1980-81 I was an NEH Fellow at Villa i Tatti, the Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies in Florence, Italy. There I met several eminent historians of the Renaissance, Charles Trinkaus, Salvatore Comporeale, O.P., James Hankins and John Monfasani. These colleagues deepened my understanding of Lorenzo Valla, George of Trebizond and renaissance humanism and motivated me to try all the more to understand why humanists so bitterly opposed scholasticism and what a scholastic philosopher might have said in its defense. Unlike Pico della Mirandola's honest scholastic, whose sincerity has recently been questioned, I have tried to maintain that point of view in the following study. My colleague Thomas Maloney of the University of Louisville generously read two earlier drafts of this book and gave me the benefit of his perceptive comments. John Monfasani, Gerard Etzkorn and Paul Spade read one or more chapters and offered many worthy suggestions. Two colleagues at the University of Kentucky James Manns and Michael Wiitala read the entire manuscript, and for their wise counsel I am grateful. To all of these persons and institutions I express my sincere thanks. I take full responsibility for sometimes disregarding their advice and asserting whatever errors remain. Finally, special gratitude goes to my wife, Grace, whose support, encouragement, uncommon endurance and—not least—love over many years has made my work possible.

ALAN PERREIAH

October 21, 2013

Introduction

[O]f all forms of mental activity, the most difficult to induce even in the minds of the young, who may be presumed not to have lost their flexibility, is the art of handling the same bundle of data as before, but placing them in a new system of relations with one another by giving them a different framework, all of which virtually means putting on a different kind of thinking-cap for the moment.

Sir Herbert Butterfield,
*The Origins of Modern Science*¹

General Introduction

In the half-century since Professor Kristeller stated that polemics between humanists and scholastics were “an understandable expression of departmental rivalry, and a phase in the everlasting battle of the arts,” scholars have had their say whether this was in fact the case.² Were those exchanges mere squabbles about parochial matters? Or were they serious contests on fundamental issues? Kristeller favored the former view as he weighed the arguments on both sides and sought common ground between them. Meanwhile, increasing numbers of critical editions, translations, commentaries and studies have created a mounting body of evidence that might be adduced to support either alternative. In recent years most scholars have gotten beyond Burkhardt’s vision of “individualism,” Baron’s ideal of “civic humanism” and humanist anti-scholastic propaganda that long dominated research on the period. One measure of progress is the sense of *déjà vu* in a recent recitation of Valla’s rants against scholastic dialectic and his tired clichés about its “sterility,” “technicality” and “formality.”³ Scholastic dialectic is no more sterile, technical or formal than humanist grammar, and most scholars have set aside this academic psittacism. Valla’s cavils no longer

¹ Notes Butterfield 1957: 13.

² Kristeller 1961: 43. “If we keep in mind the cultural and professional divisions of the period, and the flourishing state of Aristotelian philosophy in Renaissance Italy, we are inclined to view this polemic in its proper perspective, that is, as an understandable expression of departmental rivalry, and as a phase in the everlasting battle of the arts of which many other examples may be cited from ancient, medieval, or modern times.” In addition to Professor Kristeller’s accounts of renaissance humanism, see Giustiniani 1993: 29-57; Hankins 2003: 573-590.

³ Nauta 2009: 193-211; See also Valla eds. and trs. Copenhaver and Nauta 2012: 62.

trigger the delicious mockery that once fueled renaissance scholarship. The research of many scholars such as James Hankins, Brian Copenhaver, Jill Kraye, John Monfasani, Charles G. Nauert, Jr, Lodi Nauta, James Overfield, Erika Rummel, Charles Trinkaus, Brian Vickers, Ronald G. Witt and others has contributed to a balanced perspective on renaissance intellectual life.⁴ Their careful analyses of humanist and scholastic positions on particular topics have encouraged a sense of equanimity and shown that differences between the two traditions are intelligible if not reconcilable.

Three books, in my opinion, have changed the nature of that discussion.

In 1987 Richard Waswo's *Language and Meaning in the Renaissance* expanded on his earlier claims that Lorenzo Valla revolutionized the philosophy of language by placing linguistic usage at its center.⁵ Just as Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* in the twentieth century appealed to "ordinary language usage" to bypass problems in the philosophy of language, Valla's *Dialectical Disputations* and *Elegantiae linguae Latinae* in the fifteenth century turned to language usage to set philosophy on a new course. According to Waswo, Valla discovered a new "relational semantics" to replace the old "referential semantics."⁶ Language usage establishes language meaning. "Words are concepts; they are the means by which we divide up and 'weigh' the world."⁷ "[L]anguage becomes knowledge, the truth of which depends on the human judgment that applies names and uses words."⁸ In effect, language both causes what can be thought and constitutes what is real. Waswo's reading of Valla and his later interpretation of Vives imply that both thinkers rejected, or aimed to reject, the established Aristotelian view that both the nature of things and the content of thoughts are the same for everyone, and that only languages differ among human beings. If true, Waswo's claims would challenge the idea that differences between humanists and scholastics were not fundamental.

⁴ Copenhaver 1992; Hankins 2003: Part 4, esp. 511-524; 2004: 45-50; Kraye 1996; Monfasani 1994, 2004; Nauert 1973: 1-18; 1995: 8-14, 207-209; Nauta 2009; Overfield 1984; Rummel 1995; Trinkaus 1968, 1983; Witt 2000.

⁵ Waswo (1979: 257) cites Fr Salvatore Camporeale's studies that suggested a similarity between Valla and Wittgenstein on issues in the philosophy of language. See Camporeale 1972. Jill Kraye traces the interest in comparing Valla and Wittgenstein to Kristeller's casual remark, "One is reminded of present-day [1964] attempts to base philosophy and especially logic on ordinary language" (Kristeller 1964: 34). Waswo endorses and elaborates the views of Hanna-Barbara Gerl (1974) and attempts to replace a semantical theory of meaning with what he calls a "relational" or pragmatic theory of meaning.

⁶ Waswo 1987: 8-47. Waswo states that his work elaborates ideas documented by Camporeale 1972 and Gerl 1974.

⁷ Waswo 1987: 101.

⁸ Idem.

In 1995 Erika Rummel's *The Humanist–Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance and Reformation* took the issues between the two traditions to a new level of concern.⁹ Professor Rummel showed that after the Reformation minor humanist–scholastic disagreements escalated into major confrontations over professional competence and religious orthodoxy. Who was better qualified to interpret Christian doctrine? The scholastic trained in logic and dialectic? Or the humanist trained in linguistics and philology? Should official religious doctrine be based on the dialectical examination of abstract theological questions or on the philological investigation of original sources by the standards of textual criticism? Although these questions arose from serious differences in methodology, Professor Rummel does not question conventional views about the nature of language, thought and its object. Holding those constant, she does not argue for a fundamental change in the concepts of meaning and truth. Despite deep divisions over matters of religious orthodoxy and scholarly methodology, so long as the verbal exchanges between humanists and scholastics continued one might still believe that their differences were intelligible and that they did not define an unbridgeable linguistic divide.¹⁰ Indeed, as noted in her conclusion, humanism and scholasticism survived side by side to face the challenges of rationalism and empiricism well into the seventeenth century.¹¹

In 2003 Ann Moss moved the religious and methodological debates to the sphere of language theory and to seemingly intractable problems about meaning and truth. Her *Renaissance Truth and the Latin Language Turn* assembled an impressive body of evidence to support her primary thesis “that the turn to humanist Latin is of major significance in the intellectual history of the Renaissance.”¹² Between 1480 and 1540 humanists developed an idiom of Latin based on classical Roman sources that replaced scholastic Latin. According to Moss, this transformation produced not only “two Latin speech communities that talked past one another.”¹³ It created “two different mind-sets.”¹⁴ It brought about “two linguistic universes” and “two orders of truth-values.”¹⁵ In the

⁹ Rummel 1995. See the perceptive comments of Charles G. Nauert on the significance of Rummel's study (Nauert 1998).

¹⁰ That communications—no matter how bitter and impassioned—continued is well documented in Rummel's works. See Rummel 1989, 1995.

¹¹ Rummel 1995: 195.

¹² Moss 2003: 9. We do not question, nor do we discuss, her secondary thesis, “that religion must be made as central to our understanding of the period's intellectual predicaments as it was to the original actors ... [and] that sixteenth-century religious controversy [w]as to a large extent predicated on linguistic difference” (*ibid.*).

¹³ Moss 2003: 90, 179, 274.

¹⁴ Moss 2003: 115, 188, 231, 256.

¹⁵ Moss 2003: 128.

end, those universes, separated by two idioms of the same language, became “incommensurable.”¹⁶ These are powerful claims. If true, they clearly would count against Kristeller’s view that humanist–scholastic disagreements were only minor.

These three books are important for several reasons. First, they are scholarly treatments of humanistic and scholastic methodologies. Second, they bring the topics of meaning and truth to the center of controversies between humanists and scholastics. Third, they assume definite though differing relationships between language, thought and reality, and those relationships have important implications for meaning and truth. In this study we hope to show that the claims of Waswo and Moss about differences between humanism and scholasticism on the nature of language are, at best, misleading and, at worst, false.

An underlying premise of both Waswo’s and Moss’s accounts is the principle of linguistic determinism, that language structures thought and fixes the relationship of both thought and language to reality. As a thesis about language, linguistic determinism was first formulated in the early twentieth century by Edward Sapir and his student Benjamin Lee Whorf. The Sapir–Whorf hypothesis claimed that languages are fundamentally different from one another and that those differences form our categories of thought and set limits to the ways that we conceive reality.¹⁷ Since each language defines a unique perspective on the world, no two languages can express the same meaning or the same truth. These premises imply that languages are incommensurable. Professor Moss argues vigorously that by the early sixteenth century classical Latin and scholastic Latin became incommensurable, but she does not explore the wider ramifications of that thesis.¹⁸

Scholastics share none of the premises that support the incommensurability thesis. Nor, we believe, do most humanists. Aristotle’s texts offer two different conceptions about the relations between language, thought and things. The first view holds that language signifies things *indirectly* as Aristotle stated in *De interpretatione* 16^a 3-9:

Now spoken words are symbols of affections in the soul, and written marks symbols of spoken sounds. And just as written marks are not the same for all [humans], neither are spoken sounds. But what these are in the first place signs

¹⁶ Moss 2003: 6, 273-80. Professor Nauert had earlier expressed a similar view: “The impression that humanists and scholastics were failing to communicate, were talking past one another, is correct: they were not engaged in the same enterprise, did not pursue the same goals, and most assuredly did not have compatible ideas about the proper use of human reason—that is, about valid intellectual method” (Nauert 1998: 433).

¹⁷ Sapir 1921.

¹⁸ Moss 2003: 6.

of—affections in the soul—are the same for all; and what these affections are likenesses of—actual things—are also the same.¹⁹

As the mind becomes aware of things, it forms thoughts that bear likenesses to things. Human language expressed in speech and writing symbolizes thought primarily and by way of thought signifies things. Most scholastic theories agree with this understanding of the matter.

A second view maintains that language signifies things *directly* as Aristotle noted in *De sophisticis elenchis* 165^a 6-10:

It is impossible in a discussion to bring in the actual things discussed: we use their names as symbols instead of them; and we suppose that what follows in the names, follows in the things as well, just as people who calculate suppose in regard to their counters.²⁰

Although concepts signify things naturally and primarily, under the guidance of concepts words signify things *directly*. This view comports with the claims of some later scholastics, and it is compatible with a humanist view that words (*verba*) have a direct relationship to things (*res*). While words need not be mediated by thought, they are nonetheless subject to the guidance of thought. To say otherwise would not only divorce speech from thought: it would violate a long-standing principle in humanism, namely, that eloquence should not be separated from wisdom.

No matter which approach one takes, scholastics generally held that since thoughts are the same for all humans, communication between language users is possible. Moreover, because things are the same for everyone a sentence in a language that expresses the nature of a thing is true. To the extent that two or more languages are able to express the same truth, they are mutually translatable. Despite their protestations against scholastics, we believe that most humanists would also agree with these general principles. Although there are serious problems with the thesis of incommensurability, the word “incommensurable” may be used in highly specialized or popular contexts to characterize humanist–scholastic conflicts in the Renaissance. For example, the term may dramatize emotionally charged disagreements over matters of religious piety and devotion. It may represent a failure of two thinkers to communicate with each other. In these cases the term is used figuratively or persuasively, and it is of merely ideological significance. But the term should not be used to describe accurately differences between humanists and scholastics on serious matters of

¹⁹ Aristotle tr. Ackrill 1963: 43. See Ashworth 1988: 153-172 for a useful summary of ideas about meaning and truth.

²⁰ Aristotle tr. Pickard-Cambridge 1984: 278.

religious orthodoxy or scholarly methodology. As part of a theory of language for the interpretation of such controversies, the claim that the relevant languages are “incommensurable” is simply false.

To set a background for our discussions, Chapter 1 outlines a new paradigm for the study of humanism and scholasticism. We show how the seemingly divergent pursuits of humanists and scholastics in fact converge in a common quest, namely, the search for the perfect language. To explore the fortunes of that adventure, Chapters 2 through 6 examine humanist and scholastic approaches to meaning and truth. Chapters 2 and 4 take up the topic of meaning in the philosophies of Lorenzo Valla and Juan Luis Vives. These authors were selected because their works illustrate two extremes in humanist attitudes toward scholasticism. Valla is an early humanist whose contempt for scholasticism is equaled only by his ignorance of it. Vives is a late humanist who is trained in scholasticism and whose criticisms and convictions demonstrate an exceptional knowledge of it. The works of these authors provide an opportunity to test Professor Moss’s claim that humanist Latin and scholastic Latin were “incommensurable.” Chapters 3 and 5 examine respectively Valla’s and Vives’s approaches to the concept of truth. Chapter 6 will examine the concept of truth in Paul of Venice’s *Logica Parva*. This work was selected because it was the leading logic textbook that disseminated Oxford logic in Italy during the fifteenth century. Published in more than 80 manuscripts and 26 editions, it was the most widely circulated logic text of the day. Though its contents were known to only a few humanists—for example, George of Trebizond—its scholastic style of Latin was the bane of humanists who followed in Valla’s train.

Introduction to the Chapters

Chapter 1 has three parts. Part I introduces the concept of “the perfect language” and summarizes its textual, religious and secular background. Part II describes the ambiance of Umberto Eco’s *The Search for the Perfect Language* and then examines some representative attempts to find or invent the perfect language.²¹ The idea of a perfect language goes back to a belief about the language that Adam spoke in the Garden of Eden. It was thought to be a language that was clear, unambiguous and, most importantly, capable of expressing truth. Given the corruption of such a language at Babel, scholars in the medieval and modern worlds set about to recover it. Beginning with a discussion of Dante’s *De vulgari eloquentia*, we survey the various attempts from Raymond Llull to Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz to discover the perfect language. Part III locates Lorenzo Valla’s *Elegantiae linguae Latinae* and Paul of Venice’s *Logica Parva* as

²¹ Eco 1995.

representatives of humanism and scholasticism within the larger conceptual framework developed in Part II.²²

Chapters 2 and 4 examine the works of Valla and Vives respectively on the nature of language. We will consider evidence for Professor Moss's thesis that both humanists accepted a form of linguistic determinism. We will explain why they appear to have held such a view of language and will outline some of the problems that follow from it. We will pay special attention to two texts, namely, Valla's *Dialectical Disputations* and Vives's *Adversus pseudodialecticos*.²³ Chapter 2 reviews Valla's reductionist program in logic and notes its difficulties and limitations. Chapter 4 investigates Vives's *Adversus pseudodialecticos*. Most scholars have read this work as a devastating critique of scholastic dialectic. We show that this reading is not only inconsistent with Vives's own ethics of criticism, but that it ignores the form and content of the work. Written in the style of a sophistical disputation, its purpose is to exhibit fallacies that its hearers or readers (normally, undergraduate students) are supposed to detect. Read in this way, the work is an undergraduate exercise in logical fallacies. Far from a critique of scholastic dialectic, it is an outstanding example of it. Whether or not they knew its true purpose, Erasmus and More encouraged its publication as a piece of anti-scholastic propaganda to advance the humanist movement. Both chapters consider the evidence for Professor Moss's thesis of linguistic determinism. We set aside the question whether all humanists were linguistic determinists (we believe that they were not); however, we show that both Valla and Vives assume a strong form of linguistic determinism when criticizing scholastic dialectic. We review the problems of linguistic determinism and offer reasons why some humanists assumed it while scholastics would have rejected it.

Chapters 3 and 5 investigate the topic of truth in the writings of Valla and Vives respectively. Although Valla has no single conception of truth, he has an array of opinions about it. Chapter 3 reviews these and their modern interpretations. Because logical inference extends truth throughout language, we will comment on a neglected passage of the *Dialectical Disputations* devoted to that topic. Copied *verbatim* from Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*, it both illustrates Valla's notion of inference and substantiates our claim that Valla knew very little of the scholastic logic of his own day. In particular, he appears to be entirely innocent of the *consequentiae*, the inference rules for ordinary argumentation. Moreover, he appears oblivious to the fact that the syllogistic reasoning that he discusses at great length had been integrated into the theory of *consequences*. We weigh Valla's diverse statements about truth and then offer a summary of his conception of truth. Chapter 5 reviews Vives's various comments on truth and offers an account of his theory of truth. Vives's monumental new organon *De disciplinis*

²² Valla 1962; Paul of Venice 1984, 2002.

²³ Valla 1982, 2012; Vives tr. Guerlac 1979; Vives ed. Fantazzi 1979.

aims to redefine the categories of all knowledge.²⁴ Published in Antwerp in 1531, it includes Vives's philosophy of education as well as his philosophy of language. The *De disciplinis* comprises 20 books. After brief discussion of the first 12 books and the last three, we will concentrate on five books of *De artibus*, namely, *De explanatione cuiusque essentiae* (DE 1 book), *De censura veri in enuntiatione* (DCE 1 book), *De censura veri in argumentatione* (DCA 1 book), *De instrumento probabilitatis* (DI 1 book), *De disputatione* (DD 1 book). These are especially important for Vives's ideas on meaning and truth. We conclude each chapter with a critical evaluation of each author's theory of truth.

Several modern studies of the Renaissance are devoted in one way or another to the examination of truth, yet few treat scholastic approaches to truth. Eco's study of modern searches for the perfect language provides a framework for reconceiving the purpose of humanist and scholastic theories of language, yet he does not discuss these key traditions in early modern thought. Moss traces the development of humanist approaches to truth, but her references to scholastic ideas about truth are, at best, anecdotal and occasionally misleading. Neither Eco nor Moss discusses vernacular languages and the topic of translation. Rita Copeland's *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation in the Middle Ages* offers a fresh interpretation of medieval translation practices.²⁵ She describes the roles of grammar and rhetoric in translation but says little about the contributions of logic to the theory and practice of translation. Moreover, she omits entirely any discussion of the role of translation in language-learning. In contrast, Donald Davidson offers a theory that makes translation an essential component of learning a language.²⁶ Chapter 6 elucidates the connection between translation and truth and shows how Davidson's theory applies to the concept of sentential truth in Paul of Venice's *Logica Parva*. We argue that scholastic logic performed an essential task in the renaissance university. It was a translational language that enabled students who spoke mainly their regional vernaculars to gain access to the language of university discourse. It equipped them to read the materials essential to training in logic and to advanced university study.

²⁴ Vives 1782-1790.

²⁵ Copeland 1991.

²⁶ Davidson 1984.

Chapter 1

The Search for the Perfect Language

[T]he “effort to realize the idea of the perfect language” is common to all languages, and the business of the linguist is to investigate to what extent and with what means the various languages approach this idea.

Hans-Georg Gadamer, citing Wilhelm von Humboldt in *Truth and Method*¹

A strictly universal language, whatever it may be, will certainly, by necessity and by its natural bent, be both the most enslaved, impoverished, timid, monotonous, uniform, arid, and ugly language ever. It will be incapable of beauty of any type, totally uncongenial to imagination [...] the most inanimate, bloodless, and dead [entity], a mere skeleton, a ghost of a language [...] it would lack life even if it were written by all and universally understood; indeed it will be deader than the deadest of languages which are no longer either spoken or written.

Giacomo Leopardi, *Tutte le opere*²

Introduction

In this chapter I want to propose a new frame of reference for studying and evaluating the achievements of humanists and scholastics in the Renaissance. I am aware of the long history of debates that have galvanized opinions on most of the issues of the period. Nonetheless, I am encouraged to proceed because it has become increasingly clear to me that the contributions of these two major traditions have been neither rightly understood nor properly evaluated. Research on humanism has emphasized the new departures made by humanists in the fields of language, literature, history and the arts. Research on late scholasticism has focused on the theories of logic or dialectic in the context of the *trivium* including the auxiliary disciplines of grammar and rhetoric. The rise of Renaissance Studies has encouraged scholars to think beyond disciplinary

¹ Gadamer 2004 [1975]: 437. The text to which Gadamer refers is translated by Buck and Raven as follows: “Differently expressed, we see in language man’s striving to wrest reality from the idea of linguistic perfection. To pursue this striving, and to represent it in its simplest, ultimate solution, is the occupation of the comparative linguist” (Humboldt 1971: 5).

² Leopardi 1969: 814, cited in Eco 1995: 303.

boundaries and consider the broader implications of the ideas of their favored authors and subjects. In that spirit I want to place the work of three renaissance thinkers—two humanists and one scholastic—within the history covered in Umberto Eco's *The Search for the Perfect Language*.³ The humanists are Lorenzo Valla and Juan Luis Vives; the scholastic is Paul of Venice.⁴ This new framework provides an opportunity to stand back from conventional topics that have divided, and often bedeviled, discussion of the two traditions, and to examine their differences from a fresh perspective. We hope to show that many of the ideas that have been thought to set the two traditions apart in fact point to similarities between them. Areas of mutual disagreement presuppose common interests and the possibility of seeing how the traditions of humanism and scholasticism complement one another.

The chapter has three parts: Part I introduces the concept of “the perfect language” and summarizes its textual, religious and secular background. Part II sketches the ambiance of Eco's study and then reviews some representative attempts to discover or invent the perfect language. Part III identifies several themes that are relevant to the concept of perfect language in the humanist and scholastic traditions.

I Background of the Search for the Perfect Language

In *The Search for the Perfect Language* Umberto Eco poses the central questions that led medieval and early modern thinkers to search for the perfect language. The European concept of a perfect language originates in the Hebrew Bible's account of creation and a view about the language that Adam spoke before the dispersal of Noah's children (Genesis 10) and the confusion of tongues at Babel (Genesis 11). Adam's language is assumed to have been a clear and truthful expression of the natures of things. Eco examines more than two dozen major attempts from medieval to modern times to discover a language like Adam's, a perfect language. He cites or alludes to still more dozens of similar projects little known outside the field of historical linguistics. Although Eco's book has been received as a history of early modern linguistics, it has some notable omissions. Some of these result from Eco's confessed passion for antique books on imaginary, artificial, mad and occult languages that comprise his “Bibliotheca Semiologica Curiosa, Lunatica, Magica et Pneumatica”—a “mainstay,” he tells us, in writing the present book.⁵ He devotes a great deal of discussion to fringe movements and

³ Eco 1997 [1995]: 1.

⁴ For biography and background on these authors see: on Valla, Kraye 2001: 37-57; on Vives, Vives tr. Noreña 1990: Part I; on Paul of Venice, Perreiah 1986.

⁵ Eco 1997: 6.

oddities but neglects to mention several thinkers of major importance. Because searches for the perfect language flourished in the Renaissance, Eco elaborates the views of Pico della Mirandola, Marsilius Ficino, Nicholas of Cusa and Giordano Bruno, but he alludes to other humanist and scholastic thinkers only incidentally. With the exception of one reference to Roger Bacon, who believed that all languages share a universal grammatical core, he chides scholastics for presiding over an “ossified,” “artificial” idiom of Latin in contrast with Dante’s Tuscan vernacular.⁶ Briefly acknowledging that Dante wrote *De vulgari eloquentia* in the scholastic Latin style, he ignores the notable contributions of scholastics to language theory and the semiotic fields of syntax and semantics. He cites humanists for their fascination with an obscure text on hieroglyphics and for the recovery of Hebrew. However, he omits their restoration of classical Latin to replace medieval Latin as a scholarly language in the search for “the perfect language.”⁷ Eco later refers to “the years between the crisis of scholasticism and the beginning of the Renaissance”; however, he nowhere discloses the nature of an alleged “crisis” or its effects on the Renaissance.⁸ Admittedly, the scope of Eco’s study is vast, and the theories he discusses are quite complex. Moreover, he explores them in considerable detail with characteristic originality and insight. In light of these virtues, the limitations of the study are understandable and most omissions excusable. He examines “true and proper” languages that embody perfection in some important sense: namely, (1) original or mystically perfect languages, for example, Hebrew, Egyptian or Chinese, (2) reconstructed languages, (3) artificially constructed languages that exemplify perfections in (a) structure or function (*a priori* philosophical languages of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), (b) universality (*a posteriori* international languages of the nineteenth century) and (c) practicality (*polygraphies*). Finally, he treats magic languages “whose perfection is extolled on account of either their mystic effability or their initiatic secrecy.”⁹ Eco excludes a number of languages, for example, (a) dreamlike, fictitious and glottomanic languages as well as *bricolage*, pidgin or natural tongues and jargons created to facilitate communication between linguistically distinct cultures, and (b) formal languages such as logic except as they relate to 3a above. Dante’s “illustrious vernacular” is the starting point for examining all of the selected types of language. In this context, it seems reasonable to consider both the literary Latin of the humanists and the formalized Latin of the scholastics as candidates for “perfect” languages. Humanists such

⁶ Eco 1997: 44. “Grammatica una et eadem est secundum substantiam in omnibus linguis, licet accidentaliter varietur.” Bacon 1902: xxv, 27. See also: Murphy 1974: 43; Bursill-Hall 1971: 38; Sandys 1915: Vol. I, 595; Scaglione 1972: 123 ff.

⁷ Eco 1997: 145-6.

⁸ Eco 1997: 70.

⁹ Eco 1997: 2-3.

as Valla clearly thought that classical Latin was a perfect language. Vives even declares it to be so.¹⁰ Scholastic Latin is more difficult to classify. Since it enabled students who spoke vernacular dialects to learn the technical languages of university instruction and research it might be regarded as a pidgin language and thus excluded from Eco's study. However, it was also a formal language used to analyze other languages, and that qualifies it as an *a priori* philosophical language. Finally, insofar as it facilitated translation between Latin and the vernaculars it served as a "parameter language"—one used to mediate between two or more languages. In Chapter 6 we will offer evidence to support the thesis that scholastic logic performed these functions. In Part III of this chapter we offer some additional reasons for including both humanism and scholasticism within the framework of Eco's survey.

Although the origin of language is shrouded in mystery, anthropological studies of the emergence of human cultures normally account for it, just as modern linguistics explains it, in a variety of ways.¹¹ The mythologies tell us that language is a gift bestowed by a god, such as the deities Bhraspati or Vac in the *Rig Veda*.¹² Traditional European scholarship on the origin of language has taken the Hebrew book of Genesis as a starting point, and that is where Eco begins.

The story of God's gift of language to Adam is familiar. It is mysteriously folded within the tale of Eve's creation.¹³

Yahweh God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helpmate.' So from the soil Yahweh God fashioned all the wild beasts and all the birds of heaven. These he brought to the man to see what he would call them; each one was to bear the name that the man would give it. The man gave names to all the cattle, all the birds of heaven and all the wild beasts. But no helpmate suitable for man was found for him. So Yahweh God made the man fall into a deep sleep.¹⁴

When Adam is said to "name" the animals, his activity seems to have involved more than simple labeling. Some have gone so far as to say that Adam knew the essential natures of each thing, so that the words he applied would faithfully represent what each thing is. But this seems to stretch the text. Minimally, Adam appears to have been capable of uttering in the presence of the appropriate animals names like "lion," "elephant," and so on, or truthful sentences such as "This is a lion," "This is an elephant." Since no other human language user yet existed, it

¹⁰ See below Chapter 5, Section I. 000

¹¹ Bickerton 1995: 41 ff. Also, Calvin and Bickerton 2000; Calvin 2004; Pinker 1994.

¹² O'Flaherty 1981. For Chinese and other Asian languages, see Leaman 2001: 308 ff.

¹³ All passages from Genesis and Acts are taken from Jones 1966. For useful commentary on the place of Hebrew in the perfect language debates, see Demonet 1992: 15-86, 131-187.

¹⁴ Genesis 2:18–21a (Jones 1966: 16).

is questionable why Adam would have engaged in this monumental linguistic act. Nonetheless, he performed other linguistic acts such as speaking with God and understanding what God said to him. This included the instruction that “he may eat of all of the trees in the garden with one exception”: that he “not eat fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Once Eve had been created, she also spoke Adam’s language and used it in her fatal conversation with the serpent.

When God returned to the garden he found Adam hiding and ashamed of his nakedness. Knowing that his command had been disobeyed, God reviled the serpent; then he foretold the future of humans. Because of her sin, Eve and her children would give birth in pain, and she would be subject to Adam. Because of his sin, Adam would toil on the earth and sweat his brow until he would return to the earth from whence he came. Adam is barred from eating fruit from the tree of life lest he gain immortality, and he and Eve are cast out of the Garden of Eden. Yahweh God clearly spells out the consequences of their fateful act.

The biblical narrative continues to tell about the descendants of Adam and Eve, the early Patriarchs as well as Noah and the flood. Noah had only three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth. However, these fellows were quite prolific, and in time the earth was populated with their offspring. All went well until the children of Noah reached a plain in the land of Shinar. There they built a town and a tower that would reach up to heaven.

Now Yahweh came down to see the town and the tower that the sons of man had built. “So they are all a single people with a single language!” said Yahweh. “This is but the start of their undertakings! There will be nothing too hard for them to do. Come let us go down and confuse their language on the spot so that they can no longer understand one another.” Yahweh scattered them thence over the whole face of the earth, and they stopped building the town. It was named Babel therefore, because there Yahweh confused the language of the whole earth.¹⁵

How is the confusion of tongues to be interpreted? At the very least, it implies that the languages spoken by some workers on the tower could not be understood by others. Their inability to understand one another impaired their work, and the project could not be completed. Eco detects an inconsistency between Genesis chapters 10 and 11.¹⁶ Chapter 10 describes how Noah’s offspring were spread across the land. Japheth’s children were settled “according to their countries and each of their languages, according to their tribes and their nations.” Ham’s sons were dispersed “according to their tribes and languages, [and] according to their countries and nations.” And Shem’s sons were also distributed “according to

¹⁵ Genesis 1:11 (Jones 1966: 26-27).

¹⁶ Eco 1995:9 ff.

their tribes and languages, and according to their countries and nations.” Thus, Noah’s sons propagated tribes that migrated to distant lands and each tribe was settled “*according to its own language.*” Since there was a multiplication of languages before Babel, Eco asks why the confusion of tongues should have been considered a punishment. Clearly, the existence of many languages before Babel was not a problem. Despite all of the special languages spoken by the offspring of Japheth, Ham and Shem, everyone understood the speech of his neighbors. After Babel things were different.

In the early 1920s Edward Sapir and his student Benjamin Whorf proposed an influential theory about human language.¹⁷ They claimed that every language is the result of common agreement and that “*its terms are absolutely obligatory*” for all of its users. The language that we speak instills in our minds a linguistic system that compels us to organize our concepts in determinate ways. In a word, language causes thought. Given that persons in different cultures speak different languages, they have different mindsets, experiences and expressions that are not intelligible to those who speak other languages. In this way the different languages are rendered “incommensurable” with one another. As a consequence the languages are not translatable and communication between people who speak them is impossible. Citing Benjamin Whorf and Willard Quine, Eco refers to their “rather extreme” thesis about the nature of human languages: “[T]here are experiences, recognized by other cultures and capable of being expressed in their languages, which are neither recognized by our own, nor even capable of being expressed in our languages.”¹⁸ And later: “[E]ach language [is] a ‘holistic’ universe expressing the world in a way that could never be wholly translated into any other language.”¹⁹ Although Eco’s own view of linguistic relativism is not entirely clear, near the end of the book he states as a “fact” that “different languages present the world in different ways, sometimes mutually incommensurable.”²⁰ I submit that the principle of the incommensurability of human languages is relevant to the biblical accounts of language. In Genesis 10 we have multilingualism, but the many languages were “commensurable.” Despite differences of culture, mental outlook and experience, those who spoke them could communicate with one another and their languages were inter-translatable. In Genesis 11 the languages became “incommensurable.” Whatever caused the disruption, after Babel people could not understand their neighbors’ speech. The fact that human languages became at that point incommensurable was the central consequence of Babel and the principal significance of the *confusio linguarum*. Later thinkers sought “the perfect language” that could mend that wound.

¹⁷ Sapir 1921.

¹⁸ Eco 1997: 22.

¹⁹ Eco 1997: 113.

²⁰ Eco 1997: 330.

In addition to overcoming a major obstacle to human communication, early Christians had even greater reason to be concerned about the confusion of tongues. They believed that a Holy Spirit facilitates the expression of faith through language. If human communication were in jeopardy, the faith could be neither shared nor propagated. Of all the major world religions Christianity has experienced the greatest dissemination of ideas across diverse linguistic cultures. This phenomenon is no accident. The New Testament account of the gift of tongues at Pentecost was believed to be both an antidote to the confusion of tongues in the Old Testament and an anticipation of the spread of Christianity throughout a multilingual world.

When Pentecost day came round, they had all met in one room, when suddenly they heard what sounded like a powerful wind from heaven, the noise of which filled the entire house in which they were sitting; and something appeared to them that seemed like tongues of fire; these separated and came to rest on the head of each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak foreign languages as the Spirit gave them the gift of speech.

Now there were devout men living in Jerusalem from every nation, and at this sound they all assembled, each one bewildered to hear these men speaking his own language. They were amazed and astonished. “Surely,” they said, “all these men speaking are Galileans? How does it happen that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; people from Mesopotamia, Judaea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Lybia round Cyrene; as well as visitors from Rome—Jews and proselytes alike—Cretans and Arabs; we hear them preaching in our own language about the marvels of God.” Everyone was amazed and unable to explain it; they asked one another what it all meant. Some, however, laughed it off. “They have been drinking too much new wine,” they said.²¹

Despite the last disparaging remark, the text records that Peter went on to preach quite soberly about the teachings of Jesus, his death and resurrection. Surprisingly, Eco does not cite the event at Pentecost until the very last pages of his book; yet the experience at Pentecost was highly symbolic and had great significance for later Christian thought about the nature and possibilities of human language. Eco suggests two interpretations of the words that the apostles spoke on that day: *gossolalia* and *xenoglossia*. The former is “an ecstatic language that all could understand.”²² The latter is simply polyglotism, the capacity to speak in different languages; and “since all of the apostles were understood at once it may have

²¹ Acts 2:1–13 (Jones 1966: 202-204).

²² Eco 1997: 351.

been a sort of mystic service of simultaneous translation.”²³ Eco’s characterization of the apostle’s language as “ecstatic” and “mystical” is questionable since the text goes on to say that the speakers performed rather ordinary communicative functions. On the former view that the apostles were speaking a kind of babble, the gift of tongues would have been of merely ephemeral value, of little use for expressing belief, a silly event. The latter reading that recognizes translation and the possibility of reliable communication between speakers of diverse languages not only accords with the text: it anticipates the entire course of medieval learning. Whichever interpretation one prefers, and apart from claims of divine intervention, the apostles were able to surmount the differences between languages: somehow the incommensurability of languages had been overcome. Medieval culture was built on a rich inheritance from the ancient world. The religious traditions of Judaism, Islam and Christianity thrived on a wealth of translated materials, and all of the sources of learning were ancient texts in foreign tongues. The glosses, expositions and commentaries on those texts prepared the way for later practices in the art of translation. The thirteenth-century surge in translation of ancient materials into the vernaculars enabled those languages to supplant Latin in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. With the voyages of exploration translation became indispensable to cross-cultural communication and the development of commerce in the early modern world. Its effects remain today in computer languages and the world-wide reach of the internet. For all of these reasons it is not surprising that late medieval and early renaissance scholars joined the search for the perfect language: they sought to recover or invent a language that was pure and truthful in the way of Adam’s original tongue.

II History and Conceptual Framework

It is not possible, or even necessary, to review here all of the projects that sought to discover “the perfect language.” For that readers should consult Eco’s fascinating and comprehensive book. In the next few paragraphs we can only sketch the ambiance of those efforts before focusing on the strains of thought that are most relevant to understanding the contributions of humanists and scholastics to this tradition. They are: (1) Dante’s late medieval views about language, (2) early modern searches for the perfect language and (3) the rise of *a priori* philosophical languages. Although Eco’s final verdict is that most, if not all, of the efforts to realize “the dream” of the perfect language failed, the failures are instructive. We will note them especially as they pertain to the views of humanists and scholastics.

²³ Ibid.

As in his other works Eco adopts a basic model for the study of language derived from Louis Hjelmslev.²⁴ This model has certain virtues especially in relation to linguistics. It distinguishes between a content-plane and an expression-plane. The content-plane of a language comprises the normal units of signification or meaning; the expression-plane comprises the actual words that a particular language uses to express content. These words make up the bulk of the lexicon. Within each plane the model recognizes three factors—form, substance and continuum. For a natural language the expression form includes the phonological system, the lexicon and the rules of syntax. These elements produce the concrete utterances and inscriptions. The model posits a parallel three-part structure for the content-plane. The content-continuum comprises everything that humans can conceive or talk about. The content-form organizes the content-continuum in a particular way. The content-substance is just the sense that speakers give to an utterance or inscription on the expression-plane. This model is useful in accounting for natural languages that have interpreted content; however, it is less useful for languages with uninterpreted expressions, such as artificial languages that have place-holders for content-words. It is also needlessly complex and obscures some distinctions that are important for a comparison of humanist and scholastic approaches to language.

Fortunately, Eco also resorts to a second model in commenting on particular languages: that is, semiotics that distinguishes between the semantical, syntactical and pragmatic aspects of language.²⁵ Semantics concerns those parts of a language related to meaning, signification and truth. Syntax treats the structure and organization of a language, and pragmatics deals with the ways in which a language is used. Consistent with both models, we distinguish between the form and the content of language. By “form” we mean whatever factors structure a language and make up its syntax. We understand “syntax” broadly to include not only the surface grammar that is described by traditional grammarians but also the logical structure that is examined by logicians and linguists. By “content” we intend whatever the words uttered by a language user signify. Normally, these comprise the majority of words in the standard dictionaries of a language. While we agree in principle with the idea that languages constitute holistic systems—that is, that a language can express an understanding (or misunderstanding) of the world—we question whether languages “organize *the totality* of our vision of the world.”²⁶ We suspend judgment about the Whorfian hypothesis that languages, at bottom, are “incommensurable” and thus untranslatable.

At the end of the thirteenth century Roger Bacon expounded his theory of signs, and paused to reflect on the fact that someone at some point lays down

²⁴ Eco 1997: 20-21.

²⁵ Eco 1994; Morris 1938.

²⁶ Eco 1997: 22, emphasis added.

(*imposit*) the meanings of words in a language. His subject is artificial languages, but the same holds for those who first imposed the words of a natural language.

But if someone objects that not just anyone ought to impose names but only the wise, I reply that there are two reasons for imposing names: sometimes it occurs for the composition of the language of some dialect, and then it could not come about just by anyone but by an expert in the art of imposing, since it is necessary that one first fabricate an unlimited number of non-signifying vocal sounds, paying attention to how many ways two letters can be combined, how many ways three, thus up to six, because the largest syllable is made up of six letters, e.g. “branch” (*stirps*), and this is to be seen with respect to all the letters of the alphabet so that one may discover all the primitive words (*primitivas*), all of which must be monosyllables by nature because the principles (*principia*) are minimal in quantity, and these perhaps would suffice. Next he would form derivatives and make them two-syllable, which perhaps would suffice if they were multiplied as much as possible. Next, once there was an unlimited supply of vocal sounds, it is necessary that the first vocal sounds be imposed for primary things, and the second ones, namely, the derivatives, be imposed for secondary things, which are connected (*annexae*) to the first, and such a construction of a language is not just for anyone but for the expert. For I indeed concede: few are the languages constructed in this way by means of the sincere art of orthography, wherein all the things were observed which are owed to a language in its most powerful (*potissimo*) state. The Latin language falls far short of this art, and so it is difficult to speak with facility (*prompte*) unless a person use[s] it from youth. But sometimes languages are entirely constructed by art, e.g., those of the ancient Saxons and Angles and the like, and they are very concise languages because of the fact that all the elements that pertain to the art are observed in them. For all the primitive elements are monosyllables and the derivative things are disyllables, and so [such languages] are easy to construct, but there is some difficulty with respect to the substance of the sound to be generated. I say, therefore, that to impose in such a way that an artificial language results is not a task for just anyone but for the wise.²⁷

Bacon’s text offers a prelude of things to come in the search for the perfect language. His vision of mathematics as prior to all of the sciences as well as grammar and logic anticipated an ideal of later thinkers who sought a universal grammar underlying all particular languages.²⁸ His discrimination of the primitive units of a language, their composition from simples to complexes

²⁷ Bacon 1978: 131. Professor Thomas Maloney generously shared his forthcoming translation of this text which I have revised slightly. On Bacon’s general theory of signs, see Maloney 1983: 120-154.

²⁸ Murphy 1983.

and their derivative forms, is a preview of hierarchical language systems that developed over the next 700 years. These ideas along with those of speculative grammar and the *logica modernorum* were part of the intellectual culture in which Dante articulated his bold new theory of language.²⁹

As the greatest poet of the Latin Middle Ages, Dante's best-known poem was written in the vernacular, and he is, perhaps, the strongest defender of the intrinsic value of vernacular languages. Although Dante argues on behalf of his own Tuscan dialect, his claims are general and clearly intended to support the primacy of all vernaculars. Dante's views about the origin of human language gave rise to later controversies between humanists and scholastics.³⁰ Dante was steeped in the writings of the best Latin authors and knew well the Latin that became the language of the Church, the university and the professions. In the *Il Convivio* Dante praises classical Latin for its nobility, virtue and beauty.³¹ First, it is nobler than the vernaculars because it has a permanent form and is not subject to change. Vernaculars by contrast are unstable and change according to the vagaries of human taste. Second, it is more virtuous than the vernaculars because it operates according to its proper nature and performs its function of expressing the concepts of the mind. Moreover, Latin can express many ideas that the vernaculars cannot. Finally, Latin is more beautiful than the vernaculars because its parts are in proper harmony with one another. This is reasonable since art has created Latin, whereas usage produces the vernaculars. Latin's constancy is secured by the art of grammar. By contrast, the vernacular is simply raw usage of a language without formal grammar and is, therefore, prior to art.³²

Having extolled Latin in *Il Convivio*, in *De vulgari eloquentia* Dante argues for the superiority of vernacular languages over Latin.³³ His primary reasons are the following. Latin must be learned from study, few people can become proficient in it, and most of those who master it do so for personal gain and ignoble motives. Latin is a dead language; vernaculars are living languages. For that reason Latin is “artificial,” whereas vernaculars are “natural.” Where ancestry and social status lead to the cultivation of Latin, people speak vernaculars out of the natural nobility of the human soul. Vernaculars offer each person an opportunity to achieve nobility through the practice of moral virtue regardless of social station. Vernaculars are not produced by art; they originate in human nature, and that is the basis of their superior value. Vernaculars grow organically. They are the first languages that people speak at birth—our “mother tongues.” Dante may have come to appreciate natural language from his knowledge of

²⁹ Bursill-Hall 1971.

³⁰ Mazzocco 1993: 39 ff.

³¹ Dante Alighieri 1989: 4-15.

³² Minnis and Johnson 2005: 380-381; Mazzocco 1993.

³³ Quinones 1979: 60-88. Dante Alighieri 1996.

Aquinas who taught that it is preferable to know through natural means—that is, by perception and reason—than second-hand on the word of someone else. Aquinas gives priority to knowledge acquired naturally over that derived from authority. Knowing something on the basis of belief is second best to knowing it first-hand by one's own natural powers.³⁴ Vernaculars develop in the changing lives of ordinary people subject to the vagaries of time, location and circumstance. Their variety is due to the changeable character of human life. Dante's admiration for vernacular languages was not uncritical. He gives many examples of Italian vernaculars that are harsh or imbalanced, and he argues that literary vernaculars should be refined through imitation of the best classical authors. In time, the art of grammar will produce a lexicon and a syntax giving the vernacular a stability and regularity comparable with that of classical Latin. Dante's ideal for a refined Italian vernacular has four properties. It is illustrious, cardinal, courtly (*aulic*) and curial. A vernacular is illustrious when well-trained poets have weeded out the unseemly aspects of its dialects, have enhanced its power to persuade and have gained honor and glory through their writing. A vernacular is cardinal because it is perfected by usage among the leaders of the society who, in turn, influence popular speech. It is courtly because it is fit to be used in the ruling quarters of the land. Even Italy with no single government can support a language spoken daily within the common court of reason. It is curial because it embodies a just balance as in a system of justice. Guided by these standards, Dante set about transforming his favored Tuscan dialect into the elegant language of the *Comedia*.

On the question of original language Dante believed that Adam received neither a particular language, namely, Hebrew, nor a general faculty of language.³⁵ Rather Adam's gift was a grasp and command of linguistic form (*forma locutionis*). This idea calls for interpretation. Eco translates a crucial passage from Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia* (1303 CE):

[I]t is precisely this *form* (the *forma locutionis*) that all speakers would make use of in their *language* had it not been dismembered through the fault of human presumption, as I shall demonstrate below. By this *linguistic form* Adam spoke: by this *linguistic form* spoke all of his descendants until the construction of the Tower of Babel—which is interpreted as the “tower of confusion”: this was the *linguistic form* that the sons of Eber, called Hebrews after him, inherited. It remained to them alone after the confusion, so that our Saviour, who because of the human

³⁴ Thomas Aquinas 1914-1942: II, Question 2, Articles 4, 10.

³⁵ Mazzocco (1993: 165 ff.) discusses why Dante “at the time of the *De vulgari eloquentia* argu[ed], relying on patristic exegesis, that the Adamic language was of divine formation and therefore unchangeable, whereas at the writing of *Paradiso* XXVI he maintain[ed], following scholastic theories, that it was manmade and therefore changeable.”

side of his nature had to be born of them, could use a *language* not of confusion but of grace. It was thus the Hebrew *tongue* that was constructed by the first being endowed with speech.³⁶

Commenting on this passage, Eco claims that the original gift was a set of principles from which a language could be made. Steven Botterill's translation of the sentence before this passage relates form even more closely to the parts of language:

Returning, then, to my subject, I say that a certain form of language was created by God along with the first soul: I say "form" with reference both to the words used for things, and to the construction of words, and to the arrangement of the construction ...³⁷

On the basis of this passage Eco claims that Dante was influenced by speculative grammar and may have meant something like the rules of a universal grammar. Speculative grammarians were also called *modistae* because they emphasized the ways that language signifies (*modi significandi*). The *modistae* taught that words primarily signify thoughts and that sentences are expressions of complex thoughts. They affirmed a strict correspondence between the signifying functions of thought (*modi intelligendi* or *cognoscendi*), language (*modi significandi*) and things (*modi essendi*). Since these ideas were known in Bologna, Professor Maria Corti has argued that they influenced Dante.³⁸ Because it challenged traditional grammar, speculative grammar was highly controversial in both the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Humanists who denied that grammar is prescribed by reason and affirmed the primacy of usage were especially critical of it.

Whatever Dante may have borrowed from the modists, he expressly adopts Aquinas's principles of scriptural interpretation. His exposition of *Il Convivio*, tract II, expounds the fourfold senses of scripture, and affirms the primacy of the literal or historical sense of language in determining the truth of allegory.³⁹ But the logic of the literal sense of language was the main subject-matter of scholastic logic (*logica modernorum*) in Dante's world. In the *Comedia*, Dante refers to Peter of Spain whose *Summulae logicales* were known throughout Italy. His tract on syncategorematic words that give language its structure and form could well have been the source for Dante's idea of linguistic form. In sum, Dante aspired

³⁶ Eco 1997: 42-43.

³⁷ Dante Alighieri 1996: 13.

³⁸ Corti 1981.

³⁹ Minnis and Scott 1988: 394 ff. For discussion of the literal or historical sense in Dante, see Freccero 2007. For the relation of political power to a logic founded on truth, see Mazzotta 1993.

to craft an “illustrious vernacular” that could express universal truth and be, in effect, a “perfect” language.

Eco goes considerably beyond Maria Corti’s controversial thesis. He suggests that the principles of universal grammar enabled Adam to structure the lexicon and the syntax of the first language: the *forma locutionis* was a “sort of innate mechanism, in the same terms as Chomsky’s generative grammar.”⁴⁰ Later he writes even more boldly, “[D]ante’s *forma locutionis* is not a language but the universal matrix for *all* language.”⁴¹ But a matrix for all languages has a syntactical core as can be seen in Chomsky’s concept of “deep structure” as opposed to “surface structure.” In other words, generative grammar requires a logic and a conception of logical form. Logical form is also central to scholastic theories of language, and this would be evidence that scholastic logic influenced Dante.⁴²

On the European continent strong religious reasons often motivated those who searched for the perfect language. Attempts to recover the lost language of Adam gained momentum as problems arose in the late medieval Church. Thinkers sought a language that could help mend relations between the Eastern and Western divisions of Christendom. The first European who proposed a perfect language was the Catalan philosopher Raymond Llull. He was driven by a religious motive to convert the Saracens to Christianity. Llull’s *Ars Magna* is a work of great originality. It presents a language that can be generated systematically from a set of primitive predicates. The system of rules he called the combinatorial art (*ars combinatoria*). A basic alphabet of nine letters from

⁴⁰ Eco 1997: 45. Eco (1994: 220) tells the story differently: “According to my revised version of the myth, Adam did not see tigers as mere individual specimens of a natural kind. He saw certain animals, endowed with certain morphological properties, insofar as they were involved in certain types of action, interacting with other animals and with their natural environment. Then he stated that the subject *x*, usually acting against certain countersubjects in order to achieve certain goals, usually showing up in the circumstances so and so, was only part of story *p*—the story being inseparable from the subject and the subject being an indispensable part of the story. Only at this stage of world knowledge could this subject *x-in-action* be named *tiger*.” It is not clear how the two accounts of Adam’s role as language inventor—that is, Adam as generative grammarian and as behavioral anthropologist—are compatible.

⁴¹ Eco 1997: 52, emphasis added.

⁴² Eco’s positive assessment of speculative grammar is not surprising since Semiotics of which he is the leading exponent was founded by C.S. Peirce after studying the speculative grammars of the Middle Ages. Because Thomas of Erfurt’s *Grammatica Speculativa* was included in a collection of Scotus’s works edited by Luke Wadding in 1639, the first modern semiotician C.S. Peirce mistakenly attributed the work to Scotus. See Bursill-Hall 1971: 34, n. 79. At the time he was developing semiotics Peirce also studied the logical writings of Paul of Venice whose theories of logic and language rivaled those of the speculative grammarians (Perreiah 1989).

B through K less J are assigned to basic predicates of two kinds, “absolute” and “relative.” These are, in turn, correlated with subjects of the predicates, corresponding virtues and vices as well as a set of related questions. Possible combinations of these factors are systematically represented in four figures. By simple mechanical manipulations of letters one can produce a very large number of sentences. The goal is to generate as many combinations of the elementary units as possible and then to decide which of the resulting sentences are demonstrably true. Llull’s system attracted many admirers in the Renaissance—for example, Nicholas of Cusa and Giordano Bruno. Llull’s combinatorial rule—the idea that the meaning of a whole expression is a function of the meaning of its parts—is an important principle in most modern theories of language. However, his art was applied to the small number of predicates that he selected, and hence lacks the universality and completeness necessary for a perfect language. Despite the large number of sentences generable from the elements, Llull arbitrarily rejected sentences that he believed to be false, and for that reason his system fails to obtain the degree of formality that is needed to fulfill its purpose. Not surprisingly, several scholars have concluded that his system has little relevance to the history of formal logic.⁴³

Spanish and Provençal cabbalists including Abraham Abulafia led a second stream of efforts to invent a perfect language based on the mystical number four. In the Jewish tradition the tetragrammaton was a vocalization and recombination of the Hebrew alphabet to form the Hebrew word “YHWH.”⁴⁴ Because it could be manipulated in a multiplicity of ways to produce strings of intelligible discourse and presumably true sentences, Hebrew was regarded by Cabbalists and renaissance Lullists as the perfect language. The existence of the Hebrew language from ancient times and a belief that Adam spoke it gave rise to the “monogenetic hypothesis”—the notion that all human languages descend from a common root. This idea has had both supporters and detractors. It dominated the earlier searches for the perfect language. Its plausibility was challenged most strongly by research in anthropology. The voyages of exploration encountered peoples whose languages had no apparent connection with ancient Hebrew. Thus, the question: How can Genesis explain their origin? Isaac Peyrera (Isaac de La Peyrère, a Swiss Christian with a Murano Jewish name) had an answer to this puzzle. His pre-Adamite theory asserted that humans existed before Adam, and that Genesis tells not of the origin of the entire human race but only of the Jewish people.⁴⁵ Thus, one can question whether Adam’s language was the root of all human languages. Eco notes that the tenth-century Islamic scholar al-Maqdisi had already affirmed the existence of races prior to

⁴³ Ashworth 1974: 2; Johnston 1987: 1.

⁴⁴ Eco 1997: 117 ff.

⁴⁵ Popkin 1987: 69 ff.

Adam.⁴⁶ In fact, the theory traces back to ancient times.⁴⁷ As we will show, the question of whether human languages are genetically one or many is relevant to humanist and scholastic approaches to language. Eco examines, in turn, the iconographic languages of Egyptian hieroglyphics, Chinese ideographics, magic languages (for example, those of Paracelsus and the Rosicrucians) as well as sign languages developed for the deaf. To these we can add Cistercian sign language used in the medieval cloister. Each of these languages was thought to embody some special wisdom about the nature of things and hence claimed status as a perfect language. Polygraphic languages symbolized directly the nature of things and were thought to express ancient wisdom.⁴⁸ Athanasius Kircher, whose scholarship spanned Egyptian hieroglyphics, Chinese and the secret language of Hermes Trismegistus, combined mathematics and hieroglyphics into a code that was later known to Leibniz. Finally, Eco canvasses the works of mystics, magicians and mathematicians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that recognized the unlimited nature of human language as a vehicle for expressing the infinite potential of human thought. With these thinkers there was an important shift in approach to the study of language. Galileo had observed that the great book of nature is written in the language of mathematics. Others would see that mathematics also held a key to the nature of human language. Increasingly, attention focused not on actual languages but on notational systems that could represent the elementary units and syntactical structures of language. “Unlike Llull, Mersenne, Guldin, Clavius and others [w]ere no longer calculating upon particular concepts [that is, predicates in a real or imagined language] but rather upon simple alphabetic sequences, pure elements of expression with no inherent meaning, controlled by no orthodoxy other than the limits of mathematics itself.”⁴⁹ To see how that idea grew, we will need to discuss what Eco calls “*a priori* philosophical languages.” The projects of George Dalgarno, John Wilkins and Francis Lodwick pointed the way toward a tradition of mathematical logic that continues from Leibniz through the present day. Finally, since Eco’s work is part of *The Making of Europe* series, he concludes with a survey of international auxiliary languages, so-called *a posteriori* languages such as Esperanto.⁵⁰

Dante’s identification of perfect language with “the illustrious vernacular” initiated the modern search for the perfect language among the vernaculars. Following the broad range of efforts from the thirteenth through the sixteenth centuries outlined above, it was left to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thinkers to bring the venture to a new level of investigation. Where Dante

⁴⁶ Eco 1997: 89.

⁴⁷ Popkin 1987: Ch. 3.

⁴⁸ Eco 1997: 194-208.

⁴⁹ Eco 1997: 142.

⁵⁰ Eco 1997: 317 ff.

and other early modern thinkers gave priority to natural languages, later thinkers sought to develop artificial languages that could serve as a universal medium for rational discourse and thus be considered “perfect.” Eco finds the inspiration for this pursuit in several sources. In the sixteenth century François Viète devised the first systematic notation for mathematics by allowing alphabetic letters to stand for both known constants and for variables known and unknown.⁵¹ Inspired by Viète, Descartes formulated geometric problems algebraically and invented modern analytic geometry. As part of his program to reform philosophy he proposed a new universal mathematics (*mathesis universalis*). This discipline “should contain the primary rudiments of human reason and extend to the discovery of truths in any field whatever.”⁵² Despite early interest in artificial languages on the part of Continental thinkers, Eco marks the beginning of work on *a priori* philosophical languages in Britain in the seventeenth century. As we will show later, a logic containing elements of such a language developed there as an accessory to a new physics and migrated to Italy in the late fourteenth century. Originally a secular movement distanced from religion in England, it later regained a religious purpose on the Continent in the philosophy of G.W. Leibniz. British thinkers identified Latin with the Roman Church and were motivated to find an alternative to Latin as a universal language. They also saw the benefits of a universal language to promote British commerce. Francis Bacon had criticized the ambiguities inherent in natural languages and pointed the way toward a new language that could be used in the cultivation of science. He proposed a basic alphabet of characters that would signify precisely concepts of the mind. Jan Komensky (*Comenius*), a Hussite reformer who settled in England, also criticized the ambiguities of ordinary usage and advocated a universal artificial language. In the seventeenth century several thinkers assembled and organized the content words of a language that would be “perfect” in the sense of unambiguous, universal and true.

Francis Lodwick, George Dalgarno and John Wilkins are the leading British thinkers who attempted to formulate artificial universal languages on the basis of content-words. All employed a methodology inspired by Llull. They first identified a set of primitive concepts from which all other concepts could be derived. Second, they organized the primitives into systems that model the organization of content. Third, they devised a catalog of “characters” to signify the semantical primitives. In this context the word “character” has a special meaning. A character is an arbitrary sign that indicates unequivocally

⁵¹ Viète 2006.

⁵² Descartes 1981: 19 ff. John Wallis, a British mathematician, was the first to use the expression ‘*mathesis universalis*’ in the title of his work on algebra, arithmetic and geometry where he introduced the modern symbol for infinity. On Wallis, see Scott 1981. On the history of *mathesis universalis*, see Crapulli 1969.

a discrete semantical primitive.⁵³ Francis Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* and *De augmentis scientiarum* contrasted conventional alphabetic expressions with "real characters." The former represent letters or words. The latter stand for things or notions and are comparable, he believed, to units in the ideographic languages of the Far East. A "character" behaves like a notational symbol in modern mathematics or logic. When combined according to standard rules of deduction (the combinatory art) these primitives would yield the desired sentential expressions. Despite the fact that these constructed languages resemble natural languages and contain many of their features, they were intended to be independent autonomous systems. Because selection of primitive terms entails considerable philosophical speculation, Eco calls them "*a priori* philosophical languages."⁵⁴ The systems of characters are precise notational representations that offer linguistic maps of whatever can be thought or spoken.

While these thinkers knew of Aristotle's classificatory systems (that is, categories and predicables) and the method of dichotomous division, they pursued their projects in diverse ways. Francis Lodwick sought to reduce all content words to verbs or action words, and he organized all questions of meaning around that principle. In this regard his work resembles that of ancient Sanskrit grammarians who traced nouns to verbal roots. George Dalgarno's *Ars Signorum* (1661) arranged the primitives under "being" and then divided being into substance, accidents and artifacts; these were further divided into genus and species. All of these systems faced the problem of selecting the primitive concepts. Where "primitive" is defined as "simple," the problem is how to decide the appropriate level of simplicity. Dalgarno limited the basic general terms to 17, yet his effort to classify and subdivide artifacts as well as accidents led him to some inconvenient consequences. He discovered that the ultimate species numbered between 4,000 and 10,000. The fact that individuals have an indefinite number of accidents further complicated an already unwieldy system. The project to construct a language on the basis of its content-words was proving difficult if not impossible. Nonetheless, Dalgarno fashioned a precise system of characters to represent the elements of human discourse, and by a method of derivation he generated basic sentences about objects in the world.

John Wilkins' *Essay toward a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* (1668) presents the best example of an "*a priori* philosophical language." In several hundred pages Wilkins assembles 40 genera and 251 types of differences (*differentia*). From this stock he is able to generate names of 2,030 species of real-world objects. Wilkins' methodology is flawed because he intermingles dichotomous division (that is, a genus divided into two opposing species) of substances with multiple division of accidents, and, as Eco observes, "the

⁵³ Eco 1997: 220. See also Rossi 2000: 145 ff.

⁵⁴ Eco 1997: Ch. 10.

whole system begins to spin out of control.⁵⁵ Like other theorists, Wilkins borrows some taxonomic systems from biology, and it becomes clear that his subdivisions are often dictated by mnemonic efficiency rather than standards of biological observation. One critic claimed that Wilkins lumped together pre-scientific taxonomies and folk taxonomy. Another commented that Wilkins had confused classification with division. Eco gives an extensive critique of Wilkins's methodology and in the end declares that it fails to do what Wilkins intended, namely, to secure human knowledge of the natures of things: "We should, by learning the *Character* (precise sign) and the *Names* of things, be instructed likewise in their *Natures*."⁵⁶ The failure of Wilkins's artificial language shows the difficulties inherent in constructing a language on the basis of its content-words. This problem beset all such efforts from Llull to Wilkins. Although he admired some of the projects that we have described, and even tried several of his own, Leibniz discovered that a language cannot be erected on content-words alone. Nor, indeed, are content-words even a primary consideration. Problems in this approach to language occur at every level, including the selection and classification of primitive terms, the method of derivation and the ultimate subjects of the entire linguistic system. It is important to establish a definite set of primitives, but how are these to be selected? If one takes "simplicity" to be the standard of selection, how can one know when one has arrived at the simplest term? Every concept admits of further analysis and, if that is so, it is plainly not possible to arrive at a single, ultimate set of them. Concerning the primary subjects of predication, a similar problem arises. Every individual is composed of an indefinite number of accidental features; thus, it is impossible to determine at what point, or to what extent, the predicates generated by the system apply. Finally, as noted above, methods of derivation differ according to the principle of difference one adopts. It is impossible to say whether a rule of dichotomous or multiple division is more appropriate for any given genus. How should one apply a principle of difference, and which differences between things in the same genus are essential? But there is a deeper problem. The signification or meaning of a content-word cannot be decided in isolation. A dictionary definition records how a word has been, or is being, used. To determine what a word means at a given time and place a speaker must use the word in a sentence that can be understood within a larger context of sentences that the speaker admits. Circumstances of place and time are, of course, relevant to the meaning and truth-conditions of all of these sentences. But the content-words are not the most important part of a language. The logical words structure sentences and determine the logical syntax of a language. One may proceed in a language without knowing the meaning or definition of each and every content-word. It is often sufficient to simply mark

⁵⁵ Eco 1997: 252.

⁵⁶ Eco 1997: 250, 255.

the places of a content-word without understanding it. But one cannot proceed with an argument or develop a narrative on a given subject without the use of logical-words.

Leibniz also recognized the futility of constructing an artificial language based on a fixed set of primitive terms. During the course of his brilliant career Leibniz attempted to construct a *lingua philosophica* (also called *lingua rationalis* or *lingua universalis*).⁵⁷ This is an artificial language designed to represent the structure of human thought “perfectly” or at least more perfectly than existing languages. He saw that the content-words of human language are inexhaustible and that any effort to contain them in a finite system would fail. Thus, his language gives priority to the syntactical components of language and uses place-holders for content-words. François Viète’s invention of a precise notational system for mathematics had greatly accelerated progress in that discipline, and Leibniz sought to find the characters or signs—an alphabet of thought—that could express all thoughts as accurately as arithmetical signs represent numbers. Once thoughts could be expressed unequivocally in written symbols, the path of reasoning would be perceptible to the senses and deduction would be mechanical. Philosophical disputes would be unnecessary. Should a difference of opinion arise, the parties would simply recast their views in the *lingua philosophica* and proceed to calculate their way to a resolution. Because he initiated the idea of using artificial symbols for both logical constants and individual variables, Leibniz is considered the founder of modern symbolic logic. By extending the idea of calculation beyond mathematics into every area of human thought, he is also considered the founder of mathematical logic. Thus, Leibniz begins to realize Descartes’s ideal of a *mathesis universalis*. He initiates a modern tradition that continues through the work of figures such as George Boole, Augustus de Morgan, Charles Peirce and Ernest Schroeder. Giuseppe Peano and Gottlob Frege furthered this tradition from the side of mathematics. In the early twentieth century Bertrand Russell, Alfred North Whitehead and Ludwig Wittgenstein consolidated the results of the earlier tradition. In the later twentieth century Rudolph Carnap, Alfred Tarski, W.V.O. Quine, Noam Chomsky and Donald Davidson showed how formal logic applies to the analysis of ordinary or natural language.

III Humanist and Scholastic Searches for the Perfect Language

In this section we will reflect on three themes from Parts I and II that bear on a consideration of “the perfect language” in the humanist and scholastic traditions. Although scholars in both traditions believed that their favored languages were

⁵⁷ Mates 1986. Bocheński 1961: 274276.

“perfect” in some sense, they had different standards of perfection, and these need to be examined and evaluated. While both thought that their languages were universal, they were well aware that not everyone spoke either classical or scholastic Latin. Just how did their languages exemplify the property of universality? Finally, if the perfect language can be found, a problem would remain: namely, how is it related to other languages? This raises the problem of communicability between languages, and the possibility of translation. Since these themes from the modern search for the perfect language recur in the following chapters, some discussion of them is in order.

The Perfect Language of Humanism

Martin Davies has aptly described humanism as “a style of approach to the life of the mind.”⁵⁸ Lorenzo Valla was dedicated to a vision of classical Latin as the foundation of Western civilization and as a major factor in the formation of the Western mind. Lodi Nauta declares: “[F]or Valla classical Latin is the perfect vehicle for the development of arts, sciences, law, literature, and communication ...”⁵⁹ Other commentators have been equally effusive about Valla’s vision of Latin. David Marsh: “In the preface to the first Book [of the *Elegantiae*] Valla draws a parallel between the Roman Empire and the Latin language, insisting on the superior cultural and historical importance of the language as the durable basis of Western civilization.”⁶⁰ Ann Moss: “Valla gives to the high culture of western Europe an inalienable linguistic basis, and that basis is the Latin of ancient Rome: ‘for who were the greatest philosophers, the greatest orators, the greatest jurists, the greatest writers, but those who attached most value to using language well?’”⁶¹

Humanist paeans to the virtues of classical Latin echo Valla’s belief that classical Latin is the perfect language. It is perfect because it embodies the features of a perfect language noted by Quintilian: namely, authority (*auctoritas*), reason (*ratio*) or antiquity (*vetustas*), and use (*usus*).⁶² Each of these qualities deserves comment.

⁵⁸ Davies 1993.

⁵⁹ Nauta 2009: 277 and n. 25.

⁶⁰ Marsh 1979: 92-93.

⁶¹ Moss 2003: 36.

⁶² Quintilian 1921-1996: I, 5, 72 ff.

Authority (auctoritas)

Where Quintilian had understood authority in terms of the speech of orators, historians and poets, Valla stresses the art of rhetoric. He agrees with Quintilian that “The judgment of the supreme orator is placed on the same level as reason, and even error brings no disgrace, if it results from treading in the footsteps of such distinguished guides.”⁶³

Antiquity (vetustas)

Valla follows Quintilian in attributing majesty and sanctity to classical Latin because of its ancient origin. Valla’s ambition to extend the influence of classical Latin rhetoric into theology adds religious and spiritual dimensions to his concept of a perfect language.

Reason (ratio)

Quintilian limits the concept of rationality to the practice of reasoning by analogy and to the orator’s use of etymology. Nonetheless, throughout his work, reason as exhibited in forensic argumentation is central to his methodology. For instance, he focuses on the sentence, proposition or judgment as the expression of truth. In Chapter 3 we will show how Quintilian’s methods of proof meet conventional standards of logical inference. Finally, Quintilian bears no hostility toward Aristotle whose theories of categories, predicables, syllogistic and various other principles of argumentation are very much in evidence in his work.

Use (usus) and usage (consuetudo)

Quintilian firmly states that “Usage is [t]he surest pilot in speaking and we should treat language as currency minted with the public stamp.”⁶⁴ Lodi Nauta’s commentary on the *Dialectical Disputations* elaborates: “the greatest of these [properties] is the *consuetudo* since speaking elegantly phrased Latin, in accordance with the linguistic usage of the great authors, is more important than following the rules of the art of grammar.”⁶⁵ He goes on to observe that ‘*consuetudo*’ covers not only the customary practices of great Latin authors but also those who speak common vernaculars. As we will show, Valla’s concept of usage is considerably more complex—and controversial—than this sentence suggests.

⁶³ Quintilian 1921-1996: I, 5, 72.2.

⁶⁴ Quintilian I 1921-1996: 5, 72.3; I, 6: 43 ff.

⁶⁵ Nauta 2009: 217.

According to Valla, Latin reached its highest point of development in the first century CE. The Barbarian invasions corrupted Latin in the Middle Ages, and a total renovation of that language was necessary if Western culture was to survive and again prosper. This could be accomplished only by a sustained effort to recover the linguistic styles and standards of its best authors, especially Cicero and Quintilian. Valla believed that Latin could not only save Western culture from medieval decadence: it could bring about its renewal. Ann Moss sees Valla's contribution as an entirely new departure:

Valla sets in motion the Latin language turn, having evolved for himself a general theory that grounded culture in language and having grasped its full implications. *Language will condition thinking*, and the culturally contextualized language of ancient Rome, if once again it becomes the native language of the intellectual elite, will empower a renewal of all the disciplines of learning.⁶⁶

Valla's admiration of the classical Latin spoken by "the intellectual elite" and his contempt for the vernacular spoken by the masses is well documented. Silvia Rizzo concludes her study of Valla's medieval heritage with a comment on the nature of Latin in the *Elegantiae*:

The sharp separation between the speech of the illiterate, governed exclusively by use (*usus*), and that of the literate, which has grammatical character and is therefore regulated by art (*ars*) and not by use (*usus*) (the usage naturally of the cultivated person and of writers) is the theoretical presupposition of [the *Elegantiae*] which, as was already observed, notwithstanding the continued reference to usage by the author, proposes a linguistic model substantially immobile and immutable, "a meta-historical language valid for all time, which can be learned equally well by the ancients and the moderns and which for both constitutes *the most perfect instrument of knowledge at the disposal of man*."⁶⁷

Valla's leading modern commentator, Lodi Nauta, agrees: Valla thinks of Latin as "a timeless tool of expression and communication, transcending boundaries of time and place, as were—it was often assumed—the values and views expressed by that language."⁶⁸ In short, Valla believed that classical Latin was the perfect language.

⁶⁶ Moss 2003: 36-37, emphasis added.

⁶⁷ Rizzo 2002: 106, quoting Cesarini Martinelli 1980: n. 62; my translation with emphasis added.

⁶⁸ Nauta 2007: 197. Nauta (2009: 55-57) comments on Valla's allusions to the language of Adam. Waswo's claims notwithstanding, Valla maintained a conventionalist view of the origin of language.

Juan Luis Vives reaffirms this estimation of classical Latin. In *De disciplinis* he calls language “a sanctuary of learning” and “an instrument of human society,” and laments that there is not one language which all nations could use in common. Original sin is the cause of our having many languages. If it is not possible to have one language, there is a language Christians and others could use.

That one language should be both sweet-sounding, learned and eloquent. Sweetness exists in the sound of single, separate words or combinations of words. Learning consists in the proper designation of things; eloquence in the abundance and variety of words and phrases. All of these qualities would bring it about that men would speak this language willingly and would be able to express their feelings in the most fitting way, and their judgment would be increased by it. Such seems to me to be the Latin language, of those at least which men use and which are known to us. For that language would be the most perfect of all whose words would explain the natural meaning of things, such as it is reasonable to think was the language by which Adam gave names to each individual thing.⁶⁹

According to his criteria of audible sweetness, erudition and eloquence, Vives testifies to the perfection of the Latin language. The highest grade of perfection would be attained by a language that expresses the essences of natural things. Vives here alludes to an essentialist approach to language that he apparently believes is closest to the language of Adam. Valla distanced himself from essentialist theories of language.

The Perfect Language of Scholasticism

Although scholastics did not describe their idiom of Latin as “the perfect language,” from the thirteenth through the sixteenth century they developed systems of logic to account for meaning and truth in that language. As noted above, searches for the perfect language in Britain in the seventeenth century were mainly secular. In addition to British antipathy toward Roman Catholicism, they were motivated by commercial and scientific interests. Eco begins his account of *a priori* philosophical languages in the seventeenth century with Francis Lodwick, George Dalgarno, John Wilkins and Francis Bacon. There are good reasons, however, to mark the beginning of the British search for the perfect language in the first quarter of the fourteenth century when the rise of kinematics called for the development of a new scientific language.⁷⁰ At Balliol and Merton Colleges, Oxford, four scholars followed the lead of Gerard

⁶⁹ Vives *De tradendis disciplinis* (tr. Del Nero) in Fantazzi 2008: 206.

⁷⁰ Clagett 1961: 199 ff.; Ashworth and Spade 1984; Grant 1974.

of Brussels in applying geometry to astronomy, mechanics and the theory of motion. Thomas Bradwardine, William of Heytesbury, Richard Swinsehead and John Dumbleton crafted a new language to describe physical motion. Their most important discovery is a proof of the theorem basic to Galileo's account of motion and velocity.⁷¹ It is called "the Merton Mean-Speed Theorem." The physics of this period required a precise language that could be used to describe physical motion and was susceptible to scientific reasoning, demonstration and proof. In response to this need the school tradition introduced students to a new variety of logic, the terminist logic of late scholasticism. In the last quarter of the fourteenth century this logic migrated via the University of Bologna to Padua and Pavia.⁷² These centers of learning in northern Italy embraced the new physics and its logic. Paul of Venice's *Logica Parva*, copied in more than 80 manuscripts and 26 editions, broadcast this logic to thousands of students in Italian universities throughout the fifteenth century.⁷³

At its core scholastic logic contains five theories: (1) signification or meaning (*significatio* of categoric terms), (2) co-signification (*significatio* of syncategoric terms), (3) supposition or reference (*suppositio*), (4) inferences (*consequentiae*) and (5) proof (*probatio*). We will comment on each of these in turn.

Signification is that property of a word that calls something to the mind of a language user.⁷⁴ It is the ordinary notion of nominal meaning or word-meaning. This would comprise all of the nouns and verbs, adjectives and adverbs that make up the normal vocabulary of a language. Scholastic logic accepts the ordinary meanings of such words as established by social convention and usage. Thus, the stock vocabularies of classical or medieval Latin—no less than those of vernacular languages—remain intact so far as scholastic logic is concerned. Logic is like grammar in this respect: it accepts and does not change the words of the language that it studies. For reasons we will discuss in Chapter 6, scholastic logic employs a sparse stock of significative terms—for example, "Sortes," "Plato," "man," "ass," "runs," "sits". It is important to keep in mind, however, that these words are only place-holders for signifying words used in Latin or other languages in particular contexts of utterance.

Co-signification is that property of certain words that have no meaning apart from their occurrence with signifying words. Co-signifying terms are particles such as "... and ...," "... or ...," "if ... then ...," "all ...," "some ...," "only ...," "except ...," which structure the sentences in which they occur.

⁷¹ Clagett 1961: 252.

⁷² Courtenay in Maierù 1982: 13 ff.

⁷³ Paul of Venice 1984, 2002.

⁷⁴ Nuchelmans 1973: 123-125 gives the background of the distinction between signifying and co-signifying terms in Aristotle, Boethius and Priscian. See Ashworth (1988: 155-159) for background on signification theory.

Supposition is a species of signification in which the meaning of a word is referred to an object—that is, either a word or a thing in the world. Signifying terms have supposition only in the context of a sentence. Every sentence has a determinate logical form. Logical form is the structure that remains when the non-logical or content words are disregarded or set aside. The logical form of a sentence is defined by the expressions that have logical force—that is, that determine the truth-conditions and logical implications of a sentence. Supposition rules are used to identify the logical forms of sentences. The logical form of a sentence is essential for two purposes: (1) it sets the conditions for deciding the truth or falsity of a sentence and (2) it shows the range of valid inferences that can be made from a sentence.

Inference rules (*consequentiae*) give the patterns of valid (and invalid) inferences between sentences. The Appendix lists more than five dozen rules of inference from the *Logica Parva*.

Finally, there is proof. Scholastic logic includes various methods of proof that are used to display the truth-conditions of sentences of determinate logical forms. All other areas of scholastic logic whose names are familiar—for example, obligations (*obligationes*), insolubles (*insolubilia*), sophisms (*sophismata*), are extensions or elaborations of the above theoretical matrix.

In Chapter 3 we will apply scholastic inference rules to examples of forensic argument in Valla's *Dialectical Disputations*. Those rules are keyed to the co-signifying terms. For example, the rule of *modus ponens* applies to an implicative sentence where the antecedent is granted independently: "If Socrates runs, then Plato runs. Socrates runs. Therefore, Plato runs." *Modus tollens*: "If Socrates runs, then Plato runs. Plato does not run. Therefore, Socrates does not run." *Modus ponens* and *modus tollens* are argument forms that represent actual arguments expressed in a natural language. In ordinary narrative a sequence of sentences may be adduced to support or refute a particular conclusion. The supporting or refuting sentences (the premises) may be conjoined—that is, hooked together by 'and'—to form the antecedent of single conditional sentence with the conclusion as its consequent. For example, "If Socrates runs, then Plato runs and Socrates runs, then Plato runs." Here the above argument is re-expressed as a compound sentence and the argument's validity or invalidity will correspond to the truth or falsity of the compound sentence.⁷⁵ In the fourteenth century the rules of syllogism were incorporated into the rules of *consequentiae* so that they governed even syllogistic reasoning.⁷⁶

The high standard of logical formality exhibited in scholastic logic shows a dedication to the main purpose of logic, namely, to maintain a principle of consistency in argumentation. Much has been made in the literature of

⁷⁵ This is Ockham's view; John Buridan disagreed. See King 2001: 117 ff.

⁷⁶ Kneale and Kneale 1962: 274-297; Bird 1960, 1961, 1962.

“scholastic metalanguage” as if scholastics spoke an arcane idiom that somehow defied normal human comprehension.⁷⁷ Scholastic logic was a metalanguage in the sense that it was a second-order language about a first-order language—that is, ordinary Latin or other languages. Humanist grammar was also a metalanguage, for it was second-order discourse about a first-order language, namely, classical Latin. They were similar also in that both metalanguages included within themselves their respective object-languages. Since it went beyond the categories of Latin grammar, scholastic metalanguage was considerably richer in semantical categories than humanist grammar. Moreover, it supported a formal system of quotation called “material supposition” (*suppositio materialis*) that was needed for a precise account of sentential truth. Scholastic methods of proof and demonstration met a high standard of transparency: that is, any claim that a sentence is true must be justified. Given its dedication to the principles of consistency and completeness as well as its requirement of provability with respect to truth, scholastic logic may claim a measure of perfection. Perhaps these were among the qualities that Pico della Mirandola had in mind when he expressed most eloquently the virtues of scholastic philosophy.⁷⁸

Universality and Humanism

Eco notes a major confusion in the history of searches for the perfect language: “Thinkers have confused the idea of a *perfect language* with that of a *universal language*.⁷⁹ As an early humanist, Valla claimed that classical Latin enjoyed the greatest universality of any Western language. Originally the language of the Latin people and the Roman Empire, Latin was perfected in the first century CE. As Roman political organization bound diverse populations together with a common language, Latin became a major civilizing influence. Since Latin was spoken throughout the Western world, it had a genuine claim to cultural universality. Its formative influence on the Western mind can be seen in the fact that it established the norms for speaking and writing for “virtually the entire human race.”⁸⁰ This is, of course, an exaggeration. Modern population research estimates that the Roman Empire in the first century comprised, at most, one-

⁷⁷ Moss 2003: 5 ff.

⁷⁸ Pico della Mirandola 1968: 15-25. For extensive bibliography on Pico’s *Letter to Ermolao Barbaro* and the latter’s response, see Kraye 2008: 13-36. For a translation of Franz Bruchard’s (1534) *Reply to Pico*, see Breen 1968: 15-25. Rummel (1992) proved that this tract, incorrectly ascribed to Melanchthon, was written by Melanchthon’s student Franz Bruchard.

⁷⁹ Eco 1997: 73-74.

⁸⁰ Valla, cited in Nauta 2009: 277.

fourth of humankind.⁸¹ Valla was convinced, however, that Latin expressed the truths on which Western civilization was built and could be restored.

As an empirical discipline that faithfully describes linguistic usage, grammar according to Valla also has a normative role in the reformation of Western culture. This view has led some to compare Valla's concept of Latin grammar to speculative grammar. Speculative grammar was an *a priori* discipline that prescribed correct usage based on a strict correlation between thought, language and reality.⁸² As noted earlier, the speculative grammarians were called "modists" because they taught that thought (*the modus cognoscendi*) corresponds to what is said in language (*modus significandi*) and that that, in turn, corresponds to reality (*modus essendi*). "For the humanist Latin is not [like speculative grammar] an invention of the grammarians, but an historical language, born, developed and diffused through the use of speakers and writers."⁸³ Although Valla rejected speculative grammar because it placed reason above common usage, his own work cites classical Latin passages to establish norms of usage just as speculative grammar sought to do. For that reason Kristian Jensen asserts that "[Valla] saw his own work *De Elegantiis linguae Latinae* as a replacement for speculative grammar."⁸⁴ Although Valla did not intend it as a textbook, his *Elegantiae* greatly influenced the subsequent writing of grammars.

Keith Percival summarizes the importance of Valla's contribution to modern linguistics:

In the areas of individual words and phraseology, the seminal work was Valla's *Elegantiae linguae Latinae*. It is hard for us nowadays to appreciate the revolutionary nature of this work. The most distinctive feature of Valla's method was made possible by the fact that he was so familiar with Latin literature that he was able to cite passages from classical authors whenever he needed an authority to support his prescriptions. This procedure was undoubtedly inspired by the example of Priscian's *Institutio*, but it had never been used before Valla in the Middle Ages or the early Renaissance, and it started a trend of great historical importance. Grammarians had always paid lip service to the notion that grammar should be based on usage (*usus*), but none had hitherto attempted to do what Valla did, namely, to show specifically how to use Latin words correctly by quoting relevant examples from Roman authors. As a glance at any reputable comprehensive Latin grammar current today will show, this procedure is the one still followed by classical scholars writing on the Latin language.⁸⁵

⁸¹ McEvedy 1970: 8.

⁸² See above ns. 6, 29, 32.000.

⁸³ Regoliosi 1993: 95.

⁸⁴ Jensen 1990: 54 ff.

⁸⁵ Percival 2004: III, 75.

Published in 59 editions, Valla's *Elegantiae* was an immensely popular and influential work. It is a great work for several reasons. First, it sought to restore classical Latin to its original status as a language whose lexicon and syntax are rich in both content and precision of expression. Assuming that Latin embodies the virtues of antiquity, authority, reason and usage, it exemplifies linguistic perfection in terms that both Valla and Quintilian affirm. As the native language of the Latin people who were spread throughout the Roman Empire, it could claim a universality of usage greater than that of other known languages. Second, the *Elegantiae* enhanced a growing field of Latin lexicography. As a source book, it influenced the writing of grammars and the teaching of Latin in the sixteenth century, and thus helped establish neo-classical Latin in the schools. Third, insofar as Latin came into use as a "natural" language, its relations to the vernaculars improved and Latin grammars were written in those languages. Fourth, as a model of philological investigation, the *Elegantiae* earned a rightful place in the early history of linguistics. Fifth, its purpose to reform theology was realized when Erasmus made the *Elegantiae* a model for the application of philological principles to textual criticism and scriptural exegesis. Whether one considers its past or present influence, therefore, classical Latin has enjoyed a measure of universality and Valla's claims have, therefore, an initial plausibility.

Valla's account of classical Latin, however, raises an important issue. On the one hand, it is the language of a particular people who lived at a particular historical time and place. It is confined to the mental outlook and cultural practices of one social group. On the other hand, as the language of the arts and sciences it transcends the particular circumstances of time and place that conditioned its use. This tension between the immanence and the transcendence of Latin runs throughout Valla's work. To the extent that it remains unresolved, Valla's claims for the universality of classical Latin are problematic.

Universality and Scholasticism

Scholastics made three attempts to formulate a universal language. The first was speculative grammar that sought to correlate the elements common to thoughts (*modus cognoscendi*), language (*modus significandi*) and things (*modus essendi*). The second was the attempt to construct a universal mental language. Following Aristotle's observation that thoughts and things are the same for all humans, whereas only the languages are different, some late medieval authors sought to determine the contents of mental language. They believed that concepts naturally signified things. Had they succeeded, they would have defined a universal mental language. The third and most successful attempt to articulate a universal language was scholastic term logic.

The theory of consequences was the heart of terminist logic just as the propositional calculus, its modern successor, is the foundation of modern systems of deduction. The logical constants, “... and ...,” “... or ...,” “if ... then ...,” “... if, and only if, ...” that are essential to both were discovered in the forensic discourse of the ancient world. On the basis of his extensive study of ancient dialectic, Aristotle's *Topics* first formulated rules of dialectical debate that eventually became the medieval *consequentiae*.⁸⁶ A century later the Stoics articulated rules for inferential reasoning. Three centuries later Quintilian compiled a collection of forensic arguments for rhetorical instruction. Book II of Valla's *Dialectical Disputations* reprints a selection of Quintilian's examples *verbatim*. Unlike Aristotle, the Stoics and the scholastics, neither Quintilian nor Valla give rules for deciding between valid and invalid arguments. In a long history from Cicero's *Topica*, through Boethius' *De topicis differentiis* to Ockham's *Summa logicae*, logicians transformed Aristotle's topical rules into a system of rules comparable to today's propositional calculus. By way of George Boole's class logic and contributions from mathematics, the logical constants made their way into modern information technology. As the armature of modern computer languages, the same logical constants that were essential to scholastic logic support internet communications today and are basic principles in current accounts of linguistic structure. When we consider their ancient origin as well as their modern influence, the logical constants that were identified and formulated in scholastic logic give the language of that discipline a reasonable claim to universality.

The Perfect Language and Translation

Finally, scholastic logic was open to the emerging vernaculars that were spoken by most university students. Its methods of analysis and criteria of truth were applicable to those languages no less than to university Latin or classical Latin itself. As we will argue in Chapter 6, it served as a “pivot” or “parameter” language that could be used to translate university Latin into the vernaculars. As a translation language, it was indispensable to undergraduate learning. As a language that mediated between languages, it showed that languages were indeed commensurable and translatable into one another. In that respect it attained a high level of perfection.

The idea that human languages are, or can become, incommensurable has a long history. The *confusio linguarum* at Babel was just the occurrence of incommensurability between the languages spoken by the ancient Hebrews.

⁸⁶ On *consequentiae*, see Ashworth 1974: 120 ff.; Buridan tr. King 1985: 177 ff.; Boh 1982.

The early Christians believed that this wound had been treated, if not healed, at Pentecost. Quite apart from Babel and Pentecost, however, the plurality of cultures and the diversity of languages emerging in the early modern world were reason enough to pose the question whether human languages are in fact or in principle incommensurable. Translation (*translatio*) understood as the substitution of one sentence in a source language by another sentence in a target language is familiar to everyone. It is a fact of everyday language usage. That human languages are successfully translated daily is empirical evidence against the thesis of the incommensurability of languages.

Having flirted with that thesis throughout *The Search for the Perfect Language*, Eco affirms that European culture is in need of a common language to mend its linguistic diversity, yet he warns of the limits of such a language.

[The limits] are the same as those of the natural languages on which these languages are modeled: all presuppose a principle of translatability. If a universal common language claims for itself the capacity to re-express a text written in any other language, it necessarily presumes that, despite the individual genius of any single language, and despite the fact that each language constitutes its own rigid and unique way of seeing, organizing and interpreting the world, it is still always possible to translate from one language to another.

However, if this is a prerequisite inherent [in] any universal language, it is at the same time a prerequisite inherent [in] any natural language. It is possible to translate from a natural language into a universal and artificial one for the same reasons that justify and guarantee the translation from a natural language into another.⁸⁷

Despite these declarations, Eco says very little about ordinary translation. Instead he turns to mechanical translation and outlines a modest alternative to the perfect languages that are his main topic.

In many of the most notable projects for mechanical translation, there exists a notion of a parameter language, which does share many of the characteristics of the *a priori* languages. There must, it is argued, exist a *tertium comparationis* which might allow us to shift from an expression in language A to an expression in language B by deciding that both are equivalent to an expression of a meta-language C. If such a *tertium* really existed, it would be a perfect language; if it did not exist, it would remain a mere postulate on which every translation ought to depend.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Eco 1997: 345.

⁸⁸ Eco 1997: 346.

The parameter language would not be a normal language but rather a comparative tool

... which might (if only approximately) be expressed in any language, and which might, furthermore, allow us to compare any two linguistic structures that seemed, in themselves, incommensurable. This instrument or procedure would be able to function in the same way and for the same reason that any natural language is able to translate its own terms into one another by an *interpretative principle*: according to Peirce, any natural language can serve as a metalanguage to itself ...⁸⁹

After all, “the perfect language” may not be a single universal language discovered or invented to replace all human languages. Because human beings grow up in diverse times and remote places, native languages and mother tongues will always be with us. Any discovered or invented “perfect language” would have to include them, and the question whether it included them successfully would have to be decided from the vantage point of a third language. Such a language would have to be a more modest thing altogether: an analytical language or method of analysis that facilitates faithful translation from one language to another. We propose to show in Chapter 6 that scholastic logic in the context of late medieval education was a language of this sort.

⁸⁹ Eco 1997: 349.

Chapter 2

Valla on Thought and Language

[T]he greater part of Latin logic is false; while Valla's logic is true.

Lorenzo Valla, *Apologia*¹

Introduction

Linguistic determinism—the view that language determines thought—has influenced modern literary scholarship. Thus, it is not surprising that the thesis has made its way into Renaissance Studies.² We noted its presence in Umberto Eco's work. In her interesting study of renaissance Latin, Professor Ann Moss adopts a version of linguistic determinism.³ According to Moss, classical Latin

¹ "...denique maximam logicae latinae falsam esse, Veramque esse logicam Laurentianam ..." Laurentii Vallae pro se et contra calumniatores, ad Eugenium, IV, Pontifex Maximus "Apologia," Opera I, 799.

² Nauta (2006: 173-186) explores the relativist implications of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis in the work of Michael Baxandall and Ronald G. Witt.

³ For background on linguistic determinism in the twentieth century, see Introduction, 000 ff. Ann Moss (2003: 9) defends her thesis "that the turn to humanist Latin is of major significance in the intellectual history of the Renaissance." She traces the development of humanist lexicography and composition through the Renaissance in order to show the rise of classical Latin as the norm for humanistic study. By the end of the sixteenth century "[H]umanist Latin use has become the norm, and medieval Latin variously deemed to be deviant, grotesque, quaint, and, finally, incomprehensible" (6). She marshals considerable evidence for her conclusion that scholars from the two traditions cultivated two idioms of Latin representing "two different mind-sets" (115, 188, 231, 256), "two orders of truth-values" (128) and "two Latin speech communities that talked past one another" (90, 179, 274). Illustrating her claims with a study of the religious controversy surrounding St Anne, mother of Mary, she concludes that the two linguistic universes were "incommensurable" (6, "Coda" 273-280). Also, Hanna-Barbara Gerl (1974) and Richard Waswo (1987) have assumed, uncritically in our opinion, a principle of linguistic determinism. Admitting that "The fullest account of this view is presented by Gerl, whose principal thesis my [Waswo's] analysis has sought to confirm," Waswo (1979: 263) states, "What the thing is is what the word means," and that "language does not 'represent' a reality but constitutes one." Waswo (1987: 94) again endorses and elaborates Gerl's thesis. He contrasts "referential semantics" with "relational semantics." The former names a traditional account where the signification of words is referred to objects. The latter designates a "revolutionary" approach

structured and furnished the humanist mind with a conceptual scheme that was *toto caelo* different from that of the scholastic, and their diverse mental outlooks led to an alleged incommensurability of their respective languages. This idea has important implications for humanist–scholastic controversies in the Renaissance. If true, it implies that for humanists the ways of organizing thought and experience are not only conditioned—but determined—by the language that they speak. I do not know whether Professor Moss's assumption of linguistic determinism correctly represents how *all* humanists understood the relationship of language to thought. Mirko Tavoni and Angelo Mazzocco have assembled a considerable amount of evidence to the contrary.⁴ However, Moss's determinist view of language does not represent the views of most scholastics who held firmly to the opposite principle that thought determines language, and that both are subordinate to the objective nature of things. Clearly, differences between these two conceptions of the relations of thought to language call for further investigation.

In this chapter we review Valla's general theory of language in order to discover whether it confirms or disconfirms Professor Moss's thesis. In Chapter 4 we will examine Vives's ideas on the same topic. These studies will provide a basis for comparing the two authors with respect to linguistic determinism. In our opinion, the evidence is fairly strong that the critical methods of both thinkers rest on several assumptions that are problematic. In the seventeenth century these ideas led to intractable problems in the philosophy of language and to a serious impasse between humanism and scholasticism.

to language that was “discovered” by Valla in the fifteenth century and apparently rediscovered by Wittgenstein in the twentieth century. “By apprehending meaning as an activity of language and its users, [‘relational semantics’] [r]eorient[s] our perception of the world and of ourselves, and redefines the aims of that perception—knowledge and truth—not as waiting to be found in a realm beyond or above or beneath language, but as being made by the semantic activity of language” (ibid., 21, emphasis added). Expounding “the sociohistorical linguistic perspective,” Waswo attempts to identify words both with concepts (ibid., 101) and with things (ibid., 108) and ignores the massive implications of these proposals that would relativize meaning to each language, collapse truth into probability and reduce knowledge to opinion. In the same vein, Sarah Stever Gravelle (1982: 286) proposes to prove “Valla's theory of linguistic determination of thought.” In a later study of Valla's contemporaries, Gravelle (1993: 110–129) concludes, “With varying success they sought not only to claim but also to prove that language determines culture and thought.” For a critique of these authors' claims, see Monfasani 1994: 319–322. For Waswo's reply to these criticisms, see Waswo 1993: 101–109. Recently, though distancing himself from Waswo, Professor Lodi Nauta (2009: 269–291) represents Valla's *Dialectical Disputations* as an exercise in “ordinary language” philosophy.

⁴ Tavoni 1984; Mazzocco 1993.

This chapter proceeds in three stages. Part I expounds Valla's critique of scholastic logic and his reductionist program for dialectic in the *Dialectical Disputations*. Part II examines critically several claims that scholars have made about Valla's work. Part III further clarifies the concept of linguistic determinism and considers its relevance to Valla.

I Dialectical Disputations

Lorenzo Valla (1407-1457) led the attack on scholasticism that sought to replace the logic of the universities with a new dialectic purged of metaphysical assumptions and subordinated to rhetoric. Two major works, *Elegantiae linguae latinae* and *Dialectical Disputations*, present his vision of a commanding rhetoric inspired by Quintilian that would lead the way to a new philosophy for the modern world. The *Dialectical Disputations* is a treatise on rhetoric written in a polemical style that was sometimes imitated in the Renaissance.⁵ Continuously revised, its successive titles *Repastinatio Dialectice et Philosophie* (*Refoundation of Dialectic and Philosophy*), *Reconcinnatio totius dialecticae et fundamentorum universalis philosophiae* (*Restoration of All Dialectics and of the Foundations of Universal Philosophy*) and *Retractatio totius dialecticae cum fundamentis universae philosophiae* (*Renewal of All Dialectics and of the Foundations of Universal Philosophy*) reveal Valla's ambition to renovate philosophy by

⁵ Valla ed. Zippel 1982: Vol. 2, 447 ff. Gianni Zippel's critical edition of Valla's text appears in two volumes. Volume 1 contains the third recension, *Retractatio totius dialecticae cum fundamentis Universae Philosophiae*, with variants from the second recension, *Reconcinnatio totius dialecticae et fundamentorum universalis philosophiae*. Volume 2 contains the first recension, *Repastinatio Dialectice et Philosophie*. Although the first recension of the *Dialectical Disputations* was the only one circulated in Valla's lifetime, the second recension was the basis of the *editio princeps* and, therefore, had a wider circulation after Valla's death. Following standard practice, I refer to the work as *Dialectical Disputations* without naming a particular recension. Citations are to Zippel's edition unless otherwise noted. For an excellent review of the edition, see Monfasani 1994: article VI. Brian Copenhaver and Lodi Nauta (Valla 2012) have recently published a revision of Zippel's edition with English translation, notes and introduction. For a review of that work see Perreiah 2013. For general studies, see Camporeale 1972; Seigel 1968; Trinkaus 1968; Vasoli 1968; Mack 1993; Nauta 2009. For a critical study of philosophy and rhetoric in the Renaissance, see Vickers 1988. A note on terminology: although the Latin word "dialectica" is plural, I use the English singular "dialectic" to refer to both Valla's work and the discipline it is about. I use the term "logic" to represent broadly the theory and practice associated with all of the forms of argument; I use "dialectic" to refer more narrowly to the theory and practice of the dialectical forms of argumentation. For a brief history of the terms "logic" and "dialectic," see Ashworth 1974: 22; Michaud-Quentin 1967. For Valla's use of the terms see Valla 2012: Volume 2, 211-217.

subordinating dialectic to the art of rhetoric. Professor Kristeller has stated its threefold purpose:

[V]alla's dialectic is an attempt to reform the logic of Aristotle and of the late scholastics, and the purpose of this reform is to simplify logic as a whole, to reduce it to classical Latin usage, and to link it with, if not reduce it to, the discipline of rhetoric, which constituted the professional core and favorite subject of humanist learning.⁶

While the philological content of the work was expanded, its singular purpose and combative style remained constant. Despite limited circulation in Valla's lifetime and through the end of the fifteenth century, the *Dialectical Disputations* eventually influenced the writing of sixteenth-century manuals of humanist rhetoric.

The *Elegantiae* circulated more widely.⁷ Printed in 59 editions, it became a best-seller in the humanist press. As a major contribution to Latin philology that supplements the *Dialectical Disputations*, it assembles and analyzes words, phrases and exemplary passages from classical Latin sources that Valla believed should inform the new learning. Professor Moss has documented its contribution to a growing tradition of humanist grammar including lexicography and syntax.⁸ The earlier meaning of the word “*elegantiae*” was “delicacies,” “niceties,” “refinements,” “fine points” or “fastidious luxuries.” David Marsh notes that the author of the *Ad Herennium* uses the word to express a semantic quality “which affects the pure and clear expression of every single topic, and comprises Latinity and clarity.”⁹ Marsh continues: “Latinity is defined as the employment of correct forms without incongruous junctures or expressions. Clarity is in turn defined as the property which consists in the use of current vocabulary (sanctioned by daily *consuetudo*) and of proper terms applied in their original, literal sense.”¹⁰ Professor Kristeller states the purpose of the *Elegantiae*: “the work sought to establish the correct usage of the ancient Romans on many points of grammar, phraseology, and style.”¹¹ If these comments clarify Valla's conception of Latinity in the *Elegantiae*, they also represent his standard for linguistic propriety and stylistic perfection in the *Dialectical Disputations*. Both works influenced the views of later humanists about relations between philosophy, dialectic and

⁶ Kristeller 1964: 34. To my knowledge Kristeller did not recognize that Valla did not know the logic of the late scholastics.

⁷ Marsh 1979: 91-117.

⁸ Moss 2003.

⁹ Marsh 1979: 99-100. *Ad Her.*, IV, 12, 17.

¹⁰ Marsh *idem*.

¹¹ Kristeller 1964: 25.

rhetoric as well as the best methods for teaching grammar and rhetoric. The following is not intended as an exhaustive commentary on the *Dialectical Disputations* or the *Elegantiae*. For that one might well consult the work of Salvatore Camporeale, Charles Trinkaus, John Monfasani, David Marsh, Ann Moss, Lodi Nauta and others.

The main thesis of the *Dialectical Disputations* is that dialectic is no longer tenable as an autonomous discipline and should be subordinated to rhetoric. Valla's reform of dialectic is but one arm of his assault on philosophy as a whole which, he says, should be separated from theology and serve the needs of rhetoric. The task is quite complex, for thinkers in the Western tradition entertained several different relationships between philosophy, dialectic and rhetoric. Plato and the neo-Platonists identified dialectic with philosophy and subjected rhetoric to both. Plato's ban on poets in the *Republic* and his strict control of poetry in the *Laws* evinces a life-long suspicion of the publicly spoken word. Aristotle separated dialectic from both philosophy and rhetoric. Because the rhetorician uses the categories, predicables and topics to discover and compose arguments, Aristotle regarded dialectic and rhetoric as mutually complementary disciplines. Following a long tradition Cicero included "discovery" (*inventio*) by means of topical principles among the five parts of rhetoric. To make his case in this contest of faculties, Valla must reject both Platonic and Aristotelian views. With Plato he identifies philosophy with dialectic, but against Plato he subordinates both of these disciplines to rhetoric. Contrary to Aristotle and his medieval followers, Valla denies the autonomy of dialectic and rejects rhetoric's dependency on dialectic. He relegates dialectic to confirmation or refutation in rhetoric. "Dialectic is quite a simple and easy thing to learn, as can be seen by comparison with rhetoric. What else is dialectic than a kind of confirmation and confutation the various sorts of which are part of discovery (*inventio*)?"¹² The ancient and medieval worlds had cultivated philosophy as an autonomous discipline and placed dialectic, grammar and rhetoric at the service of philosophy. In contrast, Valla believed that the modern world needed a philosophy based on rhetoric and governed by the standards of classical Latin grammar.

Valla had earlier resolved to make his case against "the [obscure, squalid and anemic] philosophers" by taking arguments from the philosophers themselves: "Part of the Philosophers' throats we shall cut with their own sword, the other part we shall incite to an internal war and a mutual destruction."¹³ Announcing his deconstructive program, Valla proposes to turn the very words of the philosophers back upon themselves, refuting them out of their own mouths.

¹² Valla ed. Zippel 1982: Vol. 1, 175, Vol. 2, 447. Valla eds. and trs. Copenhaver and Nauta 2012; Vol. 2, 4.

¹³ Valla 1962: 906-907. Valla borrowed the metaphor from Lactantius. See Panizza 1978: 87.

Valla applies his considerable talents in Greek and Latin philology to analyze the basic vocabulary of Western philosophy and to evaluate it according to standards of classical Latin usage. The late Salvatore Camporeale argued persuasively that Valla's revision of logic was a means to his primary scholarly purpose—a reformation of Christian theology.¹⁴ The alleged linguistic errors of Aristotle and Boethius in logic and metaphysics had led medieval theologians astray and theological reform required nothing less than a full-frontal attack on the language of Western philosophy.

Valla's critical program serves at least three purposes.

First, he aims to redefine and re-establish the foundations of dialectic and philosophy. Convinced that scholastic dialectic is a pernicious influence in philosophy and theology, he argues that it needs to be replaced by a new dialectic based on classical Greek and Latin usage. Only by careful reading and faithful imitation of ancient authors will the modern thinker acquire the linguistic resources necessary for intellectual renewal and cultural change.

Second, as a rhetorician inspired by the writings of Quintilian, Valla believes in the power of words to form cognition and shape the mind. Assuming that the language people speak influences how and what they think, a thorough revision of the vocabulary and syntax of everyday speech can bring about profound transformations of thought and behavior.

Third, as a thinker on the vanguard of humanism, Valla recognizes the importance of public education for the formation of young minds. He regards the Latin taught in the schools and universities of the day as a corrupt form of ancient Latin vernacular, a “barbaric” dialect that stands in the way of learning and hinders the cultivation of intelligence and civility. His fellow humanists are dedicated to establishing a new curriculum to replace conventional public instruction in elementary Latin and Greek. They also aim to overturn the scholastic monopoly in university education that propagates the speech and thought that Valla regards as faulty and misleading.

The *Dialectical Disputations* is divided into three books that correspond roughly to four books of Aristotle's *Organon*. Book I criticizes materials in the *Categories*. Book II offers an alternative to *On Interpretation* and includes a long text from Quintilian that covers argumentation as found in the *Topics*. Book III is devoted to criticism of the syllogistic forms of argument expounded in *Prior Analytics*. It is, perhaps, superfluous to add that Valla has no interest in the axiomatic model of science outlined in *Posterior Analytics* and cultivated in a long neo-platonic tradition from Proclus through Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, William Ockham and later scholastics such as Paul of Venice. Valla eschews logical formality in favor of a view of science based on sensory experience and expressed in classical Latin. Lastly, Valla dismisses as “puerile art” the study of

¹⁴ Camporeale 1972: 7 ff.

fallacies such as those in *Sophistici elenchi*. His own approach to solving problems of fallacious reasoning appeals to “the laws and customs of speech, as if to the laws of the land.”¹⁵ As will become clear, Valla’s critical method focuses primarily on the language used to express ideas.

Aristotle’s doctrine of categories and the companion doctrine of the predicables were basic to scholastic philosophy. Many prominent themes of medieval thought—for example, individuality and hierarchy, God and nature, persons and things—were built around the categories of “substance,” “quality” and “relation.” Substance is the primary actuality of each thing that remains throughout change. The nine categories of accident catalogue the various kinds of attributes that substances can be said to have. By their means a speaker may state a range of modifications that substances can undergo. In addition to its uses in philosophy, category theory also serves rhetoric. As part of the art of discovery (*inventio*), it provides a wealth of starting points for the composition of speeches. Predicable theory identifies the basic relationships that predicates have to subjects in standard declarative sentences. A given predicate—for example, “animal”—states the genus of man. The predicate “rational” marks a difference within the genus “man” and states the species under which man falls. The predicate “rational animal” defines the nature of man. “Runs,” “walks” and so on state accidents of an individual. A capacity for laughter (“risibility”), though not a defining characteristic, is a constant property of humans. Aristotle used predicable theory to organize and analyze the massive array of dialectical argumentation that he found in the ancient world. In the *Topics* he applied predicable theory to show that the claims contested in every dialectical exchange center on one or another of the predicable relationships. Here is how the system worked. Against a dialectician who asserts that “x” is the definition of “y,” one may argue that it is only a genus, or a property or an accident. To a dialectician who holds that “z” is the genus of “y,” one may reply that it is a definition, a property or an accident, and so on. This is the way that Quintilian treats the predicables in the *Institutio oratoria*.¹⁶ Predicable relationships, especially the genus–species relation, were also essential to the rules of inference (*consequentiae*) in fifteenth-century logic manuals. I have gone into some applications of these theories in order to show both their theoretical significance and their practical utility in medieval thought. It is clear that the categories and predicables were not confined to the discipline of logic. They had broad application in a variety of disciplines and contexts. Valla is certainly right in his conviction about their importance. We will now consider his objections to them.

¹⁵ Nauta 2009: 261.

¹⁶ Quintilian 1921-96: 5.10.56-58.

In *Dialectical Disputations* I, Valla reviews critically the Aristotelian categories.¹⁷ He considers each category against sensory experience and the acceptable Greek usage that signifies it. He declares Aristotle's system of categories to be extravagant, redundant and in need of radical revision. It is a philosopher's invention that cannot be justified by classical Greek. Valla reduces the traditional ten categories to three: substance (*res*), quality (*qualitas*) and action (*actio*) which supply a store of primitive terms sufficient for the purposes of rhetoric. Mirroring controversy about Aristotle's theory, Valla's views on the categories have been interpreted in several ways: (1) categories are classes of things and their properties existing in the natural world; (2) categories are classes of words or terms used to talk about and refer to things; (3) categories are classes of predicates used to think about and consider the nature of things in pure thought. Scholars have interpreted Valla's texts as variously consistent with all three possibilities. Professor Nauta has been most creative in showing how Valla differs from Ockham by rejecting the second and third interpretations.¹⁸ He argues vigorously for the first reading where Valla's categories would refer directly to things with their qualities and actions in an objective world. While Nauta disagrees with Hanna-Barbara Gerl and Richard Waswo, who claim that Valla identifies words with things, he believes that Valla's views are very close to "ordinary language" philosophy where common speech is supposed to relate immediately to natural things. On such a view, a category theory that was used to explore the natures of things *in abstracto* is all but irrelevant. Professor Nauta asserts that Valla maintained a correspondence relation between language and things that is similar to Aquinas's correspondence theory of truth. This is a curious claim, for the following reason. The speculative grammarians were called "modists" because they held that there is a strict correspondence between the mode of existing of things (*modus essendi*), the mode of signifying of words (*modus significandi*) and the mode of knowing of the mind (*modus intelligendi* or *cognoscendi*). This theory influenced Aquinas's concept of the correspondence (*adequatio*) relation between words and things in the act of knowing. Aquinas even uses modist terminology. But Valla expressly rejects speculative grammar. How, then, could he have agreed with a theory that employs some of its main tenets? Professor Nauta has characterized Valla's critical method as a "grammatical approach" to language.¹⁹ It consists in showing that the terminology used by Aristotle and his medieval followers to name and describe the categories and predicables violates diction and syntax at every turn. According to his method, such errors are sufficient reason to reject the doctrines in question. Valla's

¹⁷ Valla ed. Zippel 1982: Vol. 1, 8-11; Vol. 2, 363-366. Valla eds. and trs. Copenhaver and Nauta 2012: Vol. 1, 12-17. Trinkaus 1968: 75-101, 279-325.

¹⁸ Nauta 2007: 122-125.

¹⁹ Nauta 2009: 198 ff.

reductionist program is designed to simplify logic for the persuasive purposes of rhetoric, but he does not consider whether or how his revisions could support theoretical research or serve the practical needs of logic, philosophy and science.

Scholastic philosophers called certain terms “transcendental” because they signify what pertains to being considered in itself prior to its division into the ten categories. “Hence, not to have any predicate above it except ‘being’ pertains to the very notion of a transcendental.”²⁰ Words such as “being” (*ens*), “unity” (*unum*), “truth” (*veritas*), “something” (*aliquid*) and “thing” (*res*) were considered transcendental in this sense.²¹ Valla claims that in common usage the word “thing” (*res*) captures the meanings of all other words, and for that reason he adopts it as the only transcendental word.²² Because everything including even a word is a thing, thing is the primary subject of predication. Valla’s interpretation of “thing” (*res*) contrasts markedly with the scholastic concept of “being” (*ens*) current in his day. The *Logica Parva* calls “being” (*ens*) a “transcending term” (*terminus transcendentis*).²³ Such a term has nothing to do with meaning but rather everything to do with referring: occurring formally as the subject of a sentence, a transcendental term refers potentially to all of its possible instantiations. Understood in this way the scholastic “being” anticipates the concept of an individual variable [“x”] in modern formal logic. For example, Bertrand Russell writes, “I take the notion of the *variable* as fundamental; I use ‘C (x)’ [for example ‘x is a cat’] to mean a proposition[al function] in which *x* is a constituent, where *x*, the variable, is essentially and wholly undetermined.”²⁴ The major difference between Valla’s notion of “thing” (*res*) and Paul of Venice’s conception of “being” (*ens*) is this: Valla believes that “thing” (*res*) contains the meanings of all other words, whereas for Paul of Venice “being” (*ens*) is devoid of meaning and performs a purely referential function. Nonetheless, Valla’s discussion of “thing” has posed a challenge to scholars who have attempted to unravel his difficult text.²⁵ Professor Nauta resorts to the scholastic theory of supposition and its distinction between formal and material supposition to

²⁰ John Duns Scotus 1962.

²¹ For comparison with a contemporary renaissance Aristotelian’s treatment of the transcendental, see Matsen 1974.

²² Valla ed. Zippel 1982: Vol. 1, 124.16. Valla eds. and trs. Copenhaver and Nauta 2012: Vol. 1, 220.

²³ Paul of Venice 1984: 27.

²⁴ Russell 1956: 42.

²⁵ John Monfasani (1989: 318) establishes precisely Valla’s definition of “res” as “an utterance [vox] signifying the meaning and sense of all other utterances.” *Dialectical Disputations*, 124, 14-16: “est vox significans omnium aliarum vocum intellectum sive sensum.” And *Dialectical Disputations* 123, 25: “res est vox sive vocabulum omnium vocabulorum significations sua complectens.”

elucidate it.²⁶ This expedient is, of course, reasonable since the much-maligned theory of material supposition provided scholastic logicians with an essential tool of linguistic analysis: that is, a method of quotation, or name-to-name reference, within a system of deduction. Valla's preferred Latin syntax lacks the semantical resources sufficient to describe what he needs to say. We will discuss this topic more fully in Chapter 6.

Valla's rejection of "truth" as a transcendental implies that "... is true" can be only a restricted predicate, namely, one that signifies a quality in a mind or in some object. Valla later allows "true" as a *modus* of sentences.²⁷ He speaks of "false wine," "false bread" and "false prophets" with the sense that these are not "genuine" or "authentic." Their opposites are simply wine, bread and prophets. Similarly, terms important for medieval metaphysics, such as "to be" (*esse*), "essence" (*essentia*), "act" (*actus*) and "potency" (*potentia*) are reducible to "thing" (*res*).²⁸ Abstract terms ending in "-itas" that are not derivable from adjectival roots and represent no singular thing are to be struck from the language.²⁹ Here, as in his later criticism of the method of definition by *genus* and *differentia*, Valla is wary of philosophical speculation that departs from classical Greek or Latin usage and proceeds on a conceptual plane without reference to concrete experience.³⁰

Beyond logical topics, in *Dialectical Disputations* I Valla takes up several words used in traditional metaphysics. He examines the terms "matter" (*materia*), "spirit" (*spiritus*), "angel" (*angelus*), "god" (*deus*), "soul" (*anima*) and "body" (*corpus*) in both Greek (Aristotelian) and Roman authors and endorses the usage of the latter as exemplary.³¹ Tapping the vocabulary of moral philosophy, he scrutinizes terms that express properties of soul such as knowledge (*scientia*) and virtue (*virtus*). In all of these cases the Roman grammarian is concerned to show how scholastic Latin is confused or misleading and that classical Latin should be taken as normative. There would be no point to serious criticism of the basic terms of a discipline unless those terms were essential to what can be thought or spoken of in that discipline. Valla clearly assumes that the vocabulary

²⁶ Nauta 2009: 58 ff.

²⁷ See below, p. 000.

²⁸ Valla ed. Zippel 1982: Vol. 1, 21 ff.; Vol. 2, 370 ff. Valla eds. and trs. Copenhaver and Nauta 2012: Vol. 1, 37 ff.

²⁹ Valla ed. Zippel 1982: Vol. 1, 30 ff.; Vol. 2, 370 ff. Valla eds. and trs. Copenhaver and Nauta 2012: Vol. 1, 55 ff

³⁰ Valla ed. Zippel 1982: Vol. 1, 163 ff.; Vol. 2, 391 ff. Valla eds. and trs. Copenhaver and Nauta 2012: Vol. 1, 293 ff.

³¹ Valla ed. Zippel 1982: Vol. 1, 50 ff.; Vol. 2, 402 ff. Valla eds. and trs. Copenhaver and Nauta 2012: Vol. 1, 88 ff.

of a theory determines not only what can be conceived in it but what can be deduced from its basic concepts.

Valla brings together the various strands of his account in a conception of definition that includes four successive questions: *An est?* (Does something exist?), *Quid est?* (What is it?), *Quod est?* (What kind of thing is it?), *Quale est?* (How is it?).³² An affirmative answer to the first will pick out a thing (*res*). The second is answered by means of the categories of quality or action and will establish the genus of the thing. The third tells how the thing differs from others of its kind and thus determines its species. The fourth elaborates a description of perceptible features of the individual. All are essential to the definition of a thing. No act of mind comes closer to grasping the nature of something than that in which the mind conceives of that thing's definition. Here Valla combines his four basic questions with his views about categories and predicables to show how the mind can know a particular thing. When we recognize that the words expressing each node of a definition must conform to standards of classical Latin usage, it is clear that no thought is legitimate unless it is expressed in that language.

Book II examines standard inferential relationships between propositions such as contrariety, subcontrariety, contradiction, sub-implication and super-implication. Valla considers how certain signs in a sentence affect the meaning of the whole.³³ He analyzes connectives and modifiers—for example, “is,” “not,” “all,” “some,” “any”—and considers ways that sentences can be altered—for example, by negation and conversion. Valla expounds on a variety of ways to express negation in Latin, and that is, of course, the proper work of the grammarian. Scholastic logicians focused on the logical consequences of negation, however expressed in a particular language. Valla's analysis of negation simply confuses issues of grammatical syntax with those of logical syntax. Although he recognizes a few relationships between sentences that are consistent with rules of formal logic, he identifies many transformations already sanctioned by classical Latin usage. Thus, he concludes, their validity need not be founded on Aristotelian or scholastic rules.

Dialectical Disputations II concludes with a long tract on rhetorical proof from the fifth book of Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*.³⁴ This selection includes discussion of the *loci* from topical theory. Scholars have pointed out how the later humanists came to emphasize discovery (*inventio*) over judgment (*judicium*) (the validation of arguments). They have stressed the role of commonplaces in the generation of narrative discourse. Valla remains oblivious to the fact that the

³² The questions were set in Quintilian's *Institutio*. Trinkaus 1999: 91.

³³ Valla ed. Zippel 1982: Vol. 1, 183 ff.; Vol. 2, 449 ff. Valla eds. and trs. Copenhaver and Nauta 2012: Vol. 2, 19 ff.

³⁴ Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*: 5.10.1-5.10.123.

inference rules (*consequentiae*) of late scholasticism were in fact reformulations of topical rules that Aristotle and Boethius had discovered in ancient forensic practice. Thinkers developed and refined those rules through the later Middle Ages.³⁵ In Chapter 3 we will show how medieval inference rules apply to the specimen arguments in Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* V.

Valla's revision of the modes of sentences continues his reductionist program.³⁶ Aristotle and the scholastics classified declarative sentences into six kinds. They may be possible or impossible, necessary or contingent, true or false. For example, "Seven plus three equals ten" is possible, necessary and true. "God is a donkey" is impossible. "Your face is red" is contingent. "Seven plus three is eleven" is false. Valla cites examples from Latin usage to show that the word "necessary" (*necessarium*) is replaceable by a modification of the word "possible" ("necessary" = "not possible not"), and thus the former is redundant. Similarly, "contingent" (*contingens*) is replaceable by a variation on "possible" ("contingent" = "not impossible"). "False" is eliminable as a primitive term because a false statement does not describe what is. In this way Valla reduces the basic modalities of declarative sentences from six to three: "possible," "impossible," "true." To these he adds a fourth category of sentences that abound in rhetoric, namely, verisimilar sentences that approximate truth or give the appearance of truth. Marking off degrees of verisimilitude among sentences, Valla distinguishes between the semi-true or what is true for the most part (*semiverum*) and the credible or merely plausible (*credibile*).

Valla's rejection of "false" as a *modus* of sentences is troubling, and it illustrates his disregard for the logical requirements of a theoretical discipline. This can be seen from a standard method of proof used in mathematics and science. *Reductio ad absurdum* proof begins with an assumption that a given proposition is false. It then proceeds to generate a contradiction. This conclusion warrants an assertion of the truth of the original proposition. (For example, to prove that $7 + 3 = 10$, assume that the equation is false. But from $7 + 3 \neq 10$ it follows that $1 \neq 1$. Because this conclusion is false, we are warranted in asserting the truth of the original equation.) This form of proof rests on an assumption that the starting proposition is false. In other words, common scientific usage sanctions predication of "false" of sentences. In the *Topics*, Aristotle recommends *reductio ad absurdum* proof in demonstrations, but he warns against using it in dialectic.³⁷ Valla takes a big step beyond Aristotle. By eliminating "false" as a modality of sentences, Valla not only violates common usage; he brushes aside

³⁵ Green-Pedersen 1984; Stump 1982 and 1989.

³⁶ Valla ed. Zippel 1982: Vol. 1, 237 ff.; Vol. 2, 491 ff. Valla eds. and trs. Copenhaver and Nauta 2012: Vol. 2, 126 ff.

³⁷ Aristotle 1997: 157b ff.

the possibility of *reductio ad absurdum* proof—one of the most powerful tools of scientific discovery.

Dialectical Disputations III is devoted to criticism of the traditional syllogism. Aristotle and the medievals had described the syllogism as an oration (*oratio*) of three propositions (*propositiones*)—a major premise (*maior*), a minor premise (*minor*) and a conclusion (*conclusio*). Valla rejects this description in favor of Quintilian's that calls syllogism an elocution (*elocutio*) of statements (*enunciationes*) in three parts: a proposition (*propositio* or *praepositio*), an assumption (*assumptio*) and a conclusion (*conclusio*). He examines 19 moods of the three figures of the syllogism.³⁸ In the first figure he accepts the first four moods but rejects the last five because the sentences that they yield do not accord with classical Latin usage. In the second figure he admits the standard four moods. But he disallows all five moods of the third figure because the language employed in their proof violates classical usage. Valla reduces the number of acceptable syllogistic forms from 19 to 8. He deems these sufficient for the purposes of oratory. Valla's extensive treatment of the syllogism is noteworthy for it displays his apparent ignorance of the scholastic logic of his own time. Valla is oblivious to the fact that scholastic logicians had absorbed the principles of syllogistic reasoning into the rules of *consequentiae*. Concluding chapters of Book III are devoted to a criticism of Boethius's doctrine of hypothetical syllogisms and to discussion of derivative syllogistic forms such as sorites (*coacervatione*) and dilemmas (*dilemmata*) as well as the rhetorical forms of induction, example and enthymeme. The entire chapter on examples is copied *verbatim* from Quintilian's *Institutio*.³⁹

II Critical Assumptions

The casual reader of the *Dialectical Disputations* might well assume that Valla's criticisms are aimed at the scholastic dialectic of his own time and not that of a bygone era. Modern commentators have encouraged the belief that Valla knew fifteenth-century scholastic logic. These scholars seem to have assumed that if Valla can mount what appears to be a scathing critique of scholastic dialectic he must know what he is talking about. But that inference is a *non sequitur*. To lend credence to their belief they cite Valla's letter of 1440 to Bernardo Serra where Valla lists the names of several dialecticians including Albert of Saxony, Albert the Great, Ralph Strode, William of Ockham and Paul of Venice.⁴⁰ But this is

³⁸ Valla ed. Zippel 1982: Vol. 1, 286 ff.; Vol. 2, 534 ff. Valla eds. and trs. Copenhaver and Nauta 2012: Vol. 2, 231 ff.

³⁹ Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*: 5.11; Valla ed. Zippel 1982: 334:28-345:3.

⁴⁰ Nauta 2009: 262.

merely a register of philosophers' names with no textual citations or specific works. In his *Encomium of St Thomas Aquinas* he gives another tally of "new theologians." Professor Nauta notes, "This list too does not necessarily imply that Valla was well acquainted with their works."⁴¹ Again, "Valla's lists of the names of several philosophers is no proof that he read or understood their works."⁴² Despite this lack of evidence, Valla's editors, Gianni Zippel, Brian Copenhaver and Lodi Nauta, like most commentators, routinely cite Peter of Spain's *Tractatus* or *Summulae logicales* or Paul of Venice's *Logica Parva* as references for Valla's allusions to scholasticism. Professor Nauta states candidly: "Much of the terminology and many of the distinctions of even an introductory chapter such as Paul of Venice's 'De summulis' of his *Logica Parva* does not recur in the *Repastinatio*." After some examples, he adds: "the same is true, as we have noted, for the more technical material on supposition, consequences, obligations, and *insolubilia*..."⁴³ Since the *Logica Parva* is available on my computer, I have searched dozens of phrases and examples from Valla's *Dialectical Disputations* and have found no matches. If others have performed similar searches of the *Summulae logicales*, their results have not been published. The question of Valla's antagonists has another curious twist. In the *Elegantiae*, Valla calls the enemies of pure Latinity "Goths and Gauls."⁴⁴ Professor Moss identifies the former as the legal glossators from Bologna and the latter as the philosophers and logicians from Paris.⁴⁵ Peter of Spain's work was of Iberian origin; Paul of Venice's logical writings were imported from Oxford, England.⁴⁶ While Petrarch and later thinkers such as Thomas More allude to them, they appear to have little, if any, connection with Valla's program. There is simply no textual evidence—external or internal—that Lorenzo Valla read or understood the dialectical textbooks that his own *Dialectical Disputations* purports to refute. The suggestion that Valla knew these works is a misleading scholarly fiction. It is all the more disturbing when modern writers on renaissance humanism repeat it without question.

Valla's commentators have stressed his devotion to "context" as the sure way to decide the issues that his investigations raise. Read in a modern setting, this claim suggests that Valla is open to consideration of *any context whatsoever* that is relevant to his criticisms. A close reading of his text shows, however, that Valla's idea of "context" is severely limited. In fact he privileges only one context for adjudicating lexical, syntactical or stylistic issues: namely, the linguistic usage of mostly first-century classical authors. Needless to say, he steadfastly avoids the

⁴¹ Nauta 2009: 366, n. 72.

⁴² Idem.

⁴³ Nauta 2009: 368, n. 1.

⁴⁴ Valla, *Elegantiae*, preface in E. Garin (ed.) 1952: 600, cited in Moss 2003: 36.

⁴⁵ Idem.

⁴⁶ Courtenay 1982: 13 ff.

relevant contexts of logic, natural philosophy or morals that would have made sense of the expressions that he questions.

Contextualism is key principle of modern interpretation theory, and anyone who values its importance would want to see it applied, especially in difficult cases. Yet when the subject is scholastic logic, Valla has little regard for context. Whether the topic is “categories,” “predicables,” “transcendentals,” “modalities” or “argumentation,” he extracts a fragment of scholastic language out of context, measures it against his privileged standard of grammatical correctness (*grammaticice*), and discards it out of hand. In sum, Valla’s treatment of scholastic dialectic is an exercise in discussion out of context. Professor Nauta is at pains to excuse Valla’s evident aloofness from the details of scholastic theory:

That Valla was not interested in the ins and outs of the scholastics’ arguments, let alone in meeting them on their own ground and using their technical metalanguage, was of course a deliberate tactic. For in order to criticize an entire paradigm (or rather what is identified as its main essentials), one must take the position of outsider. It is to Valla’s credit that he was quite conscious about this.⁴⁷

A dispassionate mind is, of course, a basic requirement of sound criticism. In Valla’s fulminations against scholasticism, however, we find not studied detachment but intentional ignoration. We have entered a strange world where deliberate ignorance of a subject is a qualification for speaking the truth about it. Valla’s flagrant disregard for any context beyond classical letters blinds him to the evidence that would be relevant to any serious consideration of his claims.

Commentators have stressed Valla’s dedication to common and customary usage (*consuetudo* or *usus loquendi*) as the primary standard for linguistic analysis. Some have suggested that this aspect of his method qualifies Valla to be considered an “ordinary language philosopher.” The idea is questionable for several reasons that need not detain us here.⁴⁸ The phrase “common and customary usage” (*consuetudo* or *usus loquendi*) when uttered at a particular

⁴⁷ Nauta 2009: 270.

⁴⁸ Ryle (1953: 31-35) reminds us more than once that his study of ordinary language is not philological. This can be seen in his distinction between “usage” and “use.” The former studies what particular words mean or have meant. Usage is set by custom and practice and is the proper object of philology or linguistics. “Use” pertains to how words are employed in actual situations of speech. “Descriptions of usages presuppose descriptions of uses, i.e. ways or techniques of doing the thing, the more or less widely prevailing practice of doing which constitutes the usage.” Ryle is not interested in appeals to “what people say”—which he says is philosophically pointless. “What is wanted is, perhaps, the extraction of the logical rules implicitly governing a concept, i.e. a way of operating with an expression...” Notably, Ryle did not share Valla’s preoccupation with linguistic style and his prejudice against formal logic. See also Ryle 1966: Ch. VIII.

time and place normally implies that the usage referred to is proximate to the existential conditions of the utterance. “Clarity” that is part of the definition of “*elegantia*” is in turn defined as “the property which consists in the use of *current vocabulary* (sanctioned by daily *consuetudo*) and of proper terms applied in their original, literal sense.”⁴⁹ Faithful to this definition, Valla restricts “customary usage” to the Latin written by Roman *litterati* in the first century CE. Valla’s concept of usage centers on words and phrases; but not on sentences. Nor was he interested in an underlying rational basis for usage. Keith Percival notes that “[Valla] was not a grammatical theorist at all, but contented himself with the task of establishing classical standards of usage. In other words, Valla’s espousal of usage was not motivated by any deeper philosophical considerations.”⁵⁰ His occasional application of the expression “*consuetudo*” to vernacular languages of his time does not mean that he takes their *consuetudo* as his norm of analysis. In the thirteenth century the term “*lingua Latina*” was synonymous with “*grammatica*,” “*lingua litteralis*” or “*litteratura*.” These words identified Latin as a secondary language in relation to the primary language—that is, the *vulgare* or vernacular.⁵¹ As Dante noted, Latin had to be learned through the study of grammar, whereas Italian was not governed by grammatical rules and was learned naturally. Dante thought that grammar was the discipline that ensured Latin’s stability and continuity.⁵² I cannot find a single instance where Valla resolves a serious linguistic problem in favor of vernacular usage.

The relation between classical Latin and the vernacular was much discussed in the fifteenth century. Mirko Tavoni and Angelo Mazzocco have analyzed the prolonged debates about the status of the vernacular languages vis-à-vis humanism.⁵³ Valla recognizes with respect to ancient Rome a difference between the speech of the learned (*litteratus sermo*) and that of the common person (*vulgaris sermo*). He traces the Roman vernacular (*vulgare*) of his day to the ancient Latin of the learned. Medieval Latin descends from the ancient Latin of the unlearned. He disparages the vernaculars as forms of ancient Latin that were corrupted by the barbarians. Silvia Rizzo sums up Valla’s attitude toward vernacular languages: “Valla is not even touched by a doubt that vernacular languages can ever arise to the role had by the Latin language ... The dismissal of the linguistic reality of the *vulgare* in the thought of Valla is, as was observed, total.”⁵⁴ It is ironic that Valla’s preference for classical Latin over the vernacular

⁴⁹ Marsh 1979: 91, emphasis added.

⁵⁰ Percival 2004: III, 76.

⁵¹ Rizzo 2002: 91

⁵² Rizzo 2002: 95.

⁵³ Tavoni 1984; Mazzocco 1993: 69 ff.

⁵⁴ Rizzo 2002: 98-99, my translation. See also Tavoni 1984: Ch. 5, 117-169; 1986: 199-216.

of his own day is at odds with Quintilian's observation: "For it would be almost laughable to prefer the language of the past to that of the present day, and what is ancient speech but ancient usage of speaking?"⁵⁵

Given that human language is established by convention (*ad placitum*) and developed by custom, the notion that one should respect the common and customary ways that people use language seems unassailable.⁵⁶ Valla states clearly: "Languages are like systems of customs and laws: each language is different in nature, and each is considered by its users as pure and sacrosanct (*intermerata et sancta*)."⁵⁷ Valla makes an exception, however, in the case of scholastic Latin which he regards as neither "pure" nor "sacrosanct." Medieval Latin was used from the ninth century onwards. It was the language of Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*. By the fifteenth century it had been the language of the university and the professions for more than 200 years. As a language currently spoken, it would seem to have a greater claim to "common" or "customary" usage than first-century Latin. Later, Pico della Mirandola made a similar argument:

It may happen that a society of men agree on a word's meaning; if so, for each thing that word is among them the right one to use for the meaning agreed on. That being the case, what will prohibit those philosophers you call barbarians from agreeing together on a common norm of speaking? And let it enjoy with them the same respect as does the Roman among you. There is no sense in saying that the one standard is wrong and yours is right, if this business of name-making is altogether arbitrary.⁵⁸

At best, Valla's concept of "customary usage" is narrowly selective. At worst, it flatly contradicts his own avowed standard.

The title of Professor Nauta's book on Valla's *Dialectical Disputations* is *In Defense of Common Sense*. That Valla's dialectical program manifests common sense in contrast with the views of the scholastics is the major theme of the book. Just what counts as "common sense" is, of course, highly debatable and relative to cultural assumptions and practices. To take four wives may be common sense in Riyadh; in Salt Lake City it is polygamy and contrary to common sense. Valla defines "common sense" as language usage that conforms to standards of classical Latin. The view that words should always be used in "in their original, literal sense," as stated above in the definition of "clarity," can hardly be considered

⁵⁵ Quintilian 1.6.43.

⁵⁶ For a useful comparison of the natural vs. the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign in the Renaissance, see Demonet 1992, 87-129.

⁵⁷ Valla ed. Zippel 219, 17-21, quoted in Nauta 2009: 222. Valla eds. and trs. Copenhaver and Nauta 2012: Vol. 2, 88-90.

⁵⁸ Pico della Mirandola, Letter to Ermolao Barbaro (1485) tr. Breen 1952: 400.

an adequate standard for “common sense.” It denies what linguistic research in fact shows, namely, that human languages change through time.⁵⁹ Moreover, the requirement that words retain their original meaning entails that language has no place for new words and neologisms. An abhorrence of neologism is symptomatic of linguistic determinism. Many of Valla’s objections to scholastic language rest on the fact that it is “invented” and thus neither “natural” nor canonical. But there is a deeper philosophical issue here. The grammarian’s task is to faithfully describe language usage, which may, or may not, embody “common sense.” The philosopher’s task is different from that of the grammarian. It is not merely to record how people use language, but rather to explain it.

III Linguistic Determinism

The inconsistencies that we have cited in Valla’s critique of scholastic dialectic, though serious, are relatively minor in comparison with a much deeper problem in his critical method. Modern conceptual semanticists view the meanings of words and sentences as units in an abstract language of thought.⁶⁰ Linguistic determinism identifies the language we speak *with* the language of thought. Few would disagree that language influences thought; however, linguistic determinism claims that language structures the mind and furnishes it with content that defines a person’s view of the world. Since languages differ from culture to culture there will be on this theory different world views. Thus linguistic determinism implies linguistic relativism. Valla assumes both when he argues that differences in vocabulary between Latin and Greek explain differences in thought.⁶¹ But Valla’s linguistic relativism need not detain us here. In what follows we will argue that no matter what convictions Valla may have had about the relation of language to thought in general, when criticizing scholasticism he maintains a strong version of linguistic determinism.

It is easy to see how Valla could have come to adopt linguistic determinism. Several reasons make it appear to be the “common sense” view of language. First, all learning is conditioned by language usage. Through reading and conversation, language is indispensable to the maintenance of our mental life. Our mental development follows a pattern that closely corresponds to our progress in speaking a language. These common conditions of life make linguistic determinism seem plausible. Second, it is normal in everyday life to explain the elusive (thought) by means of the obvious (language) rather than the other way around. This pattern of explanation confirms the idea that language determines

⁵⁹ McWhorter 2001.

⁶⁰ Pinker 1994: 44 ff.; 2007: 125 ff.

⁶¹ Gravelle 1982: 269-289; 1989: 335.

thought. Third, a person's vocabulary defines the limits of the kind of thinking that s/he can perform; so, again, language appears to determine thought. Fourth, we are familiar with the power of language to frame events so that people will view them in a particular way apart from their merely factual circumstances, and this seems to be a case where language controls thought. Fifth, the art of rhetoric exhibits the persuasive power of language. Eloquent speech instructs, moves and pleases people by evoking thoughts in their minds. Thus the rhetorical model of human communication gives credence to the view that language causes thought.⁶² Sixth, the grammatical structures of a language profoundly affect how its speakers reason, even when they are not actively engaged in speaking and listening. Seventh, the words and sentences a person expresses constitute that person's thoughts. Therefore, people cannot conceive of something that their language cannot name or describe. Paraphrasing Wittgenstein's remark "Of that whereof we cannot speak clearly we must remain silent," of that whereof we cannot speak, we cannot think.⁶³ These are some of the reasons that may have led thinkers to adopt linguistic determinism.

Arguments against linguistic determinism are legion.⁶⁴ Here are a few that are relevant to Valla's critique.

1. Linguistic determinism unnecessarily limits thought to what can be expressed in language. But people can think of many things before they put them into speech or writing. Our capacity for thought far outstrips our command of language.
2. Linguistic determinism cannot account for how people learn language. Language learning involves the interpretation of sounds or letters which would be impossible if thoughts are determined by language.
3. Ambiguity of words or phrases and amphiboly of sentences are common in everyday language usage. These difficulties are normally solved by analyzing the various meanings of the words or sentences in question. If language determines thought, either equivocation would be impossible or there would be no means to establish unambiguous meaning.

⁶² Since rhetoric may influence how a listener or reader sees the world and how they may act, it can effect changes in the world. In that special sense rhetoric may be said to be "constitutive." Moreover, rhetoric may include performative utterances, such as "I declare you husband and wife," that create new social entities. Such sentences do not describe the world and are, therefore, neither true nor false. They are "successful" or "unsuccessful" in accomplishing their intended purpose. But these kinds of linguistic act are the exception rather than the rule for ordinary language. In claiming that words are "constitutive of things," Professor Waswo would reduce all utterances to the equivalent of performatives. On performatives, see Austin 1965: 5.

⁶³ Wittgenstein tr. Pears and McGuinness 1961: 150.

⁶⁴ Pinker 1994: 44-73; 2007: 148-50.

4. Co-reference is a common part of ordinary language usage. For example, we may refer to the same object by three different linguistic expressions. If language determines thought, those expressions must refer to three separate things. Only thought, working independently of language, could tell that they refer to the same thing.
5. That language does not determine thought can be seen in the distinction between deduction and inference. Deductions can be fully expressed in the medium of language; inferences cannot. Your accountant or calculating machine can do your deductions for you. They cannot perform your inferences for you.

These are just a few of the reasons for recognizing primacy of thought over language and rejecting linguistic determinism.

Valla's critique of scholastic dialectic presupposes a strong version of linguistic determinism. Speculative grammar maintained a strict asymmetry between thought and language: thought (*modus cognoscendi*) causes the signification of words (*modus significandi*). Valla expressly rejects this causal relationship between thought and language. Moreover, we have seen how Valla applies standards of classical grammar to both the diction and compositional structure of the theories that he examines. In the case of the traditional categories and predicables, he finds fault with both their vocabulary and syntax. His reduction of the ten categories to three presupposes that removing the names of the remaining seven categories will eliminate them as primitive terms referring to natural objects. To delete the name is to cancel the concept as well as its reference. This reduction would not be possible unless, as Valla appears to believe, language were a necessary and sufficient condition for thought. Again, regarding transcendental terms, Valla reduces a large number of expressions to the simple word "thing" (*res*). In one fell swoop one word replaces many and, inexplicably, captures all of the meanings of the other words. This reduction would not be possible without the assumption that language causes thought. Similarly, Valla's rejection of abstract terms because they are ill-formed is an instance of his belief that when a word is expunged from a language what it signified no longer exists. This is, of course, a *non sequitur*. As we have noted concerning "definition," Valla eschews philosophical speculation on a conceptual plane without the approved Latin expression of concrete experience. For Valla classical Latin is indispensable for competent thought. His revision of the terminology of traditional metaphysics exemplifies his critical method based on grammar. Reformation of the lexicon of metaphysics will bring about needed changes in metaphysical thought. Valla's criticisms in the first book of the *Dialectical Disputations* rest on the supposition that the words and grammar of a language *constitute* the concepts that they express. Apart from that assumption, Valla's rejection of scholastic ideas because their expression violates classical usage would be without point. Valla assumes

that a fault in the linguistic expression of an idea is a sufficient reason for denying it. He takes for granted that the thoughts behind the expressions that he criticizes have no bearing on his claims. That scholastics would have rejected this assumption does not, of course, disprove it. Valla's criticisms are defective because they follow from linguistic determinism, a mistaken view of language.

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Chapter 3

Valla on Truth

[T]here is no investigation of the true before a controversy over the matter arises. Therefore truth is knowledge of a disputed subject-matter, and falsity lack of knowledge concerning the same; that is a species of prudence or imprudence, or of wisdom or folly.

Lorenzo Valla, *Dialectical Disputations*¹

Introduction

Theories of thought and language lead inevitably to the central topic of truth, for apart from the pursuit and discovery of truth, all thought and language would be without point. Not surprisingly, Lorenzo Valla's statements about truth have led to considerable controversy and no small measure of confusion. In this chapter I will attempt to sort them out. Several authors have found in his work traces of illumination theory. Others have detected subjectivism, relativism and academic scepticism. Still others have represented Valla as an "ordinary language" philosopher who eschewed formalism in favor of finding truth in the "ordinary" language of classical Latin texts. Given the diversity of Valla's comments on truth, some have questioned whether he has a defined "theory" of truth. These interpretations capture the diversity of Valla's views; however, they are clearly not compatible with one another.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, we review recent interpretations of Valla's notion of truth. Second, we assemble a selection of Valla's statements about truth. Third, we examine the long quotation from Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* that concludes Book II of the *Dialectical Disputations*. This text which Valla copies *verbatim* deals with logical inference in the context of forensic argumentation. Because inference preserves truth (or falsity) in a reasoning process, it is an essential component of any theory of truth, and Valla's endorsement of the passage adds an important dimension to his own view of truth. In particular we will illustrate how the arguments in the passage are

¹ "Nec ante veri inquisitio quam rei controversia nascitur. Itaque 'veritas' est notitia rei controversie, falsitas vero eiusdem inscitia, que est species prudentie aut imprudentie seu sapientie aut insipientie." Valla ed. Zippel 1982: 378. Notably, this passage does not occur in the *Retractatio totius dialectice*, the third and last version of the work.

related to the scholastic rules of *consequentiae*, the prevailing theory of inference in the Renaissance. The passage from Quintilian also establishes the evidentiary nature of Valla's ideas about truth. The mere affirmation or denial of a statement does not confirm its truth or falsity. Evidence that is independent of a speaker or writer is the sole maker of the truth or falsity of a statement. A conclusion brings together the various strands of Valla's complex notion of truth.

I Interpretations of Valla on Truth

Charles Trinkaus wrote that "for Lorenzo Valla truth was only definable subjectively."² Valla says in his *Repastinatio*: "The true or the truth is a quality present in the sense of the mind and in speech, as in 'Does he truly feel that?' 'Does he speak truly?'"³ Because truth is related not only to thought and feeling but to speech as well, Trinkaus argues that for Valla truth has ethical implications. It underlies our capacity for erroneous moral judgment no less than for deceptive or mendacious speech. Thus, Trinkaus correlates truth and falsehood with virtue and vice and links both to the nature of the soul as an image of the Holy Trinity.⁴ He also emphasizes the centrality of light and illumination, particularly with respect to the knowledge that guides moral action: "From adhering to right and doing what right orders, this quality [justice] is named. That quality [right] emanates from truth, this [justice] from will."⁵ Despite its implications for moral action, in the end Valla ties truth to cognitive states: "For to know, or be wise, or understand, is nothing except to believe and feel about things just as they are constituted (*credere ac sentire de rebus ita ut sese habent*), and this is called truth."⁶ This passage makes clear Valla's reduction of knowledge, wisdom and understanding to belief and feeling and their relationship to the way that things are in themselves. Just how that relation is to be defined is not clear. The human knower, however, constitutes one side of the relation, and the predicate "true" applies primarily to the knower's beliefs and feelings. For that reason Professor Trinkaus has argued that Valla's conception of truth is primarily

² Trinkaus 1983: 441.

³ Valla *Dialectical Disputations*, cited in Trinkaus 1983: 441. See Valla ed. Zippel 1982: Vol. 2, 377 ff.

⁴ Although moral philosophy is of major interest to humanists, and Christian theology is vital for Valla, both fall beyond the scope of this study. These topics are usefully explored in the writings of Trinkaus 1968; Camporeale 1972; Monfasani 1994, 2004.

⁵ Valla *Dialectical Disputations*, cited in Trinkaus 1983: 443.

⁶ Valla *Dialectical Disputations*, cited in Trinkaus 1983: 443-444.

subjective.⁷ Peter Mack claims on the contrary that Valla held a non-relativized (and presumably a non-subjectivist) notion of truth in which “true” is a property of sentences that represent reality.⁸

Lisa Jardine has pursued a contrary thesis, namely, that Valla revived academic scepticism.⁹ Valla’s polemical writings, his challenges to almost all of traditional philosophy save Epicurus and his radical revisionism are *prima facie* evidence for this claim. Although Valla repudiated Aristotelian and scholastic approaches to truth, he alluded to truth or the true on many occasions and apparently believed that most, if not all, of what he said was true. Thus, the claim that Valla was, or considered himself to be, a sceptic is, to say the least, doubtful.

Several commentators have associated Valla’s work with so-called “ordinary language” philosophy. Salvatore Camporeale first showed the importance of customary language usage (*consuetudo*) in Valla’s critique of scholasticism, and he later assimilated Valla’s work to ordinary language philosophy.¹⁰ The idea that Valla was an ancestor to the later Wittgenstein has been advanced more vigorously by Hanna-Barbara Gerl and Richard Waswo. They claim that the meaning and the truth of language is constituted by its occasions of use.¹¹ Distancing his own views from Gerl and Waswo, and citing Gilbert Ryle and John Austin as representatives of ordinary language philosophy, Professor Nauta argues that Valla was an “ordinary language” philosopher. As such, “it would be far from Valla’s mind to develop a philosophical theory of truth.”¹² What “true”

⁷ In an earlier examination of Valla’s views on science, Charles Trinkaus denied altogether the objectivity of human knowledge. In 1976 he wrote: “Valla’s nominalism was both literal and radical. Knowledge was conceived as arising out of the collective subjectivity of human discourse. Truth and knowledge are, then, what an individual thinks they are, or what a segment of humanity agrees that they are. Since this can be known only through language and debate, oral and written (or, as in the case of animals, gestural), truth can best be discovered by linguistic and literary analysis, history, and criticism. Truth, in other words, is not that which is but what is named or called, what speech about it signifies. It is meaning” (1983:151).

⁸ Mack 1993: 52 ff. This work contains a useful summary of Agricola’s influence on Vives: 314-319.

⁹ Jardine 1977: 143-164; 1983: 253-286. Monfasani (1994: 192-200) was the first to demonstrate the inconsistencies in Professor Jardine’s thesis that Valla (and Agricola) were academic sceptics.

¹⁰ Camporeale 1972, 1986: 217-239.

¹¹ Gerl 1974; Waswo 1979. Monfasani (1989) mounts a thorough critique of the Gerl-Waswo interpretation of Valla. For Waswo’s reply, see Waswo 1993: 101-109. Agreeing substantially with Monfasani’s criticisms, we question Valla’s alleged knowledge of scholastic logic and identify the problematic assumption of linguistic determinism in the work of Gerl, Waswo and Gravelle.

¹² Nauta 2009: 69.

and its cognates mean is to be found in the customary language of everyday speech. This suggestion seems plausible until we recognize that for Valla the expressions “ordinary language” or “customary usage” apply not to the everyday speech of common people but to the literary discourse of “the best” Latin authors. “Ordinary language” and “customary usage” do not mean the daily talk of ancient or modern Romans. Nor do they include the vernaculars of Valla’s own day.¹³ It requires a far stretch of the imagination to consider a language once written by an elite—privileged and long deceased—to be “ordinary”.

Apparently seeing no inconsistency with these claims, Nauta assimilates Valla’s view of truth to that of Thomas Aquinas. This comparison is questionable for several reasons. Aquinas’s clearest statement about truth is in his *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* where he defines truth in three ways.¹⁴ In the primary sense, truth is identical with being and is identical with the mind of God that orders all of being and keeps it in existence. Since Valla is, at best, ambivalent about whether God is truth or is the source of truth, his notion does not square with Aquinas’s primary definition of truth.¹⁵ Moreover, the expressions “truth” and “being” are convertible transcendental terms that lie at the base of Aquinas’s view; yet Valla denies that these are transcendental terms.¹⁶ Second, Aquinas says that truth is in the intellect composing and dividing. That is: truth is a property of an affirmative or negative judgment that “adequates” to the way something is. This thesis means that truth is a property of judgment, but Valla associates truth primarily with feelings, sensations and beliefs. Third, truth is a quality of sentences that manifest the effects of truth. It is a property of sentences derivable logically from true premises. This conception of truth rests on standard rules of deduction and inference including Aristotelian syllogistic and inferential relationships defined in the *Topica* and *On Interpretation*. As we will show in the next section, Valla denies many of those principles or restates them in ways that make them unrecognizable and logically useless. Beyond these theoretical difficulties, Aquinas’s theory is expressed in a Latin idiom that Valla criticizes relentlessly. For all of these reasons Valla’s idea of truth would appear to have little, if any, connection with Aquinas’s. What, then, is Valla’s theory of truth?

¹³ On Valla’s attitudes toward these various species of language, see Tavoni 1984: 117-169.

¹⁴ Thomas Aquinas tr. McKeon 1930 [1958]: 165-166; Thomas Aquinas 1952-1954.

¹⁵ Nauta 2009: 68.

¹⁶ See Chapter 2, n. 36, p. 52.

II Valla on Truth

We noted above that Valla denied the traditional view that “truth” is a transcendental term convertible with “being.”¹⁷ Since the abstract expression “truth” has no meaning apart from actual uses of the adjective “true” or the adverb “truly,” Valla concludes that “truth,” “true” and “truly” amount to the same thing. In his study of the modes of propositions—true/false, possible/impossible, contingent/necessary—as we saw in Chapter 2, he eliminates “false,” “impossible” and “contingent” for several reasons. He asserts that “false” does not contribute to proof.¹⁸ This assertion is notable in light of what Valla’s modern translators write about his method: “To expose flaws in the scholastic picture of nature, Valla often makes a standard scholastic move, arguing by *reductio ad absurdum*.¹⁹ This kind of proof assumes the falsity of a proposition in order to prove its truth. Apparently, Valla employs a form of proof that his own account of falsity cannot explain. There is considerable evidence from the history of Western science that also confutes Valla’s claim. Although Aristotle counseled against using *reductio ad absurdum* proof in oratory, he employed it in science and recognized its importance in dialectic. Zeno of Elea, the founder of dialectic, famously deployed it against Parmenides’s Megarian critics. Euclid used it in geometry, and medieval neo-Platonists knew its utility in theological reasoning as well. Moreover, all of logic rests on the principle that every declarative sentence is either true or false; and from a logical point of view, a false sentence is just as valuable as a true one: for every false sentence implies a true sentence, namely, its negation. Without “false” as the complement of “true” it would be impossible to have even a minimal system for interpreting the truth-values of sentences. Valla observes that “[f]alse bread, false wine, and false prophet are [b]y no means bread, wine or prophet.”²⁰ In another passage he says that “true sleep” is simply sleep and not the feigning of it, yet he uses common expressions like “the truth of the thing,” “the truth of the matter” (*rei veritas*), “true speech” and “to speak truly.” “On the True Good” (*De vero bono*) is the title of one of his treatises. Valla’s famous proof that the *Donation of Constantine* was a forgery—that is, a false document—presupposes a standard of truth. In all of these cases, “true” simply means the genuine thing and not some imitation or dissimulation. When the word “true” and its cognates are applied to persons or things, qualities or actions, they add no new intelligibility to the objects in

¹⁷ Valla ed. Zippel 1982: Vol. 2, 378. Valla eds. and trs. Copenhaver and Nauta 2012: Vol. 1, 19 ff.

¹⁸ See Chapter 2, n. 36, p. 52.

¹⁹ Valla eds. and trs. Copenhaver and Nauta 2012, Volume 1, xx.

²⁰ Valla ed. Zippel 1982: Vol. 1, 19.17-20.10. Valla eds. and trs. Copenhaver and Nauta 2012: Vol. 1, 32-37.

question. Like “being” or “one,” these words are not real or determining (first order) predicates of things. Since “true” in these usages is simply redundant to the occurrence of nouns or verbs in ordinary speech, it is eliminable.

In other contexts Valla writes about truth as the property of a mental act, and in these cases “true” or “truly” is not redundant and signifies something about the act. Some authors have claimed that Valla espouses a version of illuminationism. Several passages support that view. He calls truth “the light of the mind extending itself to the senses.”²¹ As Plato, Augustine and most Augustinians claimed, this is an interior light, not one that plays upon exterior things.

Yet as the sun shows and exhibits the colors of bodies to the eyes, so too God shows and exhibits the qualities of things to the mind. Plato presented this theory somewhat differently [*nonnihil diverse*] in the *Republic*, when he said that truth is like the sun, knowledge and cognition like authentic vision (*sincerum aspectum*).²²

God is the source of truth in our minds: “Certainly when we affirm that something is true or false, this refers to the mind of the speaker, so that truth and falsity are in us.”²³ Valla says *both* that God is the source (*fons*) of truth *and* that “God properly is truth just as the sun is light, which is what Plato also held.”²⁴ Valla misrepresents Plato here. For Plato, “God” is not the source of truth but rather “the Good” which is a source only insofar as it provides a medium wherein forms are made intelligible to a mind. In this way Plato not only explains how knowledge is possible but also defines its proper object, namely the forms. Valla’s aversion to abstract forms and formalism generally would have prevented him from adopting a theory like Plato’s. Moreover, Valla’s fondness for sense and sensibilia is close to Epicureanism and contradicts Plato’s scepticism about the material world. Thus, it is not clear how Valla would define the object(s) of knowledge. Nor is he clear about how sensible objects that are changeable would relate to true sentences that are—insofar as they are true—unchangeable. Aside from these difficulties, the passages cited above support the idea that Valla conceives of truth primarily as the expression of an affective or a cognitive act. Truth resides in the mental act of

²¹ Valla ed. Zippel 1982: Vol. 1, 19:17-19; Nauta 2009: 68. Valla eds. and trs. Copenhaver and Nauta 2012: Vol. 1, 32-33.

²² Valla ed. Zippel 1982: Vol. 1, 19:25, referring to *Republic* 6.19, 508C–509B; Nauta 2009: 68. Valla eds. and trs. Copenhaver and Nauta 2012, Vol. 1, 33.

²³ Valla ed. Zippel 1982: Vol. 1, 19:26-20:1. Valla eds. and trs. Copenhaver and Nauta 2012: Vol. 1, 32-33.

²⁴ Valla ed. Zippel 1982: Vol. 1, 20:8-10. Valla eds. and trs. Copenhaver and Nauta 2012: Vol. 1, 34-35. In a perceptive analysis of this passage, Monfasani (2004: 5-6) raises the question “whether the divine light [which is God himself] provides the true concept of things, i.e. reflections of the ideas in the mind of God, or whether it simply enables true judgments in us.”

judging something to be or not to be, or to be in some way or other. In modern terms, Valla has an epistemological conception of truth.

Valla also applies the predicates “true” and “false” to spoken and written expressions of mental acts of knowledge or belief as well as to feelings. Since Valla thinks of eloquence as essential to the expression of truth, it is important to keep in mind that language that does not measure up to the grammatical and rhetorical standards of classical Latin is *prima facie* erroneous. “[W]e may say truth is both the knowledge of the mind concerning some matter and the signification of a speech derived from the knowledge of the mind.”²⁵ Valla’s comment on this idea stresses the role of feelings in the expression of truth. A verbal expression is false when someone whose mind is not in error “speaks differently from what he thinks” or whose mind is in error “misleads himself.”²⁶

For [“*speech*”] is taken in two ways: one, whether anyone speaks truly when he speaks thus as he *feels*; the other, whether he speaks forth what he *feels* or something different through simulation or dissimulation. Therefore, there may be a double falsehood in the statement, the one out of ignorance, the other out of malice; the first of imprudence, the other of injustice because in actions, as will appear in the sequel.²⁷

Valla’s attention to the element of feeling in relation to speech is important, as can be seen in the case of lying; there is a notable difference between lying to someone else and lying to oneself. A liar deceives another by speaking in a normal way while believing the opposite of what he says with an intention to deceive. No one, however, can lie to himself in this way, for a person cannot believe the opposite of what he says to himself with the intention of deceiving himself. He cannot because intention entails acceptance of the belief and not its opposite. Thus, “lying to oneself” must be defined differently from “lying to someone else.” A person lies to himself by saying what conflicts with his own feelings.

That Valla conceived of truth (and falsity) primarily in epistemic terms is brought out in the passage cited at the beginning of this chapter that stresses the importance of adversarial argumentation for the discovery of truth.²⁸ In several contexts Valla employs the word “true” to define the goal of argumentation. If the rhetorician does not seek truth (that is the goal of the philosopher), he must defend it; and all argumentation aims at establishing truth. In the *Dialogue on*

²⁵ Valla, cited in Trinkaus 1983: 213.

²⁶ Valla ed. Zippel 1982: Vol. 1 11-14. Valla eds. and trs. Copenhaver and Nauta 2012: Vol. 1, 34-35.

²⁷ Valla, cited in Trinkaus 1983: 213, italics added.

²⁸ Valla, cited in Trinkaus 1983: 213.

Free Will, Valla exclaims, “As if I fought for the sake of victory rather than truth!”²⁹ Truth arises in human understanding as a by-product of adversarial argument. In the process of arguing *pro et contra*, the dialectical question is seen first from one perspective and then from the opposite perspective. From each point of view the disputants (or anyone following the argument) are able to see the truth-conditions of the statements that express and support the opposing sides of the argument. Recognition of those truth-conditions enables the disputants or their auditors to gain indispensable knowledge of the subject-matter being debated, and that understanding is essential to deciding which side is true. In the process of arguing on both sides of a question the conditions that would make each side true are brought to the fore, and in this way the person following the arguments is able to form an understanding of them. Only after such a consideration is s/he able to weigh one against the other and to judge freely about which side is true. A person who would adopt an idea without going through this dialectical process would arrive at an opinion only by default: that is, hearing arguments in its support, but ignoring arguments against it. Few commentators have attended to this idea, but Valla’s appreciation of the utility of adversarial argumentation in the pursuit of truth may well be one of his most useful contributions to truth-theory. Unfortunately, Valla’s insight into the virtues of dialectic, was omitted in later versions of the *Dialectical Disputations*.

III Valla/Quintilian on Inference

Dialectical Disputations Book II ends with a long passage on argument from Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria*.³⁰ Commentators have paid scant attention to this text. That is unfortunate, for it offers a new dimension to Valla’s approach to truth. Quintilian’s text presents methods of proof that may be used in courts of law or other forensic contexts. Proof is needed where some matter is in doubt, and the purpose of proof is to move an auditor—that is, a judge or a jury—from doubt to certainty.³¹ Because Valla conflates truth with certainty, how certainty can be established is relevant to his conception of truth. Quintilian lists three

²⁹ Valla 1948: 166.

³⁰ Valla ed. Zippel 1982: Vol. 1, 244-275. Valla eds. and trs. Copenhaver and Nauta 2012: Vol. 2, 142-207. Quintilian 1921-1996: 5.10. References to this work will list book, chapter and section(s) where appropriate.

³¹ Scholars frequently use the terms “truth” and “certainty” interchangeably. We use the words “truth,” “true,” “truly” to represent that property of a sentence that is satisfied by its appropriate truth-conditions. “Certainty” represents a mental state, namely, the degree of conviction that a thinker has about the truth or falsity of a sentence. Again, scholars often contrast a search for “absolute truth” in logic or theology with some weaker undefined notion of “truth” in dialectic or rhetoric. As above, we use the words, “truth,” “true,” “truly”

ways to bring about certainty. So-called “artificial argument”—that is, argument practiced as an art—falls between two other topics that are also used to plead cases, namely, “indications” which are factual materials related to a case (physical evidence, documents and so on) and “paradigms” that are examples used in rhetorical induction to support a claim. “Argument” is a reasoning process in which reasons or causes are advanced to justify or support a conclusion. Given that the aim of proof is to lead the mind from doubt to certainty and that certainty is based on what is true, every proof presupposes something true that cannot itself be proven: “[T]here must needs be something in every case which requires no proof. Otherwise there will be nothing by which we can prove anything; there must be something which either is, or is believed to be, true, by means of which doubtful things may be rendered credible” (5.10.11). Assuming that the credible and the certain amount to the same thing, Quintilian reviews the various sources of certainty in human affairs. First, we are certain of those things perceived by the senses, what we see, hear or touch. Second, we are certain of things about which there is general agreement, such as (a modern example) “We can escape neither death nor taxes.” Third, we are certain about what has been established by law or passed into current usage or custom (again, a modern example): “Slavery is morally wrong.” Quintilian notes that such verities may not prevail throughout the world, but they may be established in the place where a case is being pleaded. Fourth, we are certain about things that have already been proved, are agreed to by the disputants or are not contested by an adversary. Finally, the person who would excel at argument “must know the nature and meaning of everything and their usual effects” (5.10.12-15). Based on these sources of certainty, Quintilian recognizes three degrees of credibility: (1) what usually happens, for example that children are loved by parents, (2) what is highly probable, for example that a healthy person will live until tomorrow and (3) what is assumed and has nothing against it, for example that a theft within a household was done by one of the residents (5.10.11; 5.10.16-19).

Given the breadth of knowledge and experience needed by the expert at argumentation, it is clear that he should know something about the nature of correct or sound argument.

Quintilian had already laid down what he called “the basic forms of proof” (5.8):

- a. Because one thing is, another thing is not. For example, if it is day, it is not night.
- b. Because one thing is, another thing is. For example: If the sun shines, it is day.

to represent that property of a sentence that is satisfied by its appropriate truth-conditions in any context. The best study of Valla’s logic and philosophy of language is Mack 1993: 22-116.

- c. Because one thing is not, another thing is. For example: If it is not night, it is day.

And:

- d. Because one thing is not, another thing is not. For example: If he is not a rational being, he is not a human.³²

It is noteworthy that the first three fall under one rule of *consequentiæ* in the *Logica Parva*. Because they vary directly in relation to one another, “day” and “night” are correlative terms. Inferences between sentences that contain them are governed by the rule: “From one of two correlatives to the other there is a good inference”³³ (LP 5.4). The example in (d) “If he is not a rational being, he is not human” is a simple transposition of the definition of a human: “If he is human, he is a rational being.” Alternatively, the inference is confirmed by the rule of *modus tollens*: “In a good inference, if the consequent is false the antecedent is false” (LP 2.1).

I have cited the *consequentiæ* rules that justify inferences which Quintilian considers “basic”: those rules simply state the patterns of valid inference. It should not be surprising that *consequentiæ* rules apply to Quintilian’s examples, for those rules were first formulated to articulate the structure of forensic argument.³⁴ Given the fact that topical rules were formulated originally and

³² Valla ed. Zippel 1982: Vol. 1, 246. Valla eds. and trs. Copenhaver and Nauta 2012: Vol. 2, 146-149.

³³ Paul of Venice 1984, 2002. The *Logica Parva* divides consequentiæ rules into seven groups. References to the rules will list group and rule—for example, (LP 1.3). See Appendix.

³⁴ A brief background on the origin of consequentiæ rules may explain their use in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Aristotle’s *Topics* is the first systematic statement of the rules presupposed in argumentation that takes place beyond the boundaries of science. As stated in its epilogue, the *Topics* presented for the first time the rules governing dialectical argumentation in the ancient world. Where rhetoric and the other arts developed through a long succession of thinkers, “Of the present inquiry [that is, *Topics* and *Sophistical Refutations*], on the other hand, it was not the case that part of the work had been thoroughly done before, while part had not. Nothing existed at all” (*Sophistical Refutations* 183b 36). Beginning with an undifferentiated mass of arguments collected from the rhetorical and dialectical practices of the past, Aristotle organized the material and discerned the patterns within it—for example, that all dialectical exchanges turn on the predictable relationships between alternative claims. (A proponent who claims to have found a definition of X is challenged by an opponent who argues that he has found only a genus, a property or an accident of X. A proponent who claims to have found a property of X is challenged by an opponent who argues that he has found only an accident of X, etc.) Aristotle asks his readers to acknowledge that he identified the structures of dialectical argumentation and defined its procedures. Aristotle’s topical rules were modified by Cicero, Themistius, Boethius and others. Abelard again revised them in the twelfth century. Most importantly for present

revised continuously in relation to ordinary usage in argumentation, it is remarkable that Valla, like most fifteenth-century humanists, ignores them. Valla's *Dialectical Disputations* criticize scholasticism for its complexity, yet Quintilian's text presents the student with an enormous body of proofs duly classified but with little instruction about their common patterns or standards of validity. In what follows I show how the many varieties of argument in Quintilian's text may be brought under very few simple rules of *consequentiae*.

With respect to any argument it is important to distinguish between the necessity of the inferential process and the necessity (or contingency) of the subject-matter as expressed in the premises and conclusion. A simple rule says that the modality (necessity or contingency) of the conclusion cannot exceed that expressed in the premises. In science a reasoning process may yield with logical necessity a conclusion that is itself necessary. In court proceedings, as in everyday deliberations, because of the contingent nature of the premises a reasoning process may yield with logical necessity a conclusion that is itself only contingent. In the former case we have a *demonstration*, in the latter a *proof* or an argument that is "probable" (5.10.3 ff.). Quintilian's introductory remarks obscure these distinctions between "necessity" and "contingency." He treats enthymemes, epicheiremes and apodeictic arguments as amounting to the same thing (5.10.1–9). Aristotle had kept these diverse forms of argument separate. Of the four kinds of argument that he distinguishes in the *Topics* the *philosopheme* is a scientific demonstration that is "apodeictic" in the strongest sense. The *epicheireme* is a dialectical argument about subject-matter that falls outside of a science. The *aporeme* is a double *epicheireme* that argues to both of two mutually contradictory conclusions, and the *sophisma* is an argument that appears to be sound but is not.³⁵ It should be clear that the degree of "apodeicticity" diminishes as one descends from the *philosopheme* to the *sophisma*. So when Quintilian describes reasoning as "apodeictic" he has in mind the reasoning process itself rather than the quality or strength of the conclusion. The *enthymema* has been variously analyzed throughout the history of Western logic. Aristotle understood it as an argument from signs.

Quintilian recognizes the importance of the categories and predicables as valuable resources for the orator who uses them as "place" systems to discover the starting points of argument. All of the Aristotelian categories as well as several other categories useful to the orator are here in full array. In Book I of the *Dialectical Disputations*, Valla had reduced the ten categories of Aristotle to three. The passage from Quintilian that ends Book II contradicts Valla's criticisms

purposes, they were recast by Peter of Spain, William Ockham and Paul of Venice in the fourteenth century. The net result of these developments was the re-formulation of topical rules as rules of inference, the *consequentiae*.

³⁵ Aristotle 1997: 162a, 15–20.

of, and reductionist program for, the categories. Arguments revolve around either things or persons (5.10.23 ff.). With respect to persons (*rational substances*) we should take note of their birth, nationality, country, gender, age, education or training, bodily constitution, fortune, condition, natural disposition, occupation, personal ambition, past life, previous utterances, passions, relations to others, and proper names that may have special significance. With regard to things (*substances*) we should pay attention to “all of the accidents.” We should study especially the *actions* of persons as well as *why, when, where* and *how* or *by what means* an action was performed. We should study a person’s *passions* as well as the causes and motives a person might have had in acting. We should consider the *place* where an action occurred and the *position* of the agent. We should consider the *quality* of the action as well as the *time* when it occurred. We should compare it with actions previous to, concurrent with or subsequent to the one in question. I have gone into Quintilian’s survey of the “places” of argument to illustrate the broad range of categories that he recommends to orators as starting points of arguments. Quintilian’s method clearly goes beyond the sparse three categories of thing, action and quality recommended by Valla. Quintilian prescribes a program for the training of orators, and Valla clearly commends it to his readers. Why, then, does Valla’s reductionist program depart so patently from Quintilian’s?

Next, Quintilian shows how the *predicables* can serve the orator. *Predicables* specify the kinds of relationships that predicates have to their subjects. Aristotle taught that there were four: *genus*, *definition*, *property* and *accident*. He regarded “difference,” which is needed to divide *genus* into *species*, as a generic term. Porphyry expanded the list to five: *genus*, *species*, *difference*, *property* and *accident*, and passed it down to the Middle Ages. Quintilian lists five *predicables*: *genus*, *species*, *difference*, *property* and *accident*. He illustrates the use of *genus* and *species* to establish a *definition*: for example, “Rhetoric is the science of speaking well” (5.10.54 ff.). He offers another example of definition that is descriptive: it simply lists salient properties of rhetoric. Quintilian relates *property* and *difference* to this kind of definition: “[*P*roperties serve to establish definitions, *differences* to overthrow them” (5.10.58). One must be sure to include all of the relevant properties in a descriptive definition. A descriptive definition may be impaired by omission of even one property, and a relevant difference that is omitted may be cited by an opponent to overthrow a descriptive definition. Quintilian also employs the *predicables* in the process of “division.” In the context of these discussions he offers some important instructions about the use of the *predicables* to support inferential relationships. For example, he says (a) “[*g*enus] is of little use when we desire to prove a *species*, but of great value for its elimination.” Again, he states (b) “*Species* will give us clear proof of *genus*, but is of little service in its elimination” (5.10.56–57). Peter of Spain’s *Summulae Logicales* formulates as rules the logical principles that Quintilian follows here:

(a) “Whatever is removed from the genus is also removed from the species.” And “Removing the genus also removes the species.” (b) Whatever is predicated of the species is also predicated of the genus.” And “Of whatever the species is predicated the genus is also predicated.”³⁶ In all of these matters it is important to recall that Valla, in Books I and II of the *Dialectical Disputations*, proposed ideas about the predicables that differ markedly from Quintilian’s. Valla rejected definition by genus and species and favored descriptive definition.

As Plato had shown, the predicables are essential to the important process of division (*diaerisis*) where a *genus* is properly divided into its *species* by means of the principle of *difference*. Quintilian notes that this predicate “is valuable both for proof and refutation” (5.10.65). Examples:

“To be a citizen, a man must either have been born one or be made one.”

Quintilian takes this to be a definition of citizenship:

“A person is a citizen just in case he is either born one or is naturalized.” To prove this argument one has “to prove only one thing.” This would be by *modus ponens*:

“If a person was born [a citizen], then he is a citizen. But this person was born a citizen; therefore, he is a citizen.”

Or, again, by *modus ponens*:

“If a person was naturalized, then he is a citizen. But this person was naturalized; therefore, he is a citizen.”

For disproof, Quintilian says that each and every condition must be proven false; this would apply to the following conditional statement:

“If a person is a citizen, then he is either born [a citizen] or naturalized.”

The refutation:

“This person was not born [a citizen] and this person was not naturalized.” Therefore, by *modus tollens*:

“This person is not a citizen.”

³⁶ Bird 1962: 313 ff.

These examples show that Quintilian's specimen arguments are more complex than he lets on; nonetheless, they are provable by ordinary forms of argument. When his initial proposition is taken as a definition it is either provable or disprovable by two rules of *consequentiae*: *modus ponens* and *modus tollens*.

Next, Quintilian gives examples of several arguments that prove a case by way of two contrary propositions. He states a general rule: “[T]wo contrary propositions may be advanced, either of which, if established, would suffice to prove the case.” This principle is on a par with “[W]e may give our opponent the choice between two alternatives of which one must necessarily be true, and as a result, whichever he chooses, he will damage his case.” Here is an example:

“The man who can bear pain will lie if tortured, and the man who cannot bear pain will also lie.” (5.10.70)

The opponent has the option to assert that his client can or cannot endure pain; in either case, if the client is tortured, he will lie. The structure of the argument is:

“If someone either can or cannot endure pain, then if he is tortured, he will lie.”

The consequent, “If he is tortured, he will lie,” follows by *modus ponens* from the assertion of either disjunct of the antecedent. Since the two are mutually contradictory, their disjunction is self-evidently true or true in virtue of form.

Quintilian next illustrates a style of argument that builds on the temporal order of a sequence of events. Whatever is taken as a starting point, the argument gains its force by adding the intermediate and final stages, and “the conclusion is inferred from the beginnings.”

“[T]he man that began the quarrel should be regarded as guilty of the bloodshed with which it ended.” (5.10.72)

The pattern of this argument is:

“If a man starts a quarrel, and the quarrel leads to bloodshed, then the man is guilty for the bloodshed.”

This inference is licensed under the rule: “If an inference is good what follows from the consequent follows from the antecedent” (LP 1.5).

The next group of arguments is drawn from propositions that are either similar or dissimilar (5.10.73 ff.). Several *consequentiae* rules apply to propositions of this group where “similar” and “dissimilar” are understood to mean propositions

that are “similar or dissimilar in truth or falsity.” Here are some examples of the two types:

- (a) “**If self-control is a virtue, abstinence is also a virtue.**”
- (b) “**If a guardian should be faithful to his trust, so should an agent.**”

Each of these inferences presupposes a missing premise.

- (a') “[**Abstinence is a species of self-control.**] **Self-control is a virtue.**
Therefore, abstinence is a virtue.”
- (b') “[**An agent is a species of guardian.**] **A guardian should be faithful to his trust.** **Therefore, an agent should be faithful to his trust.**”

These inferences are sanctioned by the rule “From a higher-level term [that is, the genera ‘self-control’/‘guardian’] to a lower-level term [that is, the species ‘abstinence’/‘agent’] with a due mean [major premise: ‘Abstinence is a species of self-control’/‘An agent is a species of guardian’] is a good inference” (LP 2.5).

Propositions may be dissimilar in several ways (5.10.73–81).

Subcontraries are dissimilar:

“It does not follow that if joy is a good thing, pleasure is a good thing.”

This inference also presupposes a missing premise:

“[**Pleasure is not joy.**] **Joy is a good thing.** Therefore, pleasure is not a good thing.”

Contraries are dissimilar:

“If luxury is an evil, frugality is a good.”

This inference follows by *modus ponens*:

“If luxury is an evil, frugality is a good. [**Luxury is an evil.**] Therefore, frugality is a good.”

This inference follows by application of *modus ponens*: “If an inference is good and the antecedent is true, the consequent is true.”

Contradictries are also “dissimilar”:

“If someone is wise, he is not foolish.”

Since contradictories are correlative terms this inference would follow by the rule: “From one of two correlatives to the other is a good inference” (LP 5.4).

The inferences in this group of similars and dissimilars may be necessary or probable:

“If justice is a good, we must judge rightly.”

Again:

“If breaking faith is an evil, we must not deceive.”

Quintilian observes that these arguments may also be reversed. For example, one could argue:

“Since we must judge rightly, justice is a good.”

And:

“Since we must not deceive, we must not break faith.”

Quintilian regards all of these arguments as having “logical force.”

The *Logica Parva* treats arguments from similars and dissimilars in the special context of the *obligatio*, a regimen for arguing in exercises or examinations.³⁷ The *obligatio* format regulated an exchange between an opponent and a respondent. Once a starting sentence is posed by an opponent and accepted by a respondent, the latter agreed to reply to a sequence of propositions proffered to him by the opponent within the time span set for the exchange. The goal of the opponent was to trip up the respondent; that of the respondent was to avoid admitting or conceding or denying any proposition that contradicted an original proposition that he had agreed to be tested on. A special type of *obligatio* began with a stipulation that two propositions would be “similar” or “dissimilar” in truth or in falsity. Then the rules of obligation would apply under this condition. The rules are straightforward. Similar propositions are interchangeable with their similars, and dissimilar propositions are interchangeable with their dissimilars. As usual in an *obligatio*, both call for the respondent to reply to propositions proffered to him in a way that avoids contradiction with anything that he has previously admitted, conceded or denied. The rules of obligations are an extension of the *consequentiae* rules cited earlier into the context of formal disputation. It is noteworthy that Quintilian also calls such arguments “consequents or *akolouthia*.” Quintilian is quick to distinguish these arguments from a sequence

³⁷ Paul of Venice 1984: 83-98.

of propositions that merely track events in a temporal order. For these he reserves the term “*insequent*.” Evidently, he wants his orators to avoid committing the fallacy of arguing *Post hoc, ergo propter hoc*.

Quintilian goes on to call a large group of arguments “*consequentialiae*.” He defines consequential arguments as “[T]hose derived from facts which lend each other mutual support and are by some regarded as forming a separate kind of argument, [i.e.] from things mutually related ...” (5.10.78). Here are two examples of “mutually consequential” arguments:

“What is honorable to learn is honorable to teach.”

He places this argument in the same class:

“Since decay is a property of all created things, whoever says the world is created implies that the world is decaying.”

Quintilian says that the conclusions of these arguments are reversible. Hence, these sentences would follow:

“What is honorable to teach is honorable to learn.”

And:

“Since decay is a property of all created things, whoever says the world is decaying implies that the world was created.”

These inferences would fall under a common rule of consequences: “In a valid inference whatever is consistent with the antecedent is consistent with the consequent” (LP 1.6).

Quintilian continues with a discussion of arguments in which the inference is based on a causal connection between antecedent and consequent (5.10.81–95):

“If a body is illuminated, then it casts a shadow.”

And later:

“If wisdom makes a person good, a good person must be wise.”

The relation between the subjects referred to in the antecedents and the subjects referred to in the consequents is causal: the illumination of the body *causes* the shadow to be cast, and wisdom is *the cause* of goodness. These are necessary

relations. These inferences fall under the rule: “If an inference is good, and the antecedent is necessary, the consequent is necessary” (LP 1.3).

Other inferences are contingent:

“If one has traveled, he will be dusty.”

And:

“If a person exercises, his body will be robust.”

Clearly, some travels do not raise dust and some dusty folks have not traveled. Some people with robust bodies do not exercise. Hence, the relation of cause and effect here is contingent. Nonetheless, both of these inferences fall under the rule: “If an inference is valid, and the antecedent is possible, the consequent is possible” (LP 1.4).

Quintilian dutifully follows Cicero in listing arguments from conjugates such as:

“Those who perform a just act, act justly.”

He does so somewhat grudgingly because he regards this not as an argument but a statement of fact.

Another kind of argument much more important for oratory is that from apposites or comparatives (5.10.86 ff.).

From the lesser:

“If a man will commit sacrilege, he will commit theft.”

From the greater:

“He who lies easily and openly, will commit perjury.”

Quintilian says that in all of these kinds of argument “we” follow the syllogistic methods. In Book III (6.15, 43 and 88) syllogistic is defined as an argument expressed in syllogistic form with (1) the major premise stating the law relevant to the case, (2) the minor premise giving the facts of the case and (3) the conclusion. In the fourteenth century, following a long transformation of Aristotle’s topical rules, the rules of syllogism were reformulated as rules of inference (*consequentiae*).³⁸ When that important development is taken into account, most of the arguments canvassed by Quintilian would fall under the

³⁸ See above n. 36, p. 75.

consequentiae rules that govern sentences with quantified terms (that is, universal, particular) and sentences with higher- and lower-order terms—for example, terms signifying a genus or a species. As we have seen, many of the inferences that Quintilian cites would fall under a general rule: “If an inference is good, and something is consistent with an antecedent, the same is consistent with the consequent” (LP 1.6).

Quintilian next adds some arguments that depend on a definition or a common quality.

“If the world is governed by providence, the state also requires a government.”

“If theft is a crime, sacrilege is a greater crime.”

These arguments follow from a relationship between two terms that signify some quality shared to a different degree. Quintilian is content to treat these arguments as a *genus*—that is, arguments of one kind. But he recognizes that others have divided them into various species that indeed may become innumerable.

We may argue from part to a whole, from *genus* to *species*, from that which contains to that which is contained, from the difficult to the easy, from the remote to the near, and similarly from the opposites of all these to their opposites. Now all these arguments deal with the greater or the less or else with things that are equal, and if we follow up such fine distinctions, there will be not limit to our division into species. (5.10.90–92)

While the scholastics developed special logical rules that applied to reasoning about wholes and parts (mereology), Quintilian thinks that he has said enough on the matter lest he become prolix. As we have shown, since the operative terms in Quintilian’s examples are correlated, the arguments fall under a basic rule for such terms: “From one of two correlatives to the other there is a good inference” (LP 5.4).

After surveying the field of court arguments Quintilian concludes:

Well, then, to give a brief summary of the whole question, arguments are drawn from persons, causes, place and time (which latter we have divided into preceding, contemporary, and subsequent), from resources (under which we include instruments), from manner (that is, how a thing has been done), from definition, genus, species, difference, property, elimination, division, beginnings, increase, consummation, likes [similars], unlikes [dissimilars], contradictions, consequents, efficient [causes], effects, results, and comparison, which is subdivided into several species. (5.10.94)

From the viewpoint of inferential reasoning, this passage is quite remarkable. Valla criticizes scholastic logic for its complexity and his own reductionist program rejects many of its distinctions and rules as irrelevant to the simpler needs of the orator. For similar reasons Book III of *Dialectical Disputations* dispatches most of the rules of syllogistic. In the above passage, which Valla recites *verbatim*, Quintilian summarizes the various argument forms needed by the orator. His list of oratorical argument forms contains many more species and has much more logical complexity than the few simple scholastic rules that we have used to identify their forms. Thus, if Valla were truly interested in a concise account of inference, he might have taken the time to learn, rather than to spurn, the scholastic rules of *consequentiae*.

But Quintilian's inventory is not complete. Having reviewed arguments "drawn from admitted facts" or "true arguments," he recognizes a second major group of arguments based on suppositions, and he calls these "fictitious arguments." He defines them as arguments that propose something which, if true, would either solve a problem or contribute to its solution. In another way the fictitious argument that is generated from a hypothesis may provide a case that parallels what is being argued. Quintilian asserts that there are as many species of fictitious arguments as there are non-fictitious or "true" ones. Characteristically, he gives a generous supply of examples.

In the concluding paragraphs of Book V, Chapter X, Quintilian offers some advice about how the student should use his examples. His frustration is evident in the recognition that there is an infinite number of arguments that arise from those that he has cited and that it is impossible to deal with them one by one or to reach the end of all of their species. He observes that people who have tried to do so have "exposed themselves [in] equal degree to two disadvantages, saying too much and yet failing to cover the whole ground" (5.10.100). This dilemma has influenced the education of the orator adversely.

Consequently the majority of students, finding themselves lost in an inextricable maze, have abandoned all individual effort, including even that which their own wits might have placed within their power, as though they were fettered by certain rigid laws, and keeping their eyes fixed upon their master have ceased to follow the guidance of nature. (5.10.102)

In this sentence, which must have resonated with Valla, Quintilian admits the hazards of his own emphasis on arguments that arise from persons and things; he reminds us that these, in turn, are subdivided into species. This leads to a long discussion of the importance of the circumstances of unique cases that "have no connection" with any other dispute. The best arguments are not found in the standard models but are to be discovered in the peculiarities of each case. He gives several examples of how one might discern the potentialities of an argument in the factual details of particular cases. Here the power of discovery, if not the most

important, is “certainly the first consideration” (5.10.109). He offers a second piece of advice. Just as weapons are useless for one who does not know his target, so arguments are without purpose unless a person knows in advance how they are to be applied. “This is a task for which no formal rules can be laid down” (*idem*). He then launches into an example and a prolonged analysis of how one might discover the starting points of argument by examining the details of a specific case. He shows how various factors must be weighed relative to the jury hearing the case and with a strategy for making it effective. He says that “places” play a significant part in the discovery and construction of argument, so they are not “useless.” However, the student who learns them must not conclude that he knows the subject. If he stops with knowledge of the places, he will be in possession of a “dumb science.” Students should study assiduously the concrete arguments that have been recorded from the oratorical tradition, but they should not be hampered by them and should be ready to move beyond them by an “innate penetration” and a kind of “rapid divination.” Only by this means can a person discern the best means of persuasion in each case. In sum, the possibilities and starting points of argument should become second nature to the orator so that arguments flow from his thoughts spontaneously. In this passage one cannot ignore Quintilian’s frustration at the infinite number of arguments that reason can create. Having canvassed and classified many of them, he states that not even these are sufficient to prepare the young orator for his profession. Presented with a similar mass of dialectical arguments, Aristotle in the *Topics* resorted to logic to narrow down their number and to give rules for navigating among them.

I have gone into Quintilian’s text in some detail because, first, its approach to inference adds an important dimension to Valla’s view of truth and, second, it contains many ideas that contradict Valla’s own assertions. Quintilian is quite comfortable within the framework of Aristotle’s logic and rhetoric which he cites favorably on many occasions. He retains all of the ten categories as well as the predicables of genus, species, difference, property and accident, and employs all of them both to discover the starting points of argument and to guide the inferences that they entail. Professor Nauta believes the text was included because Valla “believes he cannot improve on Quintilian’s authoritative account.”³⁹ Valla’s reductionist program in the *Dialectical Disputations*, however, plainly contradicts Quintilian’s account. Valla’s radical revision of these principles in Books I, II and III is not consistent with Quintilian’s obvious acceptance and careful application of them. Professor Nauta suggests that Valla shared Quintilian’s scepticism about “too great a reliance on rules and systematizations. Valla’s hostility was principally directed at what he regarded as the sterile and useless abstractions of scholastic-Aristotelian speculation.”⁴⁰ In discussing Book III, he continues the theme that

³⁹ Nauta 2009: 237.

⁴⁰ Idem.

“common language and not abstract formalism” is the most effective way to study argument.

From Valla’s rhetorical point of view [that] tactic makes good sense: he wants to show how fundamentally wrong a formal approach toward argumentation is. Common language offers a much wider arsenal of words to express, analyze, and assess arguments than the limited set of terms used by logicians suggests.⁴¹

It is perplexing that scholars represent Valla as a critic of “formalism,” for Valla everywhere invokes formal distinctions and rules of Latin syntax. Quintilian’s advice, repeated by Valla, that students should be plunged into a vast sea of argumentations without any criteria for evaluating them is irresponsible. How could a student with no logical standards discover which arguments in ordinary language are valid? How could he evaluate what he had when he found it? If everyday speech must meet formal standards of grammar, why not hold everyday arguments to formal standards of logic? Quintilian clearly respects rules of logical argumentation even if he does not articulate them formally. We have shown how easily his examples can be brought under just a few common rules of *consequentiæ*. If topical rules had developed into *consequentiæ* by the first century as they had by the fourteenth century, there is little doubt that Quintilian would have embraced them. For those rules provide an efficient way to analyze and evaluate forensic argumentation. It would appear that Valla’s devotion to an ideology that would make rhetoric supreme among the arts clouded his judgment and compromised his objectivity about the usefulness of formal logic for a rhetorician.⁴²

If the inclusion of Quintilian’s text in the *Dialectical Disputations* amounts to an endorsement of its contents, it is a much needed supplement to Valla’s approach to truth. Valla conceives of truth or the true primarily as the property of a mental act. He claims that the element of truth in this act results when a divine being “enlightens” the mind of a knower. This aspect of Valla’s epistemological concept of truth is problematic. What causes the act of knowing? Is it caused by God? Is it caused by the knower? Or is it caused by the language that one speaks? If, as he says in some contexts, God is the cause of knowledge, human beings would be unable to know anything by themselves. If it is caused by the knower, it cannot come about except through language, and language on Valla’s account is determined by usage.

⁴¹ Nauta 2009: 252.

⁴² Since the late eighteenth century philosophers have recognized a distinction between philosophy and ideology. For present purposes, the former may be defined as a method for the clarification, analysis and assessment of ideas in order to discover the conditions under which they are true or false. The latter is a coherent collection of ideas to guide thought, speech and action toward a social or political goal. As Rummel (1995) and Moss (2003) have ably demonstrated, the two are commonly intermingled in the humanist–scholastic debates of the Renaissance and Reformation.

Thus, on the assumption of linguistic determinism, humans would be unable to obtain knowledge under their own power.

Valla's view is similar to that held by Henry of Ghent in the thirteenth century.⁴³ Henry, too, was an illuminist who saw all human knowledge as dependent on divine light. Duns Scotus rejected such a view because it leads to scepticism, and his comments about the kinds of knowledge available to humans are instructive.

1. **Sensation.** Human beings know objects by means of the five senses, and sensation is one species of knowledge that produces certainty.
2. **Experience.** Aristotle had defined "experience" as "the memory of many sensations," and human beings tend to remember what they have sensed repeatedly. A prominent feature of experience is the relationship between cause and effect among objects or events; experiential knowledge is precisely the recognition of these relationships. Quintilian: "The person who would excel at argument must know the nature and meaning of everything and their usual effects" (5.10.12–15).
3. **First principles.** These principles include what has been proven, established by law or is not contested (5.10.11–16). Although Quintilian is not explicit about the full range of ideas covered here, it is reasonable to assume that he would include the first principles of an established discipline—for example, the axioms of mathematics, the laws of physics as well as the principles of logic, rhetoric and grammar.
4. **Self-knowledge.** Human beings are auto-reflective: they know their own acts. They know immediately that they are thinking, feeling, sensing and so forth. In philosophy this kind of knowledge became a major criterion of truth after Descartes and the cornerstone of modern theories of knowledge.

While both Quintilian and Valla appeal to all of these kinds of knowledge at one point or another in their philosophies, Valla's perspective is considerably more limited than Quintilian's. His restriction of "correct" language to classical usage and his assumption of linguistic determinism undermine his claims about knowledge and place his rhetorical philosophy dangerously close to scepticism.

Conclusion

As a philosophical discipline that develops through time, epistemology has mirrored the scientific interests of each age. The standards of knowledge set forth in any given period are normally understood in relation to the state of science at the time. Scotus's summary of the kinds of knowledge that humans are capable

⁴³ John Duns Scotus ed. and tr. Allan B. Wolter 1962: 106 ff.

of is a fair standard for assessing Valla's conception of truth. Valla emphasizes self-knowledge in his many references to sensory awareness and to feelings. Again, he appeals continually to common experience and especially to linguistic behavior. He asserts countless cause–effect relationships between objects (*res*) and words (*verba*). His assumption of linguistic determinism presupposes a fundamental cause–effect relationship between language and thought. Valla's aversion to abstract theory may imply that he had little interest in first principles. However, as the greatest Latinist of his age, Valla identified syntactical regularities in classical Latin, formulated them as rules, and established basic principles for classical philology and lexicography.

Professor Nauta has drawn attention to an unavoidable paradox in Valla's account of Latin. (A) It was the language of a particular culture (Latin) at a particular time (first century CE) and place (Rome), and it has a special history largely of corruptive influences. Nonetheless, it can be restored to its former glory. (B) It is a universal language transcending conditions of culture, time and place. Nauta attempts to embrace both horns of this dilemma but fails to do so. Affirming Valla's dedication to usage (*consuetudo*) as the primary criterion of grammatical correctness, he argues persuasively for (A). However, by renouncing all formalist explanations of language, he gives up the logical theory that could support (B). Having denied to language any tincture of logical formality, he leaves it trapped in a past moment. The repeatable formal elements that could make language universal are simply not available to it. Thus, Nauta does not resolve a basic dilemma in Valla's philosophy of language.

Despite tensions and inconsistencies in Valla's texts, we conclude that he was not a sceptic. His discoveries in several areas of scientific investigation—for example, grammar, philology and theology—counter the claim that he was a sceptic. His preference for first-century Latin usage and his aversion to current common languages including the vernaculars contradict the idea that he was an “ordinary language” philosopher in any reasonable definition of that term. His various insights and comments about truth add up to the semblance of a theory. More precisely, we can say that Valla's idea of truth or the true amounts to the following. A sentence expressed in classical Latin is true if and only if it is an evident judgment. A judgment is evident if it expresses a belief, feeling or sensation, or states a recognition of a cause–effect relationship between two or more objects of experience, or agrees with an established belief or general consensus of the classical Latin-speaking community. These positive properties of an evident judgment give Valla's truth-predicate real significance. They respect the objective nature of things and their primacy in confirming or disconfirming truth as expressed in human language. Valla's view of truth, however, appears to be at odds with his assumption of linguistic determinism, the view that language, and not reality, determines human thought.⁴⁴ Whether these two ideas can be reconciled in Valla's philosophy remains an open question.

⁴⁴ See Chapter 2, p. 58ff.

Chapter 4

Vives on Thought and Language

[Scholastic dialecticians] have invented for themselves certain meanings of words contrary to all civilized custom and usage, so that they may seem to have won their argument when they are not understood.

For when they are understood, it is apparent to everyone that nothing could be more pointless, nothing more irrational. So, when their opponent has been confused by strange and unusual meanings and word-order, by wondrous suppositions, wondrous ampliations, restrictions, appellations, they then decree for themselves, with no public decision or [verdict] a triumph over an adversary not conquered but confused by new feats of verbal legerdemain.

Juan Luis Vives, *Adversus pseudodialecticos*¹

Introduction

If Valla and his early sixteenth-century followers remained aloof from Latin logic, Juan Luis Vives (1492-1540) did not. As a student in Paris and graduate of the Collège of Montaigu, he studied logic under the leading Parisian thinkers of his day, namely, the Flemish logician Jean Dullaert and the mathematician Gaspar Lax. His distaste for scholastic “sophistry” is amply expressed in a letter dated 1519 to a fellow Spaniard, Juan Fortis.² The letter was published in 1520

¹ [C]onfinxerunt ipsi sibi nescio quos vocabulorum significatus contra omnem hominum consequitudinem et usum, ut tunc vicisse videantur cum non intelliguntur.

Nam cum intelliguntur, tunc plane nihil frigidius, nihil dementius fieri posse omnes vident. Ita turbato eo, quicum certant, mira et insinuata vocabulorum forma atque ratione, miris suppositionibus, miris ampliationibus, restrictionibus, appellationibus, ipsi tunc sibi ipsis nullo publico consilio atque sententia decernunt triumphum de hoste novis verborum praestigiis turbato, non victo (Vives tr. Guerlac 1979: 56-57; Fantazzi 1979: 39, 41).

² The term “sophist” (and its adjectival, adverbial and abstractive forms) signifies both a specialized art of disputation practiced in the renaissance university and the subtle and fallacious reasoning promoted by the itinerant teachers of rhetoric and politics in ancient Greece. As is common in the Renaissance, Vives exploits the ambiguity of these terms. Vives’s favorite word for a scholastic dialectician is “sophist” (*sophista*). Guerlac translates “*sophista*” both as “sophist” and “sophister.” The English word “sophister” is of British origin. It signified

with the title *In pseudodialecticos Liber*.³ A later work, *De disciplinis*, offered more serious arguments against scholastic language and dialectic while, at the same time, embracing some of its logical theory.⁴ Vives became an advocate of humanist ideals, especially the primacy of “common” over “technical” language, yet he explicitly rejected Valla’s reformation of dialectic:

Laurentius Valla undertook the reparation of dialectic, differing from Aristotle and the Peripatetics both ancient and modern. He makes some recommendations that are not at all bad, though these are few; more often he slips into error, for he was an impetuous man and hasty in making judgments. Not only was he wrong in dialectic, but in philosophy, for he applied himself to that also, and what is more surprising, in the rules of the Latin language. But he erred no less in his criticism there than in the *Elegantiae* and the *Invectives*. As for his errors in dialectic, which are certainly many, we shall either omit them altogether or save them for another time if it seems appropriate, for to undertake a dispute with him would be too prolix, and quite unnecessary at the moment, because his arguments neither rest on sound reasoning nor are they accepted by anyone as tenets of this art.⁵

Vives’s criticism of Valla is vehement and unequivocal. Valla was wrong in every area of his work: philosophy, dialectic and the Latin language. Vives’s objections are directed at the *Dialectical Disputations* as well as the *Elegantiae* and the polemical tracts. One could hardly imagine a more devastating attack by a fellow humanist. This suggests that Vives’s own attempt to reform scholasticism will take a new path and employ a different method from that of his illustrious predecessor. What does Vives take and what does he leave from the humanist tradition inspired by Valla? More importantly, how does he view scholastic dialectic?

Modern orthodox commentary has assumed that Vives abandoned scholastic philosophy and logic. This view has been based on a selective reading of Vives’s works that have appeared in modern editions. When his entire corpus is taken into account, however, there is evidence of a residual scholasticism. This chapter, as well as Chapter 5, will show that Vives, while critical of its language and its practice of sophistic, retains many of scholasticism’s fundamental principles. In Chapter 2 we drew some parallels between the subject-matter of Valla’s *Dialectical Disputations* and Aristotle’s *Organon*. We noted the fact that Valla dismissed as a “puerile art” any discussion of fallacies that would correspond to

a second- or third-year undergraduate at Cambridge University. For background on the use of these words as mutual terms of reproach, see Rummel 1995: 19-31.

³ I follow the Latin title used in Vives tr. Guerlac 1979.

⁴ Vives 1913.

⁵ Vives tr. Guerlac 1979: 153.

the *Sophistici elenchi*, the ninth book of the *Topics*. We will show in Chapter 5 that Vives's tracts on logic and language also correspond to the Aristotelian syllabus with one exception, the absence of specific rules to respond to sophistry. Unlike Valla, Vives did not eschew fallacies. He published a major work that exhibits the subject, namely, *Adversus pseudodialecticos*. Scholars who have read it as a serious refutation of scholasticism seem not to have understood its sophistical nature and purpose. In this chapter we argue that this is a misreading of the work and propose a new way to read it.

These ideas will be developed in three stages. In Part I we critically review modern interpretations of *Adversus pseudodialecticos* and show that they fail to account for the work's scholastic form, content and purpose. In Part II we examine Vives's ethics of criticism and show that modern readings of *Adversus pseudodialecticos* are inconsistent with his moral precepts. In Part III we offer a new interpretation of *Adversus pseudodialecticos* that recognizes its place in the curricular framework of scholastic education.

I Modern Interpretations of *Adversus pseudodialecticos*

Vives's *Adversus pseudodialecticos* has been received by most, if not all, scholars from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century as a final refutation of scholastic dialectic. Modern editors and translators have celebrated the text as the ultimate realization of Valla's program to replace scholastic barbarism with humanist eloquence, a fitting epitaph to scholasticism. These festivities would be justified if the work were a refutation of scholasticism. But is it? Erasmus and Thomas More thought it was and enthusiastically endorsed Vives's text. Erasmus praised Vives's accomplishments: “[N]o one was a keener disputant, no one better acted the sophister.”⁶ More's testimony was more substantial: “[H]e mocks those silly subtleties with witty banter, opposes them with valid arguments and destroys and knocks them off their base with irrefutable reasoning...”⁷ As we will show by and by Erasmus's appraisal contradicts More's estimation, and that inconsistency is central to the challenge of an accurate reading of *Adversus pseudodialecticos*.

Modern authors have given credence to More's view that the text contains valid and irrefutable arguments by stating that its many linguistic puzzles can be traced to actual statements in scholastic texts. Conveniently, they have left the task of documenting their claim to others. For example, Rita Guerlac: “[Vives's] citations from Paul of Venice, Gregory of Rimini and others still remain to be recovered for us by present and future historians of medieval logic.”⁸

⁶ Erasmus tr. Guerlac in Vives tr. Guerlac 1979: 25.

⁷ Thomas More, *Letter to Martin Dorp* in Vives tr. Guerlac 1979: 163.

⁸ More tr. Guerlac in Vives tr. Guerlac 1979: 163.

Similarly, in her otherwise careful examination of renaissance dialectic Erika Rummel states without documentation that Vives's examples are authentic: "It is clear that Vives's aim was not only to fill his audience with indignation but also to move it to laughter with examples of bizarre questions and absurd conclusions proffered by the scholastics."⁹ Ann Moss states that Vives "gives abundant examples, some of them authentic propositions from medieval logic manuals, some of them made up and function as parody."¹⁰ None of these scholars has supported their claims with documentary evidence from the scholastic works that they cite. Documentation is not forthcoming because Vives's references to scholastic teachings are fictitious and have no factual basis.

Nonetheless, pursuing that documentary exercise, I have searched the sources and kept abreast of a growing body of primary and secondary literature that has appeared over the past 40 years. To date no one has traced the supposed references to actual scholastic texts. Out of hundreds of humanist attributions of "scholastic nonsense" one scholar found only two "garbled examples" related to a scholastic text.¹¹ The same author showed these to be cases of verbal ambiguity presented for logical analysis. I cannot speak for other sources of examples in *Adversus pseudodialecticos*; however, Paul of Venice is mentioned in the text as one source.¹² His *Logica Parva* existed in more than 80 manuscripts and 25 editions by the time of Vives's writing, so it might well have been one of Vives's sources.¹³ An electronic word search of the *Logica Parva* found no *verbatim* quotations and no examples that match even remotely those in *Adversus pseudodialecticos*. The *Logica Magna*, also attributed to Paul of Venice, existed in only one known manuscript and one edition printed in 1499. The *Sophismata* existed in only four manuscripts and one printed edition. So these are less likely sources. Nonetheless, I checked the various fascicles of *Logica Magna* and, again, found no *verbatim* sources for Vives's examples.¹⁴ Vives is a literary ventriloquist. He practices a genre of humanist writing at the time that imputed fictitious speeches to historical figures.¹⁵ While few examples in Vives's text are traceable directly to scholastic sources, his work has some relation to scholasticism.

⁹ Rummel 1995:157. Despite her perceptive reading of other humanist texts, Rummel does not detect the sophistical nature of Vives's *Adversus pseudodialecticos* (Rummel 1995: 184-185).

¹⁰ Moss 2003: 113.

¹¹ Broadie 1993: 197-205.

¹² Vives tr. Guerlac 1979: 85.

¹³ Paul of Venice tr. Perreiah 1984; ed. Perreiah 2002. For Paul of Venice's biography and a census of his manuscripts, see Perreiah 1986.

¹⁴ Paul of Venice ed. and tr. Perreiah 1971; ed. and tr. del Punta and Adams 1978; ed. and tr. Ashworth 1988; ed. and tr. Broadie 1990; ed. and tr. Hughes 1990.

¹⁵ Grafton 2009: 38-40.

Modern scholars seem not to have understood the form, content and original purpose of Vives's text in the scholastic curriculum. When these factors are taken into account it will be clear that Vives's text does not "refute" scholastic dialectic. We propose to show, first, that its form is that of a school exercise in sophistic; second, that its content is a collection of specious arguments that appear to be valid but are, in fact, fallacious; third, that its purpose is to challenge students to detect the many logical fallacies that it contains. Whether or not they were aware of these features of the text, sixteenth-century humanists were amused and enchanted by its content and presented it to the scholarly world in an epistolary style to promote the humanist movement. Lisa Jardine sees the work as a promotional piece to advance humanist ideology:

The *In pseudodialecticos* itself, far from being a spontaneous "Spanish" response to the intricacies of logic teaching in Paris, begins to look like a work *written to order*, as part of a carefully orchestrated bid on the part of Erasmus and his associates to establish the seriousness of their program to displace logical subtlety with *eloquentia*, as the road to truth.¹⁶

Vives published *Adversus pseudodialecticos* in the form of a letter giving scholarly advice to a fellow Spaniard, John Fort. Enrique González has established that John Fort or Fuertes was a colleague of Vives at the Parisian Collège de Lisieux between 1509 and 1512 when Gaspar Lax arrived there.¹⁷ In 1979 Charles Fantazzi published a critical edition titled *Juan Luis Vives In psuedodialecticos*. In the same year Rita Guerlac published a translation and commentary on the same work based on the 1782 edition of Vives's text together with *De dialectica corrupta*, Book III, Chapters v, vi and vii of the *De causis corruptione artibus*.¹⁸ The association of the two works in Guerlac's volume may lend credence to the notion that they have the same purpose, namely, the refutation of scholastic dialectic. But this belief is mistaken. *De dialectica corrupta* is an *ex professo* critique that makes some serious claims about scholastic dialectic that call for answers. But *Adversus pseudodialecticos* has a very different purpose as we will now argue.

¹⁶ Jardine 1977: 20 emphasis added. For the distinction between "philosophy" and "ideology," see Chapter 3, n. 44.000

¹⁷ González González 2008: 33. See also González González 1987.

¹⁸ Vives tr. Guerlac 1979: 57-59. Vives ed. Fantazzi 1979. Page references shown in parenthesis are to the editions of Guerlac or Fantazzi, e.g. (G 57-59, F 38-40).

II Vives's Ethics of Criticism

It is easy to see how modern scholars could have been misled about the nature of Vives's work. For the portrayal of scholastic dialecticians in the *Adversus pseudodialecticos* seems typical of the diatribes mounted against scholastics by earlier renaissance humanists. From Valla to Rabelais, the main tradition of humanists fired a cannonade of ridicule, mockery, parody and occasional serious criticism at their academic rivals. When Vives recites the names of characteristic scholastic doctrines—for example, propositions, syllogisms, oppositions, conjunctions, disjunctions, suppositions, ampliations, restrictions and appellations—scholars have assumed that he placed no value on them or rejected them out of hand; however, his own later writings belie this interpretation.

There are several reasons to question the conventional reading of Vives's *Adversus pseudodialecticos*. First, it contradicts Vives's principles in *Introductio ad sapientiam* about criticism of intellectual error or offensive scholarly practices. Second, it denies the form and content of the text as well as its sophistical purpose. Third, it ignores Vives's virtuosity as a "sophister," numerous references in the text that he is arguing against sophistry as well as his definition of sophistry in *De disputatione* (a tract that follows *Adversus pseudodialecticos* in the *Opera Omnia*). We will show that he is also arguing sophistically. Beyond these factors, the standard reading disregards the fact that Vives's own philosophy of language exemplifies scholastic practices and retains a number of scholastic distinctions and rules albeit under a different nomenclature. We submit that no interpretation of *Adversus pseudodialecticos* that ignores this evidence is adequate. To support an alternative interpretation, we now examine each of them in turn.

Vives's *Introductio ad sapientiam* offers advice to seekers of wisdom both speculative and practical. Written in 1524, just five years after the publication of *Adversus pseudodialecticos*, it offers an ethics of criticism: "True wisdom is to judge a thing correctly and to identify it for what it actually is" (1).¹⁹ A version of this precept is stated in the first part of *Adversus pseudodialecticos*. Humanists have pictured scholastic dialectic as an evil force that corrupts minds and imperils the cultivation of learning. Vives lists crafts inspired by the devil that we should avoid at all costs. These include palmistry, necromancy, hydromancy and astrology. "In these are found the most deadly falsehoods, devised by the devil, our deceitful enemy" (124). Given modern characterizations of scholasticism, one should expect to find "scholastic dialectic" in Vives's inventory of Satanic arts; yet it does not appear there. Scholars have been amused by the mischievous banter, derision and ridicule in Vives's polemics against scholasticism. However, Vives tells his readers not to listen to "frivolous, trifling, or ridiculing matters, but rather to those things which are earnest, wise and weighty" (160). Again,

¹⁹ Vives 1968. All references to this work are to numbered items in this book, e.g. (1).

scholars have noted the vitriolic nature of Vives's youthful work.²⁰ Yet he advises against that kind of behavior: "Contention, emulation, backbiting, and vain desires of glory are to be shunned; rather, the pursuit of studies assists us in escaping from the cruel dominion of those vices" (198). In his *Encomium moriae*, Erasmus's Folly says, "Nature has a fine laugh at [scholastic dialecticians] and their conjectures ..." and modern scholars have savored the mockery and derision aimed at scholastics. But Vives rejects all scornful expression: "Scoff at no man, remembering that whatsoever chances to one may as well happen to another" (398). And later, "To laugh at the good is wicked; at the evil, cruelty; at the indifferent, madness; at the upright, an impiety; at the wicked, barbarity; at those whom we know, a monstrosity; at those unknown, derangement. In short, to make fun of man is inhuman" (429). Recent scholars have claimed that *Adversus pseudodialecticos* was directed at Vives's Parisian professors. But Vives reminds us that one's teachers are to be respected and esteemed: "Give the most profound honor to those who are in authority; obey them, even if they command burdensome and troublesome things—God wills this so, for the public peace" (433). Again, "The more refined a man is, the higher his education, the more humbly and courteously he behaves himself; the lower his background, the more disdainful and curt he is, sometimes from ignorance—hence, learning in the gracious arts is called 'humanities'" (435 excerpt). Modern scholars represent Vives's amusing polemic as fatal to scholasticism; yet he advises: "You should make fun of no man, curse no man, injure no man in any manner, nor his business, reputation or good name" (446). Criticism should be gentle and mannerly: "You should not abusively nor scornfully rage like a wild man against anyone, even if you are provoked or driven to it. In doing so you hurt yourself more before God and men of wisdom than him against whom you rail" (447). Scholars have noted the acrimonious tone of Vives's letter, yet he says, "Do not use snappish words nor biting sarcasm if you want to appear an eloquent speaker. Toward another's affronts, it would be better to be as children or as mutes" (451). We should not busy ourselves with censorship: "Do not be solicitous about censoring others; take care, rather, that they find nothing in you to censure" (452). "At no time use contumelious, reprehensible or threatening language ..." (459). "Do not be contentious or obstinate in argument" (471).

We have reviewed Vives's ethical precepts in *Introductio ad sapientiam* because they are relevant to an assessment of conventional interpretations of *Adversus pseudodialecticos*. To read Vives's text as modern scholars would have us read it violates all of his principles of criticism and would make him appear disingenuous. Were his counsels taken seriously, Vives would have to reject the manner in which modern commentators have represented his work. How could a scholar whose motto was "Without Complaint" (*sine querela*)

²⁰ Moss (2003: 113) calls it a "little shaft of purest vitriol."

have been the author of a work that rains down an unrelenting torrent of complaints upon scholasticism? Charles Fantazzi notes this incongruity. “In no other of [Vives’s] extant works, distinctive among humanistic writings for their moderation, does the Spanish scholar, whose motto was ‘*sine querela*,’ indulge in such acrid polemics.”²¹ How could the same person have written the *Introductio ad sapientiam* and the *Adversus pseudodialecticos*? Literary scholars may make light of inconsistencies in an author’s works. But where the author is a philosopher, self-contradiction is no small matter. Philosophers may not always speak the truth, but they are normally held to a standard of consistency. Where the philosopher is a humanist, we should expect that his actions reflect his words and that his publications express his moral principles. On our view, Vives’s works are consistent. They only seem incompatible because of the way that modern scholars have represented them. The works are reconcilable, we submit, because in *Adversus pseudodialecticos* Vives is arguing sophistically according to the accepted style of sophistical argumentation. The purpose of this kind of argument in the university setting is to provoke a hearer or a reader to detect its fallacies and question its claims. It is patently *not* to admire or imitate them, much less to celebrate them. Thus, as Vives counsels, we must “weigh all these arguments carefully in the balance of [our] reason,” and read his letter for what it is (G 107, F 98).

III *Adversus pseudodialecticos*: An Adversarial Interpretation

Vives was famous for his skills as a sophister arguing *sophismata*. The *sophismata* were school exercises that challenged students to detect fallacies in a discourse amidst other claims that may be plausible or even true. Aristotle recommends this form of argument as part of a regimen for training dialecticians.²² Brian Lawn claims that the text’s purpose is to criticize sophistry. He does not recognize that the text itself is a sophistical exercise, an exhibition of sophistry. Vives had excelled in the art of sophistry at Paris and the publication of his text

²¹ Fantazzi 1979: 15.

²² Aristotle 1984: 278. See also: Aristotle tr. Smith 1997; Hamblin 1970; Schreiber 2003. Sophistical argumentation follows naturally from Aristotle’s view of the nature of dialectic and rhetoric. In *Rhetoric* I, Aristotle states: “Further, we must be able to employ persuasion, just as deduction can be employed, on opposite sides of a question, not in order that we may in practice employ it in both ways (for we must not make people believe what is wrong), but in order that we may see clearly what the facts are, and that, if another man argues unfairly, we on our part may be able to confute him. No other of the arts draws opposite conclusions: dialectic and rhetoric alone do this. Both these arts draw opposite conclusions impartially. Nevertheless, the underlying facts do not lend themselves equally well to the contrary views.” (Aristotle 1984, II: 1355a 29-36.)

was no doubt a source of pride for his instructors. Lawn confirms this: “[I]n a letter to Erasmus dated June 4, 1520, Vives was pleased to report that on a short return visit to Paris he was entertained with great civility by those very sophists whom he had attacked so harshly the year before.”²³ On the conventional interpretation of the *Adversus pseudodialecticos*, this reception seems surprising; but on the present account it is not remarkable. Vives’s letter to Erasmus makes clear that his former teachers and colleagues at Paris welcomed him warmly and admired both his and Erasmus’s “humane studies.” He praises the changes at Paris and assures Erasmus that “sophistical trifles” have been set aside. “They beg you [Erasmus], they urge you to press on, undeterred by the yelping of the ignorant, to serve the Christian religion and the cause of learning in general; they make it their business that in theological disputations the contestants shall not waste their time on trifles.”²⁴ Most importantly, the Parisians recognized and appreciated the letter’s sophistical character. They would have seen that what Vives wrote was easily rebutted and that according to long-established rules of dialectical argumentation it did not “refute” scholasticism. Where *Adversus pseudodialecticos* is understood as a sophistical exercise, the text is not only consistent with Vives’ ethical precepts but teaches a valuable lesson in scholastic dialectic.

Vives knew that disputation was an important medium for examining a thesis, and he saw its importance for obtaining a university degree. In *De disputatione* he gives some practical advice about how to improve public disputation:

The main thing is that it should be made clear what is placed in controversy and what the disputers are arguing about. Secondly the respondent should keep his attention on the nature of the things in dispute, not allowing himself to digress on to unrelated issues or matters which look similar. The key here will be the skills of distinguishing different uses of terms and dividing and defining correctly. Participants must maintain the integrity of their judgment, not allowing it to be overcome by emotional involvement in the conflict. People who are liable to anger should not take part in disputations. Disputers should ensure that they understand the way in which their opponent understands the meaning of the words he uses and the meaning that the onlookers are likely to give them.²⁵

Vives gave these counsels to improve the quality of disputations in his own time. They have guided our interpretation of *Adversus pseudodialecticos*. We propose

²³ Lawn 1993: 117-119. See also Vives ed. Fantazzi 1979: 7.

²⁴ Vives, *Letter to Erasmus* 1108 in *The Correspondence of Erasmus* tr. Mynors and annotated Bietenholz 1974: 295-302.

²⁵ Vives, *De disputatione* in *Opera omnia* 1782-1790: 3, 78-79, translation and paraphrase in Mack 2008: 236.

to read the text as a reasonably good student trained in scholastic logic would have read it, namely, as a sophistical exercise replete with fallacious arguments. Sophistical disputations gave students an opportunity to hone their skills at spotting errors in sophistical argumentation.

Fallacies abound in *Adversus pseudodialecticos* and are not difficult find.²⁶ They fall into two types: (1) strategic errors that are failures of an argument as a whole; (2) tactical errors that are mistakes of reasoning about specific topics. We limit our analysis to kinds of fallacy that were known in the ancient, medieval and renaissance worlds. Despite their Latin names, many fallacies that are familiar to us (for example, “*ad vericundiam*,” “*ad hominem*,” “*ad populum*”) are of recent (nineteenth-century) origin, and the schoolmen would have considered them under one species, namely, fallacy of accident (*fallacia accidentis*).²⁷ For clarity, we shall use the modern names. Other fallacies in the text are well recognized: for example, misuse of ambiguous words (*aequivocatio*), begging the question at issue (*petitio principii*), turning many questions into one (*fallacia secundum plures interrogaciones ut unam*), taking as a cause what is not a cause (*non causa pro causa*) and mistaken refutation (*ignoratio elenchi*). Still others were understood to be fallacies in dialectical practice: for example, inconsistency (*propositiones se contradicunt* or *repugnant*) and irrelevance (*argumentum non pertinens*).

In overall argument strategy *Adversus pseudodialecticos* fails in several ways. To see this it is important to keep in mind that a dialectical argument is always about a particular issue that may be argued *pro et contra*. In this case the issue is whether scholastic dialectic is a sound method of inquiry. Vives's task as a dialectician is to argue (contrary to popular opinion) that it is an unsound method. Instead of leaving the question open until he has proved his point, he foils his case from the start by labeling his opponents “sophists.”²⁸ Where these words are taken in a pejorative sense, the designations beg the question (*petitio principii*). Moreover, sophistry is only one part of scholastic dialectic, namely, an exercise for undergraduates. Often Vives allows the term to represent the whole of scholastic dialectic, and when he criticizes the latter for some defect in the former he commits the fallacy of judging the whole by a part (*parts pro toto*). And things get no better. Vives proceeds to call scholastic dialectic “nonsense,” “folly” (G 49, 95, 97; F 29, 87, 89), “most shallow” (G 49, F 29), “madness” (G 51, 87, 95; F 31, 79, 87, 89), “corrupt,” “most corrupt” (G 55, 95; F 37, 87), “pointless” (G 57, F 39), “demented” (G 57, F 39), “foolish,” “silly,” “fatuous”

²⁶ The best historical introduction to fallacies is Hamblin 1970.

²⁷ Nuchelmans 1996: 37-47.

²⁸ See, for example, Vives ed. Fantazzi 1979: 38, 57, 62, 94. The expression “pseudodialectic” occurs in the text. See also Vives tr. Guerlac 1979: 79; Vives ed. Fantazzi 1979: 69. The titles “*In pseudodialecticos*” and “*Adversus pseudodialecticos*” are editorial additions.

(G 75, 87; F 65, 79), “futile” (G 81, 99; F 71, 91), “barbaric” (G 85, F 77), “false,” “inept,” “frivolous,” “unsound” (G 87, F 79), “bad pernicious nonsense” (G 95, F 87), “obfuscatory” (G 95, F 87), “dull and empty verbosity” (G 97, F 89) and “[a] yoke of stupid and impetuous tyranny” (G 97, F 89). This list is not exhaustive. Professionally, the task of a dialectician is to argue from premises that are accepted by the majority or by the wise to the contradictory of the thesis held by his opponent, in this case scholastic dialecticians. Vives realizes that he cannot do this, for he is arguing from humanist premises, and humanists are in the minority.²⁹ Thus, he argues from premises that *seem* to be generally accepted but are not. This is an essential element of sophistry.³⁰ Amidst a barrage of name-calling, parodies and low burlesques, Vives offers no serious arguments against scholastic logical theory or principles. Instead, following ancient sophistical practice, he draws the discussion into an area where he manages a large stock of objections, namely, against faulty diction, grammatical infelicity and rhetorical style. A recurrent theme is the offensive departures of scholastic language from the “common” language of Cicero. Vives’s rants on this topic caricature the language of his opponents, but they do not refute the methods or principles signified by that language. They appear to refute, but do not in fact refute, scholastic dialectic. They seem to be effective only to the reader who already believes that scholastic dialectic is an unsound method or who is ignorant of it altogether. In other words, Vives’s vaunted refutation of school dialectic is a classic exercise in begging the question (*petitio principii*).

A second kind of strategic error is Vives’s formulation of the dialectical problem. To show that scholastic dialectic is unsound he needs to prove its theoretical deficiencies. But the theory is quite complex, and its refutation would entail considerable analytic work. That task would not, to say the least, attract a wide audience or popular readership. Thus, he recites the names of several scholastic theories (supposition, ampliation, restriction, appellation, syllogisms) (G 57) and fragments of theories (oppositions, conjunctions, disjunctions) (G 53) and rejects them out of hand without demonstrating one by one where or why each is in error. Instead of arguments against the complexities of theory, he cites or fabricates a phrase associated with them and derides it for its “unintelligibility” or patent violation of Latinity. He claims throughout that scholastic dialectic is false, not because its theoretical tenets are false but because its practitioners are ignorant of [classical] Latin. This is faulty reasoning. It is the fallacy of “turning many questions into one” (*fallacia secundum plures*

²⁹ “I look not to their [the Spanish scholars] judgment, which is of no moment, but to that, not numerous to be sure, yet highly respected and serious, of learned men, and I strive to please their judgment” (Vives tr. Guerlac 1979: 105). Jardine (1977: 20-23) gives the background on Vives’s audience.

³⁰ Aristotle tr. Smith 1997: *Topics* 100b 23.

interrogationes ut unam). When Vives asserts here and in *De causis corruptione artibus* that corrupt dialectic is due to ignorance of Latin letters, he commits the fallacy of mistaken cause (*non causa pro causa*).³¹ Many thinkers in the ancient world spoke flawless Latin, but that did not save them from intellectual error. Since Vives requires that false statements no less than true ones be made in grammatically correct (*congrua*) Latin sentences, a sterling command of Latin is no guarantee that one speaks the truth (G 55).

A third strategic mistake is Vives's apparent conviction ("apparent" because sophistic is all about appearances) that he has effectively refuted scholastic dialectic (G 107, F 98). His objections, however, are directed primarily at the linguistic practices of his opponents. He repeats *ad nauseam* his claim that their speech is defective, and he marshals many examples—a few genuine, most fictitious or frivolous and all out of context—to show that it violates the Latin usage of ancient Romans. But what has Vives proved? Granting a close connection between language and thought, is the following inference sound: "Their style of speech is defective; therefore, their dialectical method is unsound"? At best, Vives's contention that scholastic dialectic is unsound because scholastic speech is faulty betrays a misconception of what counts as a refutation. That is the fallacy of *ignoratio elenchi*. Readers like Thomas More who think that Vives's arguments are "valid" and "sound reasoning" fall into the same fallacy.³²

Adversus pseudodialecticos contains many kinds of tactical error. In his attempt to prove the unsoundness of scholastic dialectic, Vives takes every opportunity to impugn its practitioners. We have noted how he routinely refers to them as "sophists." He also calls them "mad" (G 49, 95; F 29, 87), charges them with "arrogance" (G 49, F 29) and declares them "ignorant" (G 71, F 57), "most ignorant" (G 55, F 37) and possessed of ignorant wisdom (G 93, F 85). He says that they are "without talent or learning" (G 57, F 39), "quibblers" (G 65, F 53), "haughty" (G 65, F 53), supercilious (G 93, F 85), "proud," "boastful," "vainglorious" (G 91, F 83), "loquacious" (G 93, F 85), "ostentatious" (G 97, F 89) and, even, "criminal" (G 103, F 95). Moreover, he derides their behavior: they act as "straw men" (G 93, F 84). "[Peter of Spain] was most ignorant of Latin" (G 71, F 58). "They drink and bathe at the baths of St. Martin"—presumably, a place of debauchery (G 73-75, F 62-64). This display of name-calling and defamation may stir intrigue and spice up an otherwise dry subject, but it does not disprove the claim in question. In fact all of these epithets may apply, and the peccadillos may be real, but they are irrelevant to the issue whether scholastic dialectic is a true method of inquiry. Today they would be called *ad hominem* arguments;

³¹ Vives tr. Guerlac 1979 includes a Latin text and a translation of Chapters V, VI and VII of *De causis corruptione artibus*, Book III of Vives's *De disciplinis*.

³² More cited in Vives tr. Guerlac 1979: 163.

in medieval parlance, fallacies of accident (*fallaciae accidentis*) or irrelevant information (*propositiones non pertinentes*).

Another kind of error infects Vives's use of scholastic vocabulary. He takes many technical words out of context and holds them up to ridicule. He exploits the ambiguity of the Latin word “*confusa*” (G 61), which describes a term with indefinite reference, to caricature the mentality of scholastic teachers and students. He makes light of “*instantia*” (G 71, 81; F 59, 73), a technical term for analyzing temporal *continua* in the science of the day, to a bizarre array of other subjects. Similarly, he derides “*incipit*” and “*desinit*,” terms used to analyze physical motion, in an amusing string of sentences meant to show how dialectic can destroy one's command of Latin. Finally, he makes a play on “*logica parva*,” a name for the small logic manuals used in the schools; they are so called, he says, because they have so little logic in them. These are just a few examples of a sophistical use of ambiguous words to distract an audience or reader from the question at issue: Is scholastic dialectic a sound method of inquiry? Such ploys are fair game in sophistic; in dialectic they are fallacies.

Vives takes the scholastics to task for inventing what today is called “private language”—technical jargon and contrived examples that “only [the speakers] understand” (G 57-59, F 38-40). The contrast between a common or natural language that everyone understands (classical Latin) and a factitious language invented by the scholastics runs throughout the work. Yet Vives concocts in that same “unnatural” language numerous fabulous sentences and phrases nowhere to be found in scholastic texts. He declares that language “not understandable,” yet he makes up parodies in it. To compose parodies in a language one must understand the language. In fact one must know it quite well. Yet Vives denies repeatedly that he understands scholastic language. He asserts that scholastic arguments are “incomprehensible” (G 49, 53, 57-59 *et passim*; F 28, 34, 38-40 *et passim*). But if this is true, his arguments against them must rest on ignorance (*argumentum ad ignorantiam*). Again, if they cannot be comprehended, how can he judge them “silly” or “useless”? On the other hand, Vives states that when they are understood “their stupid and inane methods become plain to everyone.”³³ The examples he offers are insufficient to prove his conclusions which are, at best, hasty generalizations. Incidentally, if what Vives says is true, efforts by modern scholars to document and explain his examples must be in vain.³⁴ Vives's assertions that scholastic discourse is both “understood” and “not understood” are clearly self-contradictory (*se contradicunt*). In a clever manipulation of the argument (as he condemns in

³³ Vives tr. Guerlac 1979: 42-43.

³⁴ Both Guerlac and Fantazzi, op. cit., attempt to document a few of Vives's examples. Lisa Jardine (1993: 21, n. 54) questions this endeavor, but she does not consider alternative interpretations of the text.

others) Vives the sophister pastes this inconsistency on to his opponents and so commits the classical fallacy of “*tu quoque*” (G 57, F 38). Vives’s letter aims to turn attitudes and opinions against scholastic method by appealing to base emotions of fear (that it destroys minds) (G 51, F 30), despair (that it ruins a capacity for classical Latin) (G 51, F 32), anger (that it wastes so much time) (*ibid.*), indignation (that its practitioners are ignorant of classical letters) (G 55, F 36), shame (what would Aristotle or Cicero say?) (G 71, 73; F 58, 60), and so on.³⁵ As appeals to popular sentiment, all of these arguments are fallacious (*argumentum ad populum*). Vives was playing to a general audience on behalf of the humanists who challenged the authority of the scholastics, particularly in the fields of logic and theology.³⁶ In this context the leading humanists of the day embraced the young Vives as a prodigy whose talents as a sophister would convert nicely into those of a propagandist for humanism.

Finally, there are certain stylistic features that mark Vives’s letter as a piece of sophistic. The salutation informs readers of Vives’s “impressive” credentials to write on scholastic dialectic. Indeed, he reminds us of his qualifications several times. He has completed undergraduate studies (including two years of dialectic) at Paris, and this qualifies him to pass judgment on a 500-year-old tradition of dialectic. At best, this ironic statement is an appeal to questionable authority (*argumentum ad vericundiam*). The *editio princeps* title “*In pseudodialecticos Liber*” betrays its true character as a sophistical exercise in the scholastic mode. It is a pseudo-dialectical letter (an expression of sophistry), written by a pseudo-dialectician (a sophister) against a pseudo-dialectic (imagined by its author) and practiced by pseudo-pseudo-dialecticians (the author’s imaginary opponents). Who has ever questioned the irony in Vives’s letter? The arrogance, stubbornness and pomposity that Vives imputes to his opponents are matched only by the air of cleverness, invincibility and authority with which he confronts them. All of these qualities are stock attributes of the sophist who is arguing sophistically. A bold pugnacity and tenacity in public debate identifies Vives as a skilled polemicist. On the one hand, he invites rational consideration of his argument and says that he is open to advice; on the other hand, he declares himself ready for combat and willing to do battle with anyone who disagrees with him (G 107). The ancient *Dissoi logoi*, Plato’s dialogues (especially *Euthydemus*, *Gorgias* and *Sophist*) and Aristotle’s *Topics* and *De sophisticis elenchis* teach us a great deal about the sophistical shams and maneuvers that fill Vives’s letter. Vives describes

³⁵ Vives tr. Noreña 1990 is useful in this regard, for in this work Vives analyzes various emotions that are relevant to a reading of his other works, particularly his polemical works. The emotions of anger and contempt seem most prominent in his treatment of scholastic dialecticians (64-65).

³⁶ Jardine 1993: 20-23; Moss 2003: Ch. 3.

the role of a sophister in *De causis corruptarum artium*.³⁷ He gives a more precise description in *De disputatione*:

A sophist is one who does not respect the truth of things but hunts by himself for the opinion of those who listen to him. His stated goal is either wealth, or fame, or derision of an adversary or some depraved emotion. For that reason he works to contrive arguments that an anti-sophist will confirm and which others believe that he demolishes and to have shown that a statement that appears to be true is false.³⁸

His dazzling performance in *Adversus pseudodialecticos* shows Vives at his best as a sophister and the work as a masterpiece of sophistry.

Does *Adversus pseudodialecticos* “refute” scholastic dialectic as modern scholars have assumed? As an exercise in sophistic, *Adversus pseudodialecticos* does not directly refute scholastic dialectic. It exemplifies the use of sophistic in logic instruction and leaves scholastic dialectic largely intact. It does not prove the negative of the main dialectical question, namely, “Is scholastic dialectic a sound method of inquiry?” Vives mocks a scholastic sophistical exercise to draw attention to a pedagogical practice that he believed was corrupt and in need of serious reform. Despite his protestations to the contrary, the rhetorical virtuosity on display in *Adversus pseudodialecticos* is not, after all, a bad recommendation for the kind of education that Vives received at the Collège of Montaigu.

Conclusion

Although they share some common traits, Vives’s *Adversus pseudodialecticos* differs markedly from Valla’s *Dialectical Disputations*. The latter is a didactic work that takes words, phrases and specimen sentences out of context and examines them for grammaticality and style. Those that offend Latinity are declared “unintelligible,” “false” or any number of other pejorative terms, and consigned to oblivion. The former is a sophistical polemic against perceived sophistry. If *Adversus pseudodialecticos* failed to refute scholastic dialectic on logical grounds, as a work of fiction it was an outstanding success. It appeared at a time when

³⁷ Vives tr. Guerlac 1979: 147-153.

³⁸ Vives, *De disputatione* in *Opera omnia* 1782-1790: III, 79. Mack (2008: 237) paraphrases Vives’s definition of the sophist as follows: “[Vives] defines a sophist as one who is preoccupied not with reaching truth but with the impression which he makes on the audience and with the glory which he may obtain by winning the disputation ... Vives gives advice on how to avoid being caught in traps by arguers of this type. These mainly involve scrutinizing the sophist’s axioms, urging him to keep to the point, eliminating ambiguity and explaining as carefully as possible.” The present study is an application of Vives’s principles for avoiding the pitfalls of sophistry.

satire and parody were the preferred modes of criticism. The *Letters of Obscure Men* (1515), Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* (1511) and *Antibarbari* (1520), More's *Utopia* (1517) and later Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532-1546) were all efforts to awaken readers to the dangers of a regnant scholasticism and to promote humanist alternatives.³⁹ Vives's *Adversus pseudodialecticos* (1520) has a rightful place among these renaissance classics.

Satire and parody differ in important ways.⁴⁰ The former attempts to inspire, through humor and wit, the improvement of a human institution. It seeks to tear down in order to rebuild. The latter mimics the language of an original work and turns its words toward a different purpose, namely, to burlesque or ridicule them. "When the subject matter of the original composition is parodied, however, it may prove to be a valuable indirect criticism, or it may even imply a flattering tribute to the original writer."⁴¹ Vives's *De anima et vita* treats levity and laughter as antidotes to the irascible emotions. Catherine Curtis has argued that satire enabled the humanists to criticize indirectly while moderating their passions and tempering their irritation with joy.⁴² Read as either satire or parody, *Adversus pseudodialecticos* is a work of fiction, and thus its contents do not admit of factual documentation. It has a political purpose: to enhance humanist ideology and thereby advance the humanist program of research and education.

No matter how we read the *Adversus pseudodialecticos*, we arrive at the same destination. As satire, it affords us enjoyment while we are entertained by the imagined foibles of scholastic pedagogues. As parody, we are amused by the obscurities and absurdities of a fabricated scholastic jargon. In the process we are moved to reject them. As an exercise in sophistic, it shows us why Aristotle first recommended training in sophistical reasoning: "It teaches [us] to discriminate between what appear to be refutations but are really fallacies instead."⁴³ Vives's skill as a sophister and talents as an author enabled him to convince most modern readers that *Adversus pseudodialecticos* is a real, versus an apparent, refutation of scholasticism. As a student of rhetoric, he might have known that the most effective way to turn people against school sophistry is for them to suffer the humiliation of discovering that the very performance that enchanted them at the same time massively deceived them. More than a battery of formal arguments, or a real refutation of scholasticism, that discovery alone could turn anyone against scholastic dialectic.

³⁹ For background and analysis of the *Letters of Obscure Men* and for the influence of the *quaestiones quodlibeticae* as practiced in German universities, see Becker 1981: 24 ff.

⁴⁰ Kiley and Shuttleworth 1971: 478-479.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Curtis 2008: 126.

⁴³ Aristotle 1984: *Sophistical Refutations* 155a 19.

Chapter 5

Vives on Truth

In the exposition of the arts and learning, whether in verse or in prose, no deviation from Truth is permitted save for the use of metaphor.

Truth, in *Veritas fucata sive de licentia poetica*¹

A method of investigation comes next to the study of languages, a means whereby we can test the true and the false by simple and well-arranged rules. This is called logic.

Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, IV, i²

[To cultivate judgment] the study of logic, the tool for discovering truth, is helpful, for it makes clear what is true or truth-like in anything.

Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, V, i³

Introduction

As we have noted, the caustic nature of *Adversus pseudodialecticos* has led many to conclude that Vives rejected scholastic dialectic in its entirety. To confirm that conclusion scholars often cite *De causis corruptarum artium*, the first seven books of *De disciplinis*, where Vives argues that faulty dialectical practice is the primary cause of corruption in the arts. Since scholastics were the leading dialecticians of the day, they infer that Vives's rejection of scholastic dialectic was both total and final. Despite its initial plausibility, this inference would be hasty. The reputation of Vives as the ultimate victor in the humanist–scholastic debates (a public image promoted by More and Erasmus) is rendered suspect by Vives's own principles. He says that truth—and not forensic prowess—should guide our judgment on any subject. Contentious combat conceals the truth that is available to everyone.⁴ It is nonetheless surprising that Vives continues in *De causis corruptarum artium* the same pattern of fallacious reasoning and derision

¹ Vives tr. Matheussen et al., 1987: Vol. 1.

² Vives tr. Watson 1913.

³ Idem.

⁴ Vives tr. Watson 1913: 9, 33.

that he displayed in the *Adversus pseudodialecticos*. The fact that in the later work examples of scholastic language are more fully elaborated and slightly closer to actual texts and authors enhances their credibility. However, the effect of that enhancement on sophistical argumentation is to make apparent refutations seem even more like real refutations. He recites the names of numerous scholastic theories and simply declares them “unintelligible.” He confesses repeatedly that he does not understand them. He sketches fragments of theories or parts of examples from theories out of context, and compares them with texts from esteemed classical authors in an attempt to make them appear ridiculous. He faults scholastic theories—for example, theories of negation and of intentional verbs—for being incomplete. Yet he treats them even more briefly in his own works. In slapdash fashion he does not finish one criticism before moving on to the next. While on occasion he states a matter accurately, his criticisms are, as before, a prolonged exercise in the fallacy of ignorance of a refutation (*ignoratio elenchi*). He appears not to know what would count as a real—as opposed to an apparent—refutation of scholastic dialectic.

Vives once remarked that his earlier studies were an impediment and “sometimes prompt[ed] him to make sport of serious matters and talk nonsense” (G 51; F30–32). Was this a confession born of self-knowledge? Vives seems to have had a weakness for the role that he was especially good at playing. In *Adversus pseudodialecticos* he deploys sophistical argument to meet the alleged sophists on their own ground and to challenge their teachings and practices. In *De disciplinis*, Vives’s harshest polemics are directed against the induction of beginners into the practice of sophistic. The purpose of sophistical exercises in the school setting was to challenge students to detect, identify and respond to fallacious reasoning. If that goal is lost sight of, sophistic can degenerate into a game of defeating an adversary at all costs. In some that contest breeds arrogance and in others avarice for wealth or fame. Vives rightly believes that these vices are unacceptable in teachers and harmful to students. (DT 57–58).

If Vives’s early works are mainly sophistical and refutative, what are Vives’s mature views about the nature of logic and the place of dialectic within it? Whether or not he slays the monster of scholasticism in the early works, the later works tell a very different story. Far from abandoning the scholastic dialectic of his youth, he employs some of its vocabulary, agrees with many of its tenets and even recommends parts of it for the cultivation of learning.

The strongest evidence against the idea that Vives rejected scholastic dialectic in its entirety is the number and nature of theoretical claims he makes in his monumental new organon *De disciplinis*, a work that aims to redefine the categories of all knowledge. First published in Antwerp in 1531, *De disciplinis* comprises 20 books: *De corruptis artibus* [*De causis corruptarum artium*] (DC seven books), *De tradendis disciplinis* (DT five books), *De artibus* (DA eight books) including *De explanatione cuiusque essentiae* (DE one book), *De censura*

veri in enuntiatione (DCE one book), *De censura veri in argumentatione* (DCA one book), *De instrumento probabilitatis* (DI one book), *De disputatione* (DD one book), *De prima philosophia* (DP three books).⁵ The first seven books are a critique of conventional educational practices; the last 13 books present Vives's own views on language, logic and philosophy.

In this chapter we focus on Vives's concept of truth in the larger context of his views about the nature of language. This is, of course, a complex subject, and Vives's views developed through time. However, we propose to show that his conception of truth retains important elements from scholastic logic. Given the primacy of education in Vives's philosophy, we first outline his prescriptions for the curriculum in language and logic. Second, we review his analysis of sentence and argument structure. Third, we examine his theory of truth.⁶ A conclusion will compare Vives and Valla on these topics.

I Language and Logic Curriculum

De tradendis disciplinis presents Vives's principles of education.⁷ He writes in a gentle conversational style consistent in tone with all the virtues that he praises in this and other works. Book I gives a natural history of education which arises to satisfy the needs of human beings born into a natural world. Speech and a common language are necessary to live in harmony with nature. Young minds should be prepared to understand the world, and the arts and sciences should be cultivated for that purpose. Literature contains the collective learning and wisdom of the ages, and Vives lays down guidelines for selecting its best representations. Book II deals with matters of educational policy—where schools should be located, qualifications of teachers and students, salaries and other fiscal matters, the selection of schoolmasters and so on.

Book III is devoted to the language curriculum (DT, Ch. 1). Since language is the repository of erudition as well as an instrument for social concourse, it would be most desirable if there were a single language that all people and nations used in common. Such a language should be “universal” and “perfect.” The perfect language would be “sweet,” “learned” and “eloquent.” Its sweetness would consist in the sound of its words whether singly or in combination. It would be learned because it would supply appropriate names for things. It would be eloquent

⁵ Vives 1782-1790. Volume 3 contains *De artibus* and Volume 6 *De disciplinis*. To show parallels between Vives's theory and scholastic theory I have rearranged slightly the order of books of *De artibus*.

⁶ This study does not include Vives's long work *De veritate fidei christiana*, which is devoted to the truth of Christian belief. *Opera Omnia*, VIII.

⁷ Vives tr. Watson 1913.

insofar as the variety and abundance of its words and sentences would be pleasant for humans to speak. It would enable the clear expression of ideas and develop in its speakers the power of good judgment. While these are necessary qualities of a “perfect language,” they are not sufficient: “[T]hat language, whose words should make clear the natures of things, would be the most perfect of all; [this was probably the] original language in which Adam attached the names to things” (DT 92). Vives is aware of the search for the perfect language, and he declares his own verdict on the matter.

As punishment for sin, the original perfect language is no longer available to humans. After Babel they must choose among a variety of tongues. Vives declares Latin to be the best of those languages that he knows, for it comes nearer than all of the others to the essential qualities of a perfect language. Because of its diffusion throughout many nations, it is the best language for the unification of the races and the propagation of the Christian faith. It is the best language for the cultivation of learning, and it is the best repository for the wisdom of the past. Other languages too have influenced the development of culture, most notably Hebrew and Greek, and Vives believes that states should support the study of them. He notes especially the importance of Arabic and includes it among the languages that states ought to teach. Not surprisingly, as a humanist he makes classical Latin the centerpiece of his educational program.

Turning to the topic of language pedagogy, Vives recognizes the fact that students begin their studies speaking primarily their own vernaculars—for example, Italian, Spanish, French or English. Parents should teach and children should learn their mother tongues before elementary school. In Spain this meant mastery of Spanish, Arabic and Saracen. Schools should introduce Latin early. Teachers should know their students’ vernaculars well and translate Latin expressions into them. They should compose word lists with literal translations of particular words, and exemplify these with phrases or sentences from approved authors (DT 133). Grammar rules should be invoked to correct error. Vives encourages children to use Latin in casual speech and at play, and provides dialogical exercises to help them become conversant in Latin. When students advance to the study of Greek the same applies. They should study several Greek dialects, become familiar with the “mixed languages” of Greek and Latin, and pursue classical philology (DT 143 ff.). He urges the study of Hebrew for those who want to read the Old Testament. In short, Vives believes that study of all languages—from native vernaculars through Latin, Greek and Hebrew—are desirable for cultivation of the mind.

As a pupil advances from his vernacular to a command of Latin he should begin to study logic (DT 164). He starts with basic definitions that are essential to understanding the structure of language. Next, he passes to the study of simple and compound judgments, and lastly to rules of proof. In addition to Aristotle’s *On Interpretation*, Vives recommends several recent textbooks including

those of George of Trebizond and Philip Melanchthon. From Aristotle's *Prior Analytics* the instructor should select what is relevant to his purposes. Vives advises more than once that the student "should know thoroughly the dialectic of Aristotle,"—that is, the eight books of the *Topics* (DT 165). Notably, Vives omits *On Sophistical Refutations*, the ninth book of the ancient text. This is unfortunate because it contains Aristotle's analysis of fallacious reasoning and the methods of responding to it.⁸ Vives states many times that beginning students should not be exposed to contentious argument but he nowhere affords them an opportunity to learn how to detect and refute it. After the study of logic the student should investigate the world of nature conceived within a framework of divine creation. Lastly, as an accessory to all of these studies, Vives prescribes the scholastic exercises called "obligations" (*obligationes*), for these teach students how to maintain a consistent interpretation of any thesis that may be put before them (DT 165). In volumes where Vives has argued vehemently against Aristotle, it is indeed remarkable that he recommends three of Aristotle's works including the *Topics*. Despite his earlier fulminations against scholastic dialectic in *Adversus pseudodialecticos*, Vives here recommends the obligations (*obligationes*), a training regimen for scholastic disputation.⁹

De tradendis disciplinis Book IV Chapter 2 turns to the study of nature. Here a student must master names from ordinary speech, for "It is only from a knowledge of these that right signification of names could be derived" (DT 175). At this point disputation (*disputatio*) is introduced in order to clarify common usage. The student should pursue dialectic not for victory or self-glory ("which used to be permitted to boys") but to discover truth. Complemented by physical exercise, the student should examine nature scientifically. "He should study the standards of demonstration, and immediately afterwards the study of the art of collecting arguments and in the next place, the art of presentation of subject-matter" (DT 176–177). Because dialectic and rhetoric are contentious arts that provoke strife and obstinacy, Vives thinks that some students should be barred from them. Quarrelsome youths or ones suspiciously inclined towards evil should not be allowed to study them. "They must not be taught to a bad man, or to one who is seditious, venal, given to anger, greedy of vengeance ..." (DT 177). Chapters 3–7 pertain to the study of rhetoric, imitation of exemplars, the mathematical sciences, the auxiliary arts and sciences, priesthood, medicine and the training of physicians. It is noteworthy that Vives commends the practice of disputation in medicine, but they should be limited, and physicians should spend most of their time studying remedies, in dissection and recording their successes (DT 220–221). Book V examines practical wisdom and the importance of history which is broadly defined to include moral philosophy,

⁸ Schreiber 2003.

⁹ See below Chapter 6: p. 156 ff.

ethics, economics, politics and jurisprudence. An appendix to *De disciplinis* has three chapters on the scholar's life, the aim of his studies, his relations to the world and his struggles.

II Linguistic Structure

Shortly after he wrote *Adversus pseudodialecticos*, Vives published a dialogue entitled "*Veritas fucata sive de licentia poetica, quantum poetis liceat a veritate abscedere.*" In other words, "Truth Dressed up, or of Poetic License: To What Extent Poets May Be Permitted to Vary from the Truth."¹⁰ Vives's friend tells him of the appearance of Truth at the household of mankind. She is truth as commonly understood. She is dressed as a rustic with no jewelry or fancy clothes and accompanied only by her husband Fear and her son Hate. At the other entrance False appears, an urbanite, richly dressed and cosmetically fit with plenty of friends. Truth sends Plato and other learned people to try to persuade False's friends to desert him. This mission fails, but the friends of False decide that Truth should rule over men's minds. However, she will have to be better dressed and reach an agreement with them. She states a preference for bare nudity but agrees to compromise with a treaty of ten articles. These cover a wide variety of subjects where Truth may be concealed under figures of speech. Most interesting for our purposes are: (7) "In the exposition of the arts and learning, whether in verse or in prose, no deviation from Truth is permitted save for the use of metaphor" and (8) "Whatever dressing up may be given to Truth, must be characterized by verisimilitude and decorum." This allegory shows that Vives conceives of truth as a core property of language. In all learning, literal truth ("bare nudity") has primacy except where metaphor may be appropriate. Although it may appear under many different guises, truth is an invariant and constant quality that is ever present in the language of everyday speech. *Veritas fucata* presents an allegorical characterization of truth. But the figurative presupposes the literal, and Vives later offers an explication of truth that comes close to an unequivocal account. Insofar as it can be expressed in human language, truth depends on linguistic structure, a central topic in all of the tracts of *De artibus*.

From the earliest times Western philosophers have regarded sentences as the primary bearers of truth and falsity, and *De censura in enunciatione* presents Vives's analysis of the sentence (DCE 142–162). Humans make sounds called

¹⁰ Vives 1782-1790: Vol. I. See note 1 above and Nelson 1973: 45-49. The following paragraph is based on William Nelson's summary of the dialogue and Ann Moss's perceptive commentary (Moss 2003: 208-212). An earlier version of the dialogue is translated in Vives tr. Matheeussen et al. 1987.

“vocals” (*voces*). When these bring about cognition or thought in the mind they are signifying vocals (*voces significantes*) and are defined as “common signs, by means of which people explain to one another their notions, i.e. what they conceive in their mind (*Communis nota, qua inter se aliqui alii notiones suas explicant, id est, quae mente concipiunt*)” (DCE 143). These common signs fall into two species of signifying signs: signs *simpliciter* and co-signifying signs. The former signify independently and the latter signify only with other signs. Vives traces this distinction to Ammonius who divided names into *semainomena* and *susemainomena*. He glosses the distinction by saying that others (that is, the scholastics) mark a difference between “*categorematica* or *praedicativa* and *syncategorematica, id est, compraedicativa*” (DCE 145; 149–150). He recognizes Boethius’s distinctions between first and second intention (*primae et secundae intentiones*), first and second imposition (*primae et secundae impositiones*) as well as between univocal and equivocal terms (DCE 147). Vives further sorts signifying signs into “superior” and “inferior.” The former, such as “animal,” contain the latter, such as “man.” Scholastic logic makes the same distinctions in the same terminology. To these he adds several other classes—for example, “diverse” (“*album*”/“*nigrum*”), “negates” (“*bonum*”/“*non bonum*”) and “collates” (“*videns*”/“*caecum*”). He divides signifying signs into “absolute,” “concrete” and “abstract”—a division also found in scholastic texts. Passing over his exposition of univocal, equivocal, metaphorical, analogous and ambiguous expressions, we note a final distinction between simple vocals (*voces simplices*) that make up the eight parts of speech (*partes orationis*) and composite vocals (*voces compositae*) which may include two, three or any number of parts joined together.

Vives does not elaborate in the present context his theory about simple expressions that fall under the Aristotelian categories. However, in the *Prima philosophia sive de intimo naturae opificio* he employs a full complement of standard Aristotelian and scholastic categories to analyze substances and their accidental characteristics (DP-1 200 ff.). Here we find not only the distinction of form and matter of **substance** (*substantia*) but also the doctrine of the four elements (earth, air, fire and water) and the **qualities** (*qualitates*) associated with them (DP-2 216 ff.). Further, we find the study of **action** (*actio*) and **passion** (*passio*), **state** (*habitus*), **quantity** (*quantitas*). He treats **time** (*tempus*) and **place** (*locus*) as properties of actions (DP-2 244–252). **Relation** (*relatio*) and **position** (*positio*) appear throughout the three books of Vives’s natural philosophy. They are essential to his account of a hierarchy of beings that starts with God and descends through spiritual beings and humans to the world of nature.

Having embraced the Aristotelian categories, in *De explanatione cuiusque essentiae* Vives adopts the traditional language of the predicables. When we want to understand the essence of a thing we should concentrate on what is universal about it: “[A]nd thus this common likeness is what is essential in the many, which in the school is called ‘universal’ (*itaque communio haec similitudo*

est essentialis in multis, quod in schola universale nominatur" (DE 122). We understand the essence of a thing by studying how it operates in its actions and passions (DE 122). When we want to know it precisely we consider its *genus* and *species*. This entails attention to differences (*differentia*) and property (*proprium*). The entire process of analysis leads to an understanding of the individual or the "uncuttable" (*insectile*). The Greeks (like the scholastics) call this a hypostasis (*upostasis*) or a *suppositum* (DE 124–125). Dichotomous division enables the descent from genus to species where definition (*definitio*) is born (DE 128–129). What is remarkable in this text is the fact that it restates in a new language the basic framework of definition by dichotomous division proposed by Plato, employed by Aristotle, reformulated by Porphyry and passed down by Boethius to the Middle Ages. In this area of theory Vives clearly rejects Lorenzo Valla's critique of the categories and predicables in favor of his own rendition of them supported, of course, by appropriate classical sources. Vives goes on to distinguish between **definition**, the brief or proper comprehension of the nature of a thing through those [qualities] that are internal to it (*breviter ac proprie comprehensam rei naturam per ea quae sunt illi intima*), **declaration**, the exposition of the inherent intelligible that is properly congruent with what it declares (*expositionem cognobilium inhaerentium, illi proprie congruentem quod declarat*), and **interpretation**, which makes [a transition] from one language to another (*[interpretatio] quod fit ab una lingua in aliam*) (DE 132).

Returning to the topic of composite expressions (*voces compositae*), we find two species: some convey an imperfect sense and leave the mind in suspense, as the phrases "Socrates and John," "A man in a field." Others have a perfect sense that satisfies the one who hears it—for example, "Peter, read." The latter are called "utterances" (*orationes*). Though not all expressions have an explicit sense—for example, the question "Do you dispute?"—those in the indicative mood that both signify and declare something to be in some sense and are either true or false are called statements (*enunciationes*). If they refer to something that may be, will be or was, they are called "quasi-statements" (*quasi enuntiationes*). Those with one verb are "simple" and "categorical" (*simplices et categoricae*). Those with more than one verb and are joined in some way are either "composite" or "conjunct" (*compositae seu conjunctae*). The extremes of a simple categorical statement are called "subject" and "predicate" (*subjectum et praedicatum*). A predicate is that which is said of another. A predicate may be affirmed or denied of a subject. The subject points to that to which the signification of the predicate applies; it is called the statement's "object" (*objectum*). A *dictum* (*dictum*) is what is said of some object.

Next, Vives classifies simple statements into singular, particular and universal, depending upon their reference to a unique individual (singular), several individuals (particular) or every individual (universal). He also recognizes: (a) mixed cases—for example, "these" (*isti*)—may indicate some

or all individuals; (b) collectives where all of a group are indicated at once; (c) reference to a universalized kind—for example, “Every good I desire for you”; (d) infinitives where something is attributed to a kind of object—for example, “Virtue is a good.” Vives insists, however, that like negations these quantifying expressions are not to be defined by dialecticians but by grammarians who pay attention to common usage (DCE 152).

Simple statements relate to one another by way of contradiction or contrariety. He calls the law of contradiction “the principal and best known in all of the arts, disciplines and in the whole of life, and it is the foundation and rule of all things: namely, ‘Of two contradictories both cannot be true; both cannot be false’ ([C]ontradictorias nec veras esse posse, nec falsas ... [H]aec lex est praecipua, et notissima in omnibus artibus, in disciplinis, et in tota vita, estque fundamentum, et regula omnium).” The law of contraries: two contraries can both be false; but they cannot both be true ([F]alsas esse posse, numquam veras ...). It is noteworthy that Vives gives here only two of the possible relations between “simple” subject-predicate statements. Aristotle’s *On Interpretation*, among the books of Aristotle that he had encouraged students to read, also gives rules for sub- and super-implication. All of these were schematized in the scholastic “square of opposition” that Vives does not mention. Vives considers some of these relationships in later discussion about relations between statements with “superior” and “inferior” terms, a division that rests on the difference between genus and species conceived on a vertical axis: “superior” terms are generic in relation to “inferior” terms that are specific, particular or singular.

According to Vives, simple sentences may be combined into compound sentences, and these will be either conjunctive, disjunctive, illative (that is, either conditional or rational), adversative, and approbative or causal. All of these forms of compound sentences are basic to scholastic dialectic. What is surprising is the rule that Vives issues at the end of his discussion.

As a general rule in the Latin language, proper and true contradictions in every kind of statement comes about by placing the negation in front or as if the negation were to be there (*Regula est generalis in Latina lingua, contradictione in omni genere enuntiationum proprias, ac germanas, fieri praepostione negationis, aut si fuerit*). (DCE 155)

Having ridiculed scholastic examples of pre-posed negation as “not part of Latin” in *Adversus pseudodialecticos*, Vives here declares the validity of a pre-posed negation rule in the Latin language.¹¹ After expounding the structures of basic kinds of sentential expressions, Vives turns to the problem of establishing their truth.

¹¹ Vives tr. Guerlac 1979: 60-61.

III Truth

There is no certain art for deciding whether a statement is true or false. Judgment of the true and the false is always related to the subject matter and to the mind of an experienced prudent person. Such a person will pronounce certain things to be true, others false. In the present context Vives proposes a general definition of truth-conditions for simple statements which he calls “assertions” (*pronuntiationes*). An assertion that expresses what something is, as it is, is true. One that expresses what something is, though not as it is, is false (*Vera pronuntiatio est, quae enuntiat id quod re ipsa ita est; falsa, quae id quod non ita est*). Following examples of statements that are called “necessary” and “possible,” he proceeds to define truth-conditions for universal, particular and singular statements.

Rule I

All statements that are taken as universal are true, if, with respect to a thing, they congrue with what is stated and how it is stated. If a statement does not congrue with a thing, it is false (*Omnia quae sub universalitate comprehenduntur veram eam reddunt si ei quod enuntiatur, quomodo enuntiatur congruent; unum aliquid si non congruat, sit falsa*). (DCE 156).

Here Vives uses the grammarian’s term “to congrue” (*congruere*) to signify a relationship between parts of the simple sentence—that is, subject and predicate—and that to which the sentence refers (DCE 156). Later he uses the same verb to relate what is said to its object: “*Recte congruat objectum cum dictio*” (DCE 162). In one sense, the term “to congrue” (*congruere*) expresses a relation between a subject, a predicate and what they are about; in another sense it states a relation of agreement between what is said and what it is said about. This may suggest a kind of correspondence between language and its object, but Vives does not analyze the concept of “congruence.” Nor does he give a general account of how language attains truth. Later, Vives will use the same verb (*congruere*) to explain the connection between premises and conclusion of the syllogism. On the principle that two things related to a third are related to one another, the major and minor terms in the premises are related to the middle term and thus related to one another in the conclusion. It is not clear how the two accounts can be reconciled. Thus, the operative term “to congrue” remains equivocal and undefined in Vives’s notion of truth.

Rule II

With respect to particularity, one singular instance confirms it, all counter instances disconfirm it; and just as in the case of universality we use the conjunctive whose nature preserves universality, so in the case of the particular we use the disjunctive for a similar reason (*Particularitatem una singularitas pro ea confirmat, omnes contra eam infirmant; et sicut in universalitate usi sumus conjunctiva, quae naturam obtinet universalitatis, sic in particulari utemur disjunctiva consimilis ingenii*). (DCE 156).

Vives has in mind here the fact that the truth of a universal statement is confirmed by a set of particular statements conjoined by “and.” The truth of a particular statement is confirmed by a set of particular statements joined by “or.” These structures are elementary parts of scholastic supposition theory that Vives had earlier made sport of.¹² Next, Vives alludes to universal statements whose reference is uncertain—for example, “Pepper is sold in Paris and Rome.” Does the statement refer to all pepper, to some or to a single sprinkle? Vives resorts to the scholastic language of supposition and calls the reference “uncertain or confused” (*incerta, sive confusa*). Here, again, Vives employs a notion that he had mocked in *Adversus pseudodialecticos*.¹³

Rule III

One singular proves its common particular but not the reverse. A lower-level particular proves its higher-level particular, but the reverse does not follow. A higher-level universal vocal (*vox*) proves its singular, and a lower-level vocal (*vox*) proves the particular as well as the universal. (*Singulare unum probat suum commune particulare, non contra; particulare inferius probat suum superius idem particulare, sed retrorsus nonidem valet; universale superius probat singulare, et inferius tam particulare quam universale*). (DCE 157)

This rule allows that a singular instance is sufficient to confirm the truth of a particular sentence. From “Socrates runs,” we may infer “Some man runs,” but not conversely. A particular inferior term, such as “man,” confirms its superior term, such as “animal,” but not the other way around. From “Some man runs” we may infer “Some animal runs,” but not conversely. A universal superior term is applicable to all of the singulars falling under it whether they are particulars or universals. For example, “All men are animal” implies “Some men are animal,” as well as “Socrates is animal.” This account of inferential relationships between

¹² See Chapter 4: pp. 97, 99.

¹³ Vives tr. Guerlac 1979: 57, 61.

sentences with terms of various quantities (that is, “superior” and “inferior” terms) simply restates standard rules of supposition (*suppositio*), elements of a theory that Vives had made sport of in *Adversus pseudodialecticos*.¹⁴

Vives goes on to posit a rule for statements in past or future tense:

A statement about the future is true if it will be true at some time in the present; otherwise it is false. For statements about the past not only is the same required but also the negation of this here and now present time as in ‘Yesterday was’ (*De futuro vera est enuntiatio, si aliquando verum erit in praesenti, sin aliter, false; in posterioribus non solum idem requiritur, sed negatio etiam huius praesentis*).
(DCE 158)

These analyses of truth-conditions for indicative future and past-tense statements are simplified versions of the scholastic analysis of exponible propositions (*exponibilia*) and ampliation (*ampliatio*) that Vives named derisively in *Adversus pseudodialecticos*.¹⁵ Vives continues with an analysis of the truth-conditions for sentences with verbs in plu-perfect, imperfect and future-perfect tenses (DCE 159). He then analyzes the cognitive verb “to know” (*cognoscere*) as in “I know $2 + 2 = 4$ ” (DCE 160). His rule is that the truth of the statement requires both parts to be true: “*In compositis enuntiationibus intuendum in conjunctionem, in quam tota veritas enuntiati compositi incumbit, aut contra, falsa.*”¹⁶ Although Vives criticized them for an alleged failure to treat expressions of this kind, scholastics composed entire tracts on the logic of cognitive verbs. His own treatment takes up barely one page. Next, Vives examines relationships between conditional, rational and causal sentences. For the truth of a conditional it is sufficient that once the posited condition is stated, what comes from it follows: “[A]d conditionalem exigitur, ut posita conditione ponatur id quod *ex conditione sequitur*” (DCE 161–162). For the truth of a rational conditional the consequent follows from the antecedent by way of a reason that warrants the inference: “[A]d rationalem, ut *quod sequitur*, tamquam *ex ratione videatur inferri a proposito*” (DCE 162). Causal sentences are of several kinds—temporal, local and relative. Each is true by way of a cause (stated in the *protasis*) that expresses a condition of time, place or relation with regard to an effect (stated in the *apodosis*). Relational causes are, in turn, duplicative, adstrictive and simple or in a genus. These are quite complex, but Vives gives examples of each along with their truth-conditions. His analysis is replete with

¹⁴ Vives tr. Guerlac 1979: 57, 61. See Chapter 4: pp. 97, 99.

¹⁵ Vives tr. Guerlac 1979: 57, 71. Also, Paul of Venice 1984: 184.

¹⁶ This kind of sentence was analyzed under the scholastic rules for officiable propositions (*officiabilia*). See Paul of Venice 1984: 186 ff.

standard scholastic vocabulary such as “*dicta*,” “*accipere*,” “*dissolvere*,” “*resolvere*” that *qua* sophister in *Adversus pseudodialecticos* he saw fit to ridicule.

Lastly, Vives assays equivalent statements (*aequipollentia pronuntiata*). His general rule is: “All universals are equal to universals; all particulars to particulars, certains to certains, uncertain to uncertain to the extent that their pronouncements are converted” (*[O]mnis universalitas par est universalitati, omnis particularitas particularitati, certa certae, incerta incertae, quantumcunque convertantur pronuntiata*) (DCE 162). He then adds a condition that their terms maintain the same signification and quality: “*modo eidem maneant termini, eadem significatio, et qualitas*” (DCE 162). Notably, Vives had disparaged a similar requirement in the scholastics: “The newer men define form as ‘the same quality of proposition’, ‘the same quantity’, ‘synonymy of terms’, so that now no syllogism, opposition or conclusion is acceptable with respect to form unless it is cast within the narrow limits of their vocabulary and absurdities of speech.”¹⁷ Vives’s rules for sentential equivalence apply only to quantified sentences; he does not give rules of equivalence for composite sentences such as conjunctives, disjunctives, conditionals that would be part of a complete set of *consequentiae* rules.¹⁸

De censura veri in argumentatione expands Vives’s conception of truth into the field of argumentation.

An argumentation is a connection of statements so that a later statement follows from an earlier statement, and the one seems to be born from the other and to cohere with a kind of necessity. For example, ‘Some man disputes; therefore, he exerts reason’ (*Argumentatio est connexio enuntiationum, ut ex priori posterior sequitur, et quodam modo nasci videatur, et cum eo quasi necessario cohaerere; homo aliquis disputat, ergo rationem exercet*). (DCA 163)

The earlier sentence is called an “antecedent” (*antecedens*), a reason (*ratio*), an “argument” (*argumentum*) or “something proposed” (*propositum*). The later sentence is called a “sequent” (*sequens*), a “consequent” (*consequens*), an “intention” (*intentio*) or a “yield” (*illatio*). Cicero calls the entire sequence a “conclusion” (*conclusio*); in vulgar [school] language they call it a “consequence” (*consequentia*). “Prior” and “posterior” do not refer merely to position, but rather to the sense of the statement: that which is understood to imply (*inferre*) another is prior; that which is implied (*infertur*) is posterior. Vives next gives the principle behind inference, “that most certain rule of a contradictory”: “The contradictory of the consequent is repugnant to the antecedent or there would exist two contradictories simultaneously true or simultaneously false”

¹⁷ Vives tr. Guerlac 1979: 127.

¹⁸ The best account of *consequentiae* in the sixteenth century is Ashworth 1974.

(DCA 163). Within this general rule he recognizes two kinds of inference: one that follows in virtue of the signification of a vocal (*ex significacione vocum*); the other that follows in virtue of the structure of the statement (*ex structura pronuntiationis*). The former is valid (*bona*) only in particular cases; the latter is valid (*bona*) universally in all similar cases. “Similarity of cases” is defined by reference to a similar construction (*constructio*) or composition (*compositio*) of the relevant parts and their interconnections (DCA 164). The core ideas here correspond to the scholastic distinction between formal and material inferences and to a concept of sentential form that enables inferences to be judged valid or invalid. Although Vives bases his definitions and distinctions on the surface grammar of classical Latin, his earlier attention to signs of affirmation and negation, quantification and sentential connections give his generalizations here a broader systematic application. The implicit system is, of course, that of grammar and not of logic. He does not articulate the general principles of inference as rules that students could use to test the validity of arguments. Like Quintilian and Valla before him, Vives believes that correct inference can be learned by example from classical texts. Unfortunately, none of these authors tells students how to detect validity or invalidity in the examples provided. Because some texts contain both valid and invalid arguments, and students are given no criteria for judging between them, this pedagogical method is plainly deficient. Vives goes on to discuss various kinds of expression, such as equals and unequals, opposites (adversatives, privatives, negates, collations) and so on (DCA 165). Next, he defines the principal forms of argumentation that are used in rhetoric including enthymeme, epicheireme, example, comparison, induction, gradation, coascervation and dilemma (DCA 167–168). Finally, he devotes more than two-thirds of this book to an exposition of Aristotle’s theory of syllogism. He regards the syllogism as the perfect form of argumentation. He first defines reasoning (*ratiocinatio*) as “a collection of three statements in which the third which is signified is inferred and is elicited naturally from the connection of the [first] two” (*Ratiocinatio est collectio trium enuntiationum, in quibus tertia, quae inferri significatur, ex duarum connexione naturaliter elicetur*) (DCA 169). He underscores the requirement that the conclusion follows from a necessity of nature and not from intelligence. “Syllogism is a comparison of two [terms] to a third, from which comparison of those two there is a mutual connection so that they are either joined or disjoined” (*Syllogismus est comparatio duorum ad tertium, ex qua nascitur illorum duorum habitus inter se, ut vel nectantur, vel disolvantur*) (DCA 169). Here Vives shifts from talk of statements and their interrelations to talk of terms, for he compares the syllogism to a ratio of extremes with respect to a mean: whenever two things are related to a third they are related to each other. The principle is Euclid’s first axiom, and Vives illustrates the definition by discussing the proof that the two interior angles of an isosceles triangle are congruent. Thus, Vives assimilates his concept of congruence (*congruitas*) to

that in ancient mathematics. He further analyzes the components and general rules of syllogism. In this he speaks of “major,” “minor” and “middle” terms (*major, minor, medium*), of the “extremes” of the statements (that is, subject and predicate), and of “direct” and “indirect” inferences. These terms are standard scholastic vocabulary for analyzing syllogisms. He gives as well alternative names for the same units from the writings of Martianus Capella, Cicero and Quintilian. It is remarkable that Vives, having railed against the scholastics for overburdening students with “useless distinctions and rules,” saddles his readers with five different nomenclatures for the same simple items.

Vives concludes this book with an exposition of each of the 18 valid forms of the categorical syllogism. He admits that he is adopting the vulgar (scholastic) names for each of the syllogistic forms: namely, Barbara, Darii, Celarent, Ferio, Fapesmo, Darapti, Datisi, Fapello, Baroco, Felapton, Ferison, Disamis, Ferisco, Bocardo, Camestres, Baroco, Cesare, Festino. He illustrates each one and gives a brief explanation (DCA 171–175). He gives the reasons for classifying these into moods and figures and describes the process of reduction. Vives next discusses the interpretation of certain words with respect to their effects on syllogistic reasoning. He takes up “always” (*semper*), “never” (*numquam*), “sometimes” (*aliquando*), “also” (*etiam*) and “sometimes not” (*aliquando non*), “possible” (*possibile*), “impossible” (*impossibile*) and “necessary” (*necessario*) (DCA 177–179). He illustrates each with appropriate examples and shows how they fit into a syllogistic system based on universal and particular sentences. Next, he assays syllogisms with singular terms, multiple terms and comparative and superlative terms. He tells how to “reduce” an enthymeme to syllogistic form and how to discover the syllogistic middle term to prove or disprove a thesis. Finally, he takes up specious syllogisms (*pseudonemus*) that follow from self-reflexive sentences such as “This statement is false,” Epimenides the Cretan’s utterance that all Cretans are liars, and several others. In all of these cases Vives observes that one of the sentences that leads to paradox is “profligate” (*profligatio*) because, he says, “Words, as instruments, refer to other things and not to themselves” (*Sed harum omnium quaestionum una est profligatio, quoniam verba, sicut instrumenta, aliis rebus accommodantur, non sibi...*) (DCA 182–184). Vives’s claim is patently false, for words can refer both to other things and to themselves. This linguistic difference is the basis for the scholastic distinction between formal and material supposition. By denying this difference, Vives brushes aside a major crux of disputation among the scholastics but ignores a common way to solve the paradoxes.

Vives endorses syllogistic and apparently believes that it has great utility in reasoning about questions in science, morals and other fields where universal and particular statements are the coin of the realm. The *De tradendis disciplinis* stresses the field of probable argumentation that is central to rhetoric, and this is the subject matter of one tract of *De artibus*, namely, *De instrumento*

probabilitatis. As Vives notes, the discoverer (*inventor*) is the one who knows how to compose arguments and to prove theses that are plausible—that is, true for the most part. This book offers various strategies of argumentation based on the “topics” (*loci*) that Vives calls “instruments” (*instrumenti*) (DIP 86). These are the traditional predicables, namely, genus, species, difference, property and accident. To these he adds whole/part, conjugates, definition, inherent property, action, cause, end, effect, place, time and so on. Like most humanists Vives treats the topics as “places” or “starting points” for forensic composition, the part of rhetoric called “discovery” (*inventio*). Finally, he discusses authority and how to use it in argumentation. This material is especially important for Vives who in several works appeals to the authority of sacred scripture.

Conclusion

Standing back from Vives’s *De artibus*, we can discern in its eight books the pattern of topics covered in Aristotle’s *Organon* as well as the scholastic manuals that Vives and other humanists had made light of. The *De explanatione cuiusque essentiae* (DE) analyzes terms by means of the categories and predicables as found in Aristotle’s *Categories*. *De censura veri in enuntiatione* (DCE) examines the nature of sentences and their logical implications as in Aristotle’s *On Interpretation*. *De censura veri in argumentatione* (DCA) lays out the rules of syllogistic argumentation as in *Prior Analytics*. *De instrumento probabilitatis* (DI) canvases rules of dialectical reasoning as expounded in the *Topics* and exemplified in many classical works such as those of Cicero and Quintilian. *De disputatione* (DD) examines additional forms of dialectical reasoning and profiles the sophist. Unlike Aristotle’s *On Sophistical Refutations*, however, it offers no guidelines for responding to fallacious argumentation. Presumably, attention to proper usage of classical Latin is sufficient to prevent fallacies and sophistries in philosophy, science and everyday reasoning. *De prima philosophia* (DP three books) introduces topics in metaphysics and the philosophy of nature. It addresses several themes that arise in Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*, *De Anima*, *Physics* and *Metaphysics*.

Aside from his attack on sophistry in *De causis corruptarum artium*, Vives identifies and even endorses major tenets of scholastic logical theory. At one point he remarks, “I do not disapprove this [scholastic] division [of modal propositions] so much as their definition of it.”¹⁹ And later, “For in fact these men retain certain elements of the right method even now, but in degenerate form; so that if they were to be shown the true and better things, they would

¹⁹ Vives tr. Guerlac 1979: 129.

easily recognize and assent to them.”²⁰ In Book III, Chapter Five, Vives acknowledges that terms (*termini*) are the first sentential units that students learn, and he mentions signification (*significatio*) and two subdivisions of terms: namely, complex/non-complex and common/proper (G 119). While Vives employs traditional scholastic terminology here, he goes on to claim that the signification of parts of speech, namely, nouns, verbs, adverbs, signs of affirmation, negation and punctuation, is the proper subject-matter of grammar and not of dialectic (G 121). Accordingly, grammarians and not dialecticians should teach these materials. Similarly, Vives’s account of the sentence follows the grammatical tradition that calls it a “statement” (*enunciatio*) rather than the logical tradition that calls it a “proposition” (*propositio*).

Taking Paul of Venice’s *Logica Parva* as an example of a scholastic logic manual, the five tracts of *De artibus* devoted to logic compare in the following way. The background material on linguistic structure, the general definitions of word, sentence and argument in *De explanatione cuiusque essentiae*, *De censura veri in enuntiatione* and *De censura veri in argumentatione* cover materials respectively in Chapter One *Summulae*, Chapter Two *Suppositio* and Chapter Three *Consequentialiae*. In *De tradendis disciplinis*, Vives had already prescribed the equivalent of *Logica Parva* Chapter Four *De obligationibus*. *De censura veri in argumentatione* includes a section on *insolubilia*, the subject-matter of Chapter Five. *De instrumento probabilitatis* is devoted to proof; this tract compares to *Logica Parva* Chapter Six *De probationibus terminorum*. *De disputatione* defines disputation as “a comparison of arguments in order to prove or disprove something” (*Argumentorum ad aliquid probandum, aut improbadum comparatio*) (DD 68). This description applies to the material of *Logica Parva* Chapters Seven and Eight where the theses of Chapters One and Three are debated *pro et contra*.

These parallels show that Vives knows how scholastic logic is organized. His concept of signification (*significatio*) does not differ essentially from Paul of Venice’s in the *Logica Parva*. His distinction between signifying and co-signifying expressions is functionally the same as the scholastic distinction between categorematic and syncategorematic terms. While he adopts some of the language of supposition-theory and establishes truth-conditions for sentences of several kinds, he ignores other details of the theory. Noting the difference between conditionals and consequences, he recognizes the various species of *consequentialiae*; however, he does not offer a complete set of rules for determining their validity. Nor does he recognize their systematic connection with co-signifying terms. In the *Logica Parva* key syncategorematic terms are indices to the inferential possibilities of compound sentences. Vives is simply not interested in developing a logical calculus. His notion of proof (*probatio*)

²⁰ Vives tr. Guerlac 1979: 131.

is that of a rhetorician and not that of a dialectician. Although he elaborates truth-conditions for several kinds of sentence, he does not recognize formal proof procedures such as the *exponibilia*. Vives writes as a grammarian and a philologist; he uses the language of grammar and not of logic. Nonetheless, his erudite comments on the ancient origin of scholastic terms—for example, “categorematic/syncategorematic,” “ascent/descent,” “composite/divided sense,” “hypotheticals,” “insolubles”—provides a philological justification in the classics for their use. Far from a repudiation of scholasticism, Vives’s *De artibus* gives scholastic logic and dialectic a classical pedigree.

These points of common agreement should not be taken to suggest that Vives agrees entirely with scholastic logic.²¹ Scholastics define the form of a proposition by specifying its quality (affirmative or negative), quantity (universal, particular or singular) and the mode of “acceptance” or supposition of its signifying terms. Two propositions are of the same form if they agree in quantity, quality and supposition. Vives objects to this regimentation of language but gives no

²¹ Vives’s residual scholasticism is apparent in Richard Waswo’s attempts to prove that Vives was an “ordinary language” philosopher. According to Waswo, Vives embraced a humanism dominated by Valla’s “revolutionary theory” that “language is identical both with thought and with things” but was torn between that theory and his own conviction that, *Deus prohibens*, some scholastic theories were true. Waswo (1980: 595-609) states that Vives has a “reluctant awareness that all categories of thought are given by language. At every stage in the inquiry [the 20 books of *De disciplinis*] Vives finds himself having to interrogate words, their usage and their ever-problematic relation to experience. He does not like this situation, and he is not comfortable with this awareness. Again and again he insists that a philosopher (or a teacher) must pay the closest attention to the fullest range of nuances in the common use of words, only to say in the next breath that of course he mustn’t do too much of this, since his real business is with ‘things.’ Vives is thus led into many confusions, contradictions, and evasions, which have the collective result of making the exact contours of his new noetic map very difficult to identify.” Waswo repeats and elaborates substantially the same claims in *Language and Meaning in the Renaissance*. He finds in Vives only vacillation: “[Vives’s] intellectual ambivalence is deep, fundamental, and pervasive; it is in a sense the motivation of his entire program. And it proceeds, as I hope to show, from his attempt to follow in Valla’s footsteps and his unwillingness or inability to follow them far enough” (Waswo 1987: 117). Vives’s philosophy of language proves itself resilient and strongly resistant to Waswo’s reductionist interpretation of Valla’s legacy. Given that it will not square with Vives’s texts, Waswo does not re-examine his own reading of Valla. Instead he urges us to see Vives as a conflicted intellectual who failed to grasp the essential truth of his own time. When Vives is not railing against the scholastics and when he expounds his own philosophy of language, he clearly respects Aristotle’s principle that while languages differ among people, thought and things remain the same for all human beings. Moreover, with regard to truth Vives agrees with Aristotle and most other philosophers that things are prior to thought and that thought is prior to language, whether spoken or written. In other words, Waswo’s main thesis that language determines thought is just plain backwards.

definition of sentential form for statements (*enunciationes*). He is content with the grammarians' standard of grammatical correctness or congruity (*congruitas*). Regarding deduction, he stresses argumentation (*argumentatio*), the outward expression of reasoning, over argument (*argumentum*), the structure of reasoning. He is especially exercised over a major difference between the use of topics to discover argument (*inventio argumenti*) versus their use to assess argumentation (*judicium argumentationis*).²² Finally, Vives declares that "argumentation is rightly believed to operate through the figures and moods of the syllogism."²³ Vives disregards the reduction of syllogistic to *consequentiae* where syllogistic reasoning is regulated by modified topical rules. As we noted in the case of Valla who ignored the *consequentiae* altogether, Vives elucidates the formal aspects of inference, but he shows no interest in a system or calculus of rules to govern it. Thus, the legitimacy of *consequentiae* theory is a major bone of contention between humanists and scholastics.

In general Vives adopts Aristotle's three-tiered model for the analysis of language: words, sentences and arguments. This was also fundamental to the scholastic approach to language. In modern times, as we have seen, this model led to an understanding of language as compositional or combinatorial in which the elements of language, vowels and consonants, are systematically combined to generate the larger units, namely, words, sentences and arguments. These constitute the infrastructure of continuous narrative. By confining their interests to the grammatical structures of classical Latin (including grammatical syntax, lexicography and composition), both Valla and Vives miss a larger modern picture where logical structure—logical form, sentential connection and truth-conditions—are seen to pervade human languages.

Nonetheless, Valla and Vives are modern pioneers in descriptive grammar. They show how particular Latin constructions are condoned (or condemned) by classical Roman authors. They are interested in the philological origins of Latin words and phrases. Very well informed about the nature of classical Latin, they clarify and explain a language that they consider "perfect." They take for granted the undergraduates' command of Latin. They appear uninterested in the task of showing an undergraduate how to define a problem, prove or disprove a point, or maintain a thesis consistently in a language he barely understands. For that kind of pedagogical training, Vives himself recommends the scholastic obligation exercise. In contrast, scholastic writers such as Paul of Venice, Peter of Spain, John Buridan and others compose manuals that instruct students both in the structure of language and the practice of dialectic. Clearly, authors in the two traditions have different educational aims and different audiences. Valla and Vives compose treatises for the edification of classical literary scholars.

²² Vives tr. Guerlac 1979: 113.

²³ Idem.

Scholastic authors such as Paul of Venice and Peter of Spain write textbooks for university students who are in the process of learning university Latin.

Two extremes of interpretation have dominated Renaissance Studies. Vives's sophistical fulminations against scholastic "sophistry" lend credence to C.S. Lewis's rather extreme opinion that "in the field of philosophy Humanism must be regarded, quite frankly, as a Philistine movement: even an obscurantist movement. In that sense the New Learning created the New Ignorance."²⁴ On the other hand, Paul Kristeller's claims that the cavils of the humanists often represented "departmental rivalries, personal animosities, or intellectual jousts rather than a measured opposition of philosophies" need to be weighed in any assessment of Vives's mature philosophy.²⁵ Unlike Valla who was ignorant of the scholastic logic of his day, Vives completed a degree in the subject. Popular modern opinion that Vives rejected scholasticism altogether is confuted by Vives's use of scholastic terminology to analyze statements (*enunciationes*) and by his adoption of many logical principles that agree with scholastic rules. The humanist thesis, affirmed by both Valla and Vives, that classical Latin usage should be the norm for the discovery of truth is problematic, for it does not tell us which of the exemplary sentences of classical literature exhibit the infallible signs of truth. Classical grammarians knew that grammaticality alone does not define truth. A false sentence may be as well formed grammatically as a true one. Vives goes slightly beyond Valla by giving general truth-conditions for sentences of various forms, but he does not explain the figurative expression "to congrue" (*congruere*) which relates utterances to their object. So, in the last analysis, Vives does not provide an unequivocal account of sentential truth.

²⁴ Lewis 1954: 1.

²⁵ See above Introduction, n. 2, p. 1.

Chapter 6

Paul of Venice on Truth

The investigation of truth is in one way hard, in another easy. An indication of this is found in the fact that no one is able to attain the truth adequately, while, on the other hand, we do not collectively fail, but every one says something true about the nature of things, and while individually we contribute little or nothing to the truth, by the union of all a considerable amount is amassed.

Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, II

If humanists thought that they had discovered “the perfect language,” scholastics appear to have pursued the same elusive ideal. However, the idea of perfection raises difficulties for scholastic logic. By definition, a thing is “perfect” if it fulfills its purpose. But scholastic logicians rarely state the aims of their works and the purposes of several scholastic logic tracts have been called into question. How, then, could the language of scholastic logic be “the perfect language”? In “Why Don’t Mediaeval Logicians Ever Tell Us What They’re Doing? Or What Is This, A Conspiracy?” Professor Paul Spade assembles four “exhibits” to illustrate his perplexity over what the medievals were up to.¹ “We know quite a lot about the logic of this period. But what we too often don’t know is: *Just what did they think they were doing?*”² Despite 50 years of research on one of the best textual bases of modern scholarship, at the end of the twentieth century we were no closer to understanding what the medievals were doing, or thought they were doing, than we were at mid-century. Upon reflection Spade concludes, “Perhaps, as often happens with philosophical problems, the real source of the difficulty is not that we don’t know the answers to our questions but that we have the wrong ‘focus’ on things and are just asking the wrong questions to begin with.”³ He thus calls for reconsideration of the purpose of the various tracts of scholastic logic.

We may not be able to answer here all of the questions Professor Spade raises. However, we believe that a broader knowledge of the educational setting in which scholastic logic was studied may shed light on the purposes of questionable logic tracts. Before proceeding, several observations are in order. First, as he admits, Spade slightly exaggerates the problem. Several areas of scholastic logical theory have clear, well-established purposes. Second, some medieval logicians do tell

¹ Spade 2000. Unless indicated otherwise, quotations are from this article.

² Spade 2000: 2.

³ Spade 2000: 14.

what they are doing. Third, we believe that the tracts whose purposes are in doubt can be defined in relation to those that have a clear purpose. We hope, when these factors are taken into account, we will be able to support the claim that scholastic logic attained some measure of linguistic perfection.

The undisputed purpose of scholastic *consequentiæ* tracts is to instruct students in the theory and art of logical inference.⁴ Similarly, the *obligationes* tracts exercise students in the inferential maneuvers necessary to defend a thesis. The author of the *Logica Magna* states that “the subject matter of obligations is nothing more than the subject matter of consequences proceeding in a more subtle manner.”⁵ The primary purpose of obligations in the *Logica Parva* is to teach students the art of defending a thesis.⁶ The *insolubilia* and *sophismata* tracts follow the tradition of Aristotle’s *Sophistici elenchi* and provide rules for responding to insolubles and sophisms. Tracts whose purpose is problematic are: supposition (*suppositio*), proof (*probatio*), particularly the proof-procedures of exposition (*expositio*) and resolution (*resolutio*), and, for some, obligations (*obligationes*).

Research on the history of vernacular languages in the medieval and renaissance periods has brought to light new evidence that is relevant to defining the purpose of scholastic logic texts. Students matriculating at the university spoke primarily their own native vernaculars, and judging alone from the wide range of Italian dialects, these came in many varieties and flavors. Those languages—Italian, French, Spanish, German, English and so on—were “mother tongues” learned at home and considered “natural” languages.⁷ Prior to

⁴ See, for example, Boh 1982: 300–315; King 2001: 115 ff.

⁵ “[M]ateria obligationem non est nisi materia consequentiarum stilo subtiliori procedens ...” (Paul of Venice 1988: 33). Spade has questioned this interpretation for the reasons that authors holding the same theories of consequences have different obligation rules and the *propositiones impertinentes* that are part of *obligatio* exercises are not covered by *consequentiæ* rules. In defending a thesis a respondent must be able to decide whether a sentence proposed by the opponent is logically related to the initial sentence (the *positum* or *depositum*) or not. To know what falls under *consequentiæ* rules and what does not is part of the exercise. Professor Ashworth (1974: xiii) also reviews several definitions of obligations. See also Sinkler 1992: 475–493. For a recent catalog of interpretations of obligations, see Yrjönsuuri 1994: 1–35.

⁶ The initial thesis which is proposed by the proponent (*opponens*) and admitted by the respondent (usually a student) in an exercise or examination may be either affirmed in a position (*positio*) or rejected in a deposition (*depositio*). Because it closely resembles a cross-examination exercise, the *obligatio* very likely originated in the legal tradition. Just as there is great variety of cross-examination methods, there is a great diversity among types of obligations.

⁷ The terms “natural” and “artificial” are variously defined. In modern philosophy of language, “natural language” differs from “artificial language” as languages used in ordinary

the sixteenth century they had no formal grammar, standardized orthography or conventions of punctuation. They were “oral” languages primarily spoken and only occasionally written down. Latin was considered an “artificial” language because its syntax had to be learned in school, and in addition to being spoken it existed in the written medium. How did these diverse linguistic worlds come together?

Most scholars have assumed that students learned Latin in elementary school and in the grammar course that was part of the trivium.⁸ Unfortunately, recent research on language instruction presents a more complex picture. Primary and secondary school preparation in Latin varied in content and quality, and students received at best an introduction to the language.⁹ They came to the university speaking primarily their native vernaculars. Freshmen read Donatus’s *Ars minor* and the *Ianua*, a medieval compilation of Priscian’s *Institutiones*. Intermediate students studied Alexander de Villedieu’s *Doctrinale*, a popular verse grammar. Grammar classes were devoted to a narrow range of topics. They covered the syntax of nouns and verbs, adjectives and adverbs, and devoted a good deal of time to lexicography and style. Courses gave basic instruction in Latin “orthography with letters, prosody with syllables, etymology with words and syntax with sentences.”¹⁰ Despite its importance, Latin syntax was not a popular subject to teach, and grammars included little of the complex logical syntax required for advanced studies. To bridge the gap between their native

conversation differ from the formal languages of logic—for example, Frege’s *Begriffsschrift*. In the Middle Ages “natural languages” were those learned from infancy but without a grammar and formally unteachable. By contrast, Latin was an “artificial language.” Again, in the later Middle Ages spoken and written Latin was regarded as “artificial” compared to the “natural” language of thought.

⁸ For example, Kristeller 1984: 8–9.

⁹ For pre-university British grammar schools, see: Moran 1984: 36–62; Orme 2006: 339 ff. For university-level grammar studies in medieval England to 1500, see: Cobban 1988, 1999: 21 ff. For pre-university grammar studies in Italy, see Black 2001; Grendler, 1989, 1995, 2002. Carlsmith (2010) examines the extent and nature of grammatical studies in the Venetian Republic where the majority of *Logica Parva* manuscripts were produced. His introduction reviews earlier work on the history of education in the Renaissance. Summarizing her study of late medieval grammar, Moran (1984: 39) writes: “After beginning with the *Donat* and the basic grammatical rules, the grammar scholar proceeded to ‘making Latins’ with the aid of various *vulgaria*, dictionaries, and more complex grammars, from there turning to the reading and writing of Latin verse and to disputations. The result should have been to produce scholars who could read and speak a fluent ‘bastard’ Latin which, although highly anglicized in syntax and vocabulary, was sufficient for both ecclesiastical and secular administrative purposes, and who could probably write the same administrative Latin in a very practical, legible cursive hand.”

¹⁰ Percival 2004: 69. For review of the medieval background and the rise of speculative grammar, see Rosier-Catach 2010: 196–219.

languages and university Latin, students needed an intermediate language that they could translate into their own vernaculars. Research on the theory and practice of translation in the medieval and renaissance periods has grown over the last decade.¹¹ Most scholarship has focused on works by professional translators who already knew both the source and target languages—that is, Latin and the vernaculars. Few scholars have investigated the transition that students made from illiteracy to eventual command of university Latin.¹²

The medieval university student was in a situation comparable to that of the foreign student in America today who studies English as a Second Language (ESL courses). Because he lacks a grammar for his own language, however, he more nearly resembles Donald Davidson's "radical translator" or field linguist. He has only a superficial introduction to Latin and few bilingual resources. He learns the new language by listening to his professors and interlocutory exchanges with his fellow students. He notes the circumstances in which Latin words are used and relies on spoken responses, gestures, and observations about the local environment to discern their meaning. By translating them into his own vernacular he comes to know the truth-conditions of a number of representative Latin sentences. These, in turn, form a core of statements interconnected by logical rules and are the basis of his eventual command of Latin. When the linguistic needs of students are taken into account, scholastic tracts on logic may be seen to serve a dual purpose: instruction in logic as well as training in the syntax and semantics of university Latin.

This chapter has three parts. Part I reviews the grammatical resources available to university students in the late medieval and early modern period. Part II introduces two models of translation, Rita Copeland's theory based on H.G. Gadamer's hermeneutics and Donald Davidson's theory of radical translation. Part III shows how the *Logica Parva* serves not only as an introduction to logic but also as a kind of translation manual for university students.

I Linguistic Resources

In the modern world of learning it is easy to lose sight of the practical aims of the medieval classroom. Charles Briggs states these succinctly:

- (1) to understand, transmit, and remember the *dicta*, *rationes*, and *sententiae* of a discrete, though by no means small, body of authoritative texts; and (2) to learn a set of discursive practices that together could be used in one's profession, be that

¹¹ Gentzler 1993.

¹² France and England are exceptions. See Lusignan 1987; Hunt 1991: Vol. I, 433.

as preacher, pastor, lawyer, physician, bureaucrat, or courtier. This Latin was clear, straightforward, and precise, but rarely was it elegant.¹³

However modest this goal may seem to us today, it was formidable in relation to the preparedness of the students: “First, it must be stressed that all scholars of the later Middle Ages were both *laici* and *illiterati* when they began their studies. Most spent their formative years in a largely lay milieu, and throughout their lives most would continue to have significant interaction with layfolk.”¹⁴ To know Latin was essential for a university education and major effort was devoted to learning it. As a learned language, Latin represented a world very different from that of the vernaculars. In her study of reading in the Middle Ages, Suzanne Reynolds notes, “It is crucial to realize that the alphabet the *puer* learns is not the alphabet of the mother tongue—French or English—but the alphabet of Latin. In other words, even at its very earliest stages, learning to read means learning to read a foreign language.”¹⁵ Reviewing the elementary school texts, Robert Black comes to a similar conclusion: “The evidence for an entirely Latinate reading syllabus in fourteenth and fifteenth century Italy, therefore, seems conclusive.”¹⁶ It is remarkable that this curriculum did not include translation of Latin into the vernaculars. Black “is certain that the vernacular was not used at what must seem to us as the most obvious point in the curriculum: the elementary stages of learning to read. All surviving elementary reading texts from Italy before 1500 are in Latin.”¹⁷ Black clarifies the difference between Latin and the vernaculars:

[In] the middle ages and early Renaissance, Latin was regarded as an artificial, created, unchanging language, an *ars* suitable for teaching whereas the vulgar languages were regarded as changeable, unstable, and literally as forms of babble, learnt naturally but formally unteachable. Only with the triumph of humanist Latin as itself a natural, historically changing language in the sixteenth century could it become conceivable to teach fundamental language skills in the vernacular medium.¹⁸

Two manuscripts from the late fifteenth century signal a shift from grammars exclusively Latin to grammars that use vernaculars to teach Latin. “In both these works one is nearing the point at which the predominant language in teaching

¹³ Briggs 2003: 99–111, esp. 102–103.

¹⁴ Briggs 2003: 100.

¹⁵ Reynolds 1998: 8

¹⁶ Black 2001: 43–44.

¹⁷ Black 2002: 289.

¹⁸ Black 2001: 42. See also Rizzo 2002 on the vernacular tradition in Italy.

Latin would not be Latin but the vernacular—a development which would become pronounced in the sixteenth century.”¹⁹

If vernaculars were not used to teach elementary Latin in Italy, Britain presents an entirely different picture. Tony Hunt’s research on *glossalia* in medieval Latin school texts demonstrates that from the twelfth century onward French and English were routinely used to clarify and translate material in Latin texts. “The juxtaposition of Latin and vernacular which characterizes almost every page of teaching material edited in the present study leaves no room for doubt: schoolmasters in medieval England explained difficulties to their pupils in both French and English. This is only just receiving formal acknowledgement by historians.”²⁰ More recently, Nicholas Orme has studied the “vulgaria”—bilingual texts with English and Latin sentences set out together as school exercises.²¹ As the vernaculars came into greater use, bilingual texts exhibited two kinds of translation.²² Intralingual translation expanded and simplified technical or abstruse matters in order to make them easier to understand. Interlingual translation transferred material from the learned language—that is, Latin—to the mother tongue. For speakers of a romance language such as Italian, one scholar has argued that the transition from Latin to the vernacular was not translation in the modern sense but rather intralingual transposition (in French, “*transposition intralingual*”).²³ Since the *Logica Parva* originated in the British school tradition, these practices are relevant to explaining some peculiar aspects of the texts that have long perplexed scholars.

Keith Percival’s research on university education in this period clarifies a notable paradox about language instruction:

[W]hen educational institutions expanded their intellectual scope in the High Middle Ages, the demand for effective grammatical instruction grew: lectures in the newly established universities were conducted in Latin, and the technical literature of the two lay professions, medicine and law, was likewise in Latin. In these circumstances, the ability to express oneself fluently in that language was a prime necessity ... Grammar was, therefore, not merely the gateway to the other liberal arts; it was the foundation of the whole educational edifice. It is important to emphasize that the dominant position of Latin instruction in the curriculum

¹⁹ Black 2001: 170.

²⁰ Hunt 1991: Vol. I, 33. Reynolds (1996: 154) sees the gloss as bridging the gap between the linguistic difficulty of the text and the varying degrees of illiteracy.

²¹ Orme 2006: 109–118.

²² The following definitions are based on Briggs 2003: 99.

²³ Buridant 1983: 119.

persisted throughout the Renaissance and was, if anything, further reinforced by the prestige of the *studia humanitatis*.²⁴

Given the importance of Latin grammar for a command of the language, the history of instruction in that discipline is not reassuring. Percival finds the general attitude toward grammar strangely ambivalent. It was lauded as the foundation of the liberal arts but was, after all, an “irksome school subject and could, therefore, be thought of as a puerile pursuit unsuitable for an adult...”²⁵ There is some attention paid to composition, but there is plainly little instruction in what we call the syntax of language. Aldo Scaglione’s history of composition theory gives a similar account for this period.²⁶ Teaching Latin syntax to students who spoke a variety of vernaculars was especially challenging because those languages had no formal grammars. There was no uniform orthography or syntax. Hence there was no basis for comparing the structure of university Latin with the structures of vernacular languages.

Percival finds a similar pattern of Latin instruction in the Renaissance. Despite their commitment to restoring the ancient classics, the humanists made few improvements over medieval methods of grammar instruction. Anxious to engage students in reading classical literature and opposed to formalistic grammar, they did not emphasize syntax. “[T]hey made a point of getting their students past the technical part of grammar as quickly as possible and into the more interesting activity of reading authors and composing their own Latin.”²⁷ Humanism altered grammar instruction in several ways:

- (1) [T]he humanist grammarians trimmed the grammatical curriculum rather drastically. Indeed, not only was the course of study skimpier as regards coverage, but the intellectual content of the discipline was also watered down.
- (2) The grandiose attempt of the scholastic grammarians to transform grammar into a demonstrative science, an attempt that had culminated around 1300 in the treatises on the modes of meaning [*De modis significandi*], was abandoned.
- (3) [Concerning the validation of grammatical rules, the humanists] reinstated the principle that a rule is valid if it accords with the usage of classical authors. Ancient usage was, thus, the final court of appeal, not the prescriptions of grammarians, either ancient or modern.²⁸

²⁴ Percival 2004: II, 307.

²⁵ Percival 2004: II, 309.

²⁶ Scaglione 1972: 126 ff.

²⁷ Percival 2004: II, 310.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Alexander Hegius in the 1480s wrote his *Invectiva in modos significandi*.

Significantly, however, Hegius does not debate with the modistic grammarians on their own ground, and the same must be said of subsequent humanist critics of modistic grammar, such as Erasmus and Juan Luis Vives. The humanists had, it must be admitted, a completely untheoretical approach to grammar, if by theory we mean an explicitly formulated system of general principles independent of the specific facts to be accounted for.²⁹

Black reaches a similar conclusion. “[F]or renaissance grammar, as elsewhere, facts are at odds with preconceptions. If the humanists were revolutionaries in the schoolroom, it was not in their formal grammar teaching.”³⁰

To sum up, students matriculating in the universities of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance had, at best, an introduction to elementary school Latin. University grammar courses emphasized vocabulary, prosody and style, with the aim of teaching students composition. But it did not drill them in the rigors of syntax and semantics necessary for advanced coursework. It is one thing to read Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy* and quite another to comprehend his *De topicis differentiis* or his *In Ciceronis topica*. For that kind of study, training in scholastic logic was indispensable. Lessons on signification (*significatio*) and supposition (*suppositio*) reinforced instruction in the grammar of nouns, verbs and their modifiers. Practice in the construction of simple, complex and compound sentences in logic sharpened students’ skills at composition. Exercises in syllogistic, the *consequentiae* and dialectical argumentation further developed their ability to compose narratives. If logic nurtured students’ competence in all of these areas of grammar, logic and grammar enjoyed a much closer relationship than has been previously recognized.³¹ In the next two sections of this chapter we propose to show how truth-theory brought the two disciplines together.

²⁹ Percival 2004: II, 311.

³⁰ Black 2001: 125.

³¹ Keith Percival (1982: 813) makes a similar observation: “It is worthy of remark that while the humanist teachers reduced the grammatical baggage to the minimum in order to facilitate and hasten their students’ initiation into classical literature, they nonetheless retained the essential features of the system of logical syntax they had inherited from the immediate past.” For the influence of logic on grammar, see Rosier-Catach 2010: 196–219.

II Two Models of Translation

Students came to the university from a variety of backgrounds and spoke a plurality of vernaculars and dialects.³² In time, usually two years, they became bilingual. Since they continued to speak their native vernaculars while learning Latin, translation between the languages was essential to their academic progress. How did translation serve the process of language-learning? Rita Copeland has published an important study of translation in the Middle Ages.³³ She traces the history of translation and proposes a model of interpretation based on the hermeneutics of H.G. Gadamer. She provides new starting points for explaining professional translation where a translator already knows both the source language (Latin) and the target languages (the vernaculars). Where Copeland says nothing about the role of translation in language-learning, Davidson's theory of radical translation makes translation an integral part of the process.³⁴ Because of their relevance to the learning of Latin in the Middle Ages we will review both theories in the following order: (a) Copeland's hermeneutic translator, (b) Davidson's radical translator.

Rita Copeland

Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts gives a useful history of translation practices from ancient Rome to the Renaissance and proposes a new model of interpretation to explain the practices of medieval translators. Tracing the ancient rivalry between grammar and rhetoric for control of the translation process, she shows that Roman translation from Greek to Latin was dominated alternately by grammar and rhetoric. The lines between grammar and rhetoric were blurred in the patristic period when grammar's narrative function became rhetorical and grammarians began to expound on the nature of classical culture. A rhetorized grammar influenced the medieval commentary tradition that studied source texts in their historical circumstances. This included knowing an author's intention, the role of allegory and the use of paraphrase. The commentary tradition gave rise to translation practices that fell within two extremes: "primary" translation

³² Keith Percival has discussed the rise of vernaculars in the grammatical tradition of the medieval and early modern periods. See Percival 2004: I, 231–275, esp. 260 ff.

³³ Copeland 1991.

³⁴ Davidson 1984; Davidson and Harman 1975. Useful commentaries on Davidson's work: Evnine 1991; Ramberg 1989; Wheeler 2003; Malpas 1992, esp. Ch. 2. Also, Norris 1989; Preyer, Siebelt and Ulfig 1994; Lepore 1986. For critical discussion of Davidson and alternative approaches to truth, see Künne 2003; Hallett 1988: Ch. 13. For the influence of Davidson's work on literary theory, see Dasenbrock 1989, 1993.

remained close to traditional exegesis; “secondary” translation appeared to be exegetical but in fact generated new original works.³⁵ Finally, in the Renaissance rhetoric came to dominate the field, and translations from Latin to the vernaculars were notable for their eloquence.

Where grammar was a theoretical discipline, rhetoric was a practical art because it related a speech to an audience in a particular time and place. Grammar emphasized structure and form; rhetoric stressed function and action. Cicero and Quintilian respected grammar but claimed that the rhetorician was better equipped than the grammarian to interpret ancient texts. Grammar and rhetoric respectively supported the conventional distinction between “literal” and “non-literal” (also “literal/free,” “strict/loose”). The former saw translation from Greek into Latin as “metonymic” (*ennaratio*) that was continuous with the Greek texts. The latter regarded translation as a new product of discovery (*inventio*) where the translation became an artifact in its own right and then displaced the original.

Professor Copeland’s primary purpose is not to give a history of translation but to define the place of vernacular translation within the fields of rhetoric and hermeneutics.³⁶ She focuses on rhetoric *per se*, rhetorical grammar and interpretation theory. Translation (*translatio*) was a species of interpretation (*interpretatio*) in the Middle Ages, and Copeland elaborates a new model of interpretation based on Gadamer’s hermeneutics. Just as Roman and medieval thinkers sought to recover the learning of the past, Gadamer is concerned to rehabilitate historical texts. The armature of his theory is a principle of “understanding” that enables a translator to mediate between an historical source text and its modern interpretation. “Understanding” includes a complex set of epistemic functions such as knowing the language of the source text, the circumstances of its production and the history of its reception. Contrary to Enlightenment ideals of impersonal “objectivity,” Gadamer encourages the interpreter to admit his prejudices and prejudgments as essential in the translation process. He rejects speculation about author intention and ignores altogether conceptions of truth from formal logic. In the final stage of the translation process an interpreter must “apply” his understanding of the original text to the circumstances in which he lives. Copeland relates this component of Gadamer’s method to the realm of practice and in particular the art of rhetoric. Just as the rhetorician crafts his speech to appeal to a given audience, the interpreter tailors his translation for a particular readership. Michel Foucault’s influence is evident as Copeland explores the relations between translation and political power. Vernacular translations vie with source texts for authoritative status. A successful

³⁵ Copeland 1991: 85.

³⁶ Copeland 1991: 3.

translation moves from a posture of subservience to a position of displacement of the original text. In time the translator supplants the author.

Though illuminating in many ways, Copeland's study has several limitations.

First, her history of translation concentrates on grammar and rhetoric and all but ignores the role of dialectic in the struggles for control over translation. From the earliest times, however, Roman grammarians recognized dialectic as a co-partner with rhetoric. Both Quintilian and Cicero treated dialectic on a par with grammar and rhetoric. Boethius's *De topicis differentiis* and his commentary on Cicero's *Topica* testify to the importance of dialectic in the rhetorical tradition and in the transmission of Greek learning. Finally, in the medieval university dialectic provided training in argumentation that was essential to rhetoric. Despite its prominence in all of these areas, Copeland's model of translation all but ignores the contribution of dialectic.

Second, Copeland endorses Gadamer's hermeneutics uncritically. She does not define terms that are crucial to his theory of interpretation—for example, “understanding.” Since “understanding” requires an interpreter to know both the source and target languages beforehand, it cannot explain the role of translation in the process of language-learning. Gadamer published *Truth and Method* in the heyday of logical positivism, and this fact may explain his silence about the semantical conception of truth. However, Alfred Tarski's semantical theory of truth has dominated discussions of truth-theory in the past century. Logic was an essential component of education in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. For that reason it is difficult to see how any account that ignores logic's contribution to translation theory and practice could be adequate.

Third, Copeland wants to show that “translation is a vehicle for vernacular appropriation of academic discourse.”³⁷ Since appropriation entails power Foucault's notion of empowerment and the displacement of authorship is an underlying theme of her study. She describes the competition for authority between vernacular translations and Latin originals. On the one hand, the medieval translator *qua* exegete respects the source text, but *qua* inventive rhetorician creates a new text authoritative in its own right. In time the vernacular translation eclipses the Latin original. Copeland recognizes the empowerment of those who already know both Latin and one or more vernaculars. She is silent about the majority of vernacular speakers who needed to translate in order to learn Latin. Copeland tells us a great deal about professional translation, but nothing about colloquial translation. She is interested in political empowerment but does not address it at the personal level—that is, how students became empowered by learning Latin. For these reasons her interpretation theory is designed for the literary elite. I should add that Copeland is not alone in this regard. Research on translation in the Middle Ages says very little about

³⁷ Idem.

how translation served the learning process.³⁸ The limitations of these studies demonstrate the need for a theory of interpretation that includes translation as part of language-learning.

Donald Davidson

Donald Davidson offers the only theory of interpretation that makes translation an essential part of language-learning.³⁹ Davidson's model of radical interpretation and radical translation explains how a previously unknown language can be learned within the framework of a truth-conditional semantics. Since Latin was, for all intents and purposes, a foreign language for those entering the medieval university, the typical student was in both senses a "radical" engaged in "radical interpretation" and "radical translation."

According to Davidson, a theory of language must answer the question first raised by Wilhelm von Humboldt: How can a speaker with finite means produce and comprehend an infinite number and variety of well-formed sentences? Davidson's answer follows from a distinctive vision of language. A natural language is akin to a formal system in which every sentence has a discernible logical form and a definite place within a totality of sentences. Sentences are composed of two basic kinds of expression. (1) Non-logical terms are words that represent ordinary content, the nouns and verbs, adjectives and adverbs that comprise the bulk of a language's vocabulary. (2) Logical terms are co-signs that combine with non-logical terms to structure sentences in particular ways—for example, words that indicate affirmation and negation, sentential connection, namely, "... and ...," "... or ...," "if ... then ...," "... if and only if ..." and quantification such as "all," "some"—as well as a quotation or naming device for citing a sentence declared to be true. As the two kinds of words come together in sentences, the logical words have uniform effects on the non-logical words. Logical expressions determine the logical forms of the sentences in which they occur. Conversely, the logical form of a sentence is what remains when the non-logical or content words are deleted. The logical form of a sentence determines its truth-conditions. Given well-recognized conditions for the truth or falsity of sentences of particular logical forms, sentences are decidedly true or false in virtue of their logical form. Here are some obvious examples of sentences whose truth or falsity is determined by their logical form. If a given sentence is true, its contradictory is false. A conjunctive sentence is true just in case all of its component sentences are true. If at least one of them is false, it is false. A disjunctive sentence is true when at least one of its members is true; it is false when all of them are false. A conditional sentence is false when

³⁸ Ellis and Beer (1989–2007) have encouraged research on medieval translation.

³⁹ Davidson 1984, esp. Essay 9.

its antecedent is true and its consequent is false; in all other cases it is true.⁴⁰ An equivalence relation between two sentences is true when both of its constituent sentences have the same truth-value. Otherwise it is false. From these examples we can see how “true” and “false” apply to sentences in virtue of their logical form. “To give the logical form of a sentence is to give its location in the totality of sentences, to describe it in a way that explicitly determines what sentences it entails and what sentences it is entailed by.”⁴¹ The logical constants are also indices of the substitutions and inferences permissible between sentences. We replace one sentence by another that is equivalent to it in truth or falsity. We know that one sentence follows from another by a rule that preserves truth or falsity. These logical norms govern all rational thought and discourse. While names for them vary from language to language, the logical constants and their effects on reasoning are invariant and not defined by social convention.

The concept of truth is at the core of Davidson’s theory of language, yet he denies that truth can be defined. How, then, do we know what “truth” means? In “The Folly of Trying to Define Truth,” Davidson considers several traditional definitions—for example, correspondence, coherence, consensus—and finds them wanting because they attempt to reduce truth to elements apart from truth, and those factors, in turn, call for definition. Truth cannot be reduced to anything “more basic” than truth itself. For Davidson the predicate “... is true” is primitive. “Truth (in a given natural language) is not a property of sentences; it is a relation between sentences, speakers and dates.”⁴² We can only observe and describe its behavior in language, and by relating the sentences of a language to occasions of truth we are led to construct a theory.⁴³ The kind of theory that we construct is called a truth-theory for a given language. “A theory of truth [for a language], in contrast to a stipulative definition of truth, is an empirical theory about the truth-conditions of every sentence in some corpus of sentences.”⁴⁴ It is a body of sentences whose truth-conditions we have come to accept or believe. In ordinary conversation we interpret the statements of another speaker by

⁴⁰ This claim is true only where the conditional is understood truth materially. The “If... then ...” connective is read differently in many natural languages and systems of formal logic.

⁴¹ Davidson 1980: 140.

⁴² Davidson 1984: 43. As we will see, Davidson regards each “T-sentence” (one that conforms to Tarski’s Convention T) as a theorem in a theory of truth. He also leaves some room for correspondence: “Statements are true or false because of the words used in making them, and it is words that have interesting, detailed, conventional connections with the world. Any serious theory of truth must therefore deal with these connections, and it is here if anywhere that the notion of correspondence can find some purchase.”

⁴³ Davidson claims that “Tarski wasn’t trying to define *the* concept of truth—so much is obvious—but that he was *employing* that concept to characterize the semantic structures of specific languages” (Davidson 1996: 269).

⁴⁴ Davidson 1990: 309.

translating them into our own language and confirming or disconfirming them against the same kinds of conditions that we use to verify our own sentences. Similarly, in learning another language we translate foreign sentences into sentences of our own language and check them against truth-conditions that we are familiar with. In both cases, as we assemble a complement of sentences whose truth-conditions we understand, we grow in our command of a new language.

The idea of constructing a truth-theory for a language comes from Alfred Tarski who proposed such a theory for formalized languages.⁴⁵ Davidson modifies and adapts Tarski's theory to account for truth in natural languages.⁴⁶ For present purposes we set aside the formal requirements of such a theory and focus on its material requirements.⁴⁷ A materially adequate theory of truth must yield as consequences sentences of the following form:

S is true if, and only if, p

where S is a sentence and “p” is replaced by a sentence of the same form as S. Davidson names this schema “Convention T” and a sentence of this form he calls a “T-sentence.”

How does Convention T apply to ordinary sentences? Tarski's example is familiar:

“Snow is white” is true if, and only if, Snow is white.

Convention T defines the predicate “... is true” by stating on the right-hand side the truth-conditions of the sentence quoted on the left-hand side. A person uses the sentence replacing “p” (which sentence has the same form as S) to state

⁴⁵ Tarski 1983, 1944.

⁴⁶ See Davidson 1984.

⁴⁷ The formal requirements are many and complex, and while scholastic logic might meet many of them, it is not organized as a formal logistic system. Can the equivalence affirmed in Convention T be justified in scholastic logic? Aristotle supported the inference from the assertion of a sentence p to the statement that p is true. Also the *Logica Parva* rule “From one cause of truth to a sentence having that cause of truth is a valid inference.” In the *Logica Parva* the “cause of truth” is the “primary and adequate significate” of the proposition. “This proposition ‘You are a man’ is true because its primary or adequate significate that you are a man is true (*te esse hominem est verum*).” The “adequate significate” is also called the “customary significate.” The cause of the truth of “Socrates runs” is the same cause of truth of “‘Socrates runs’ is true”: namely, the adequate significate of the former sentence. This principle justifies the inference from the right-hand side to the left-hand side of Convention T. There is no formal rule that justifies the inference from the left-hand side to the right-hand side of Convention T. While Convention T is not stated as a formula in the *Logica Parva*, the functional relationship of equivalence between a quoted sentence whose terms are in material supposition and its unquoted counterpart whose terms are in formal supposition is exhibited throughout the *Logica Parva*. In this chapter I employ Convention T as a convenient platform for showing how and where translation enters the interpretive process. Ashworth (1974: 54 ff.) reviews early sixteenth-century views of the formula “P→T P”

something about an object and that object is as s/he says it is. It is assumed that the person who utters these sentences speaks truly; that is, s/he is not speaking ironically, mendaciously, fraudulently or dramatically. Ironists speak falsely to express a truth about themselves. Liars and frauds appear to speak truly but intend to deceive. An actor in a play utters words that an audience may take literally, but they do not hold the actor responsible for the words. So the definition assumes that the person who utters the sentence does so in good faith.

For example, in the T-sentence:

“Snow is white” is true if, and only if, Snow is white,

“Snow is white” is understood to be asserted by someone at a particular time and place where snow *is* white.

Tarski claims that his theory captures the classical conception of truth as a relationship of correspondence between thought and reality. At the very least Convention T expresses our intuitions about the way that “... is true” behaves in everyday language.⁴⁸ Tadeusz Kotarbinski was Tarski’s mentor. He believed that all talk of truth “is at bottom talk about persons thinking truly.” “In the classical interpretation, ‘truly’ [in ‘Jan thinks truly’] means the same as ‘in agreement with reality’ ... Jan thinks truly if and only if Jan thinks that things are thus and so, and things are indeed thus and so.”⁴⁹ Whether Tarski succeeded in formulating “the classical correspondence theory” is debatable, but his teacher’s influence on his theory is clear.

To see how Convention T serves language-learning, consider an imaginary conversation between Bob and Kurt. Bob speaks English and knows no German but wants to learn it. Bob hears Kurt utter sounds in German that appear to be

⁴⁸ Convention T states a material equivalence between two sentences. A statement of this form is true when both of its component parts have the same truth-value. In the case where both sentences are true, the equivalence is true. In a case where one of the sentences is false—for example, pointing to an elephant, I say “This animal is a crab”—the equivalence is also true. The reason: When the false sentence is placed in the frame of Convention T, the left-hand side would read “‘This animal is a crab’ is true.” This sentence is false because it says that a false statement is true. Since both sides of the equivalence have the same truth-value, namely, false, the equivalence itself is true. It tells us that the two false statements are equivalent. Note that (1) Convention T is not a tautology—that is, a sentence true under any assignment of truth values. It is not because the sentences that flank the equivalence are at two different levels of language. The one on the left is stated in the object-language; the one on the right that gives its truth-conditions is in the meta-language. Here the meta-language includes the object language. (2) The semantical theory of truth does not tell us which statements in the language are true. As a logical theory, the most that it can do is clarify the conditions under which a determination of truth or falsity can be made.

⁴⁹ Kotarbinski 1966: 106–107. See also Künne 2003: 209 ff.

sentences. In a place where it is raining, Kurt says “*Es regnet*.” Bob hears this and several looks, gestures and observations later, he infers that this utterance means what he means when he says “It is raining.”⁵⁰ In other words, the weather conditions under which Bob says “It is raining” are the same as those under which Kurt says “*Es regnet*.” When these two sentences are placed in the frame of Convention T

“*Es regnet*” is true if, and only if, it is raining,

it is clear that they have the same truth-conditions and are, therefore, equivalent. Because they have the same truth-conditions, the sentence on the right also gives the meaning of the sentence on the left. In this case the expression “is true if, and only if” can be replaced by “means the same as.”⁵¹

“*Es regnet*” means the same as “It is raining.”

⁵⁰ Davidson’s description of the interlocutory process is reminiscent of St Augustine’s account of his own progress in learning language. “Then, I pondered in my memory: when they named anything, and when at that name they moved their bodies toward that thing, I observed it, and gathered thereby, that the word which they then pronounced was the very name of the thing which they showed me. And that they meant this or that thing, was discovered to me by the motion of their bodies, even by that natural language, as it were, of all nations; which expressed by the countenance and cast of the eye, by the action of other parts, and the sound of the voice, discovers the affections of the mind, either to desire, enjoy, refuse, or to avoid anything” (Augustine, *Confessions*, tr. Watts 1912: 1, vii).

⁵¹ Tarski’s definition of truth uses a meta-language sentence to define the truth-conditions of an object-language sentence. Davidson conceives of Convention T as essential to a theory of meaning no less than the theory of truth. Just as the truth of a sentence is determined by the truth-values of its component parts, the meaning of a sentence is determined by the meaning of its constituent parts. This insight leads him to see Convention T in a new way. Convention T showed us that if you replace “S” with a quoted version of a sentence, and “p” with an unquoted version of a sentence of the same form, you get a true sentence. Davidson’s new proposal is that Convention T can also give us the meaning of a sentence. Consider this example: “Snow is white” is true means that snow is white.

If substituting a sentence of the same form for S and p shows us anything about truth, this example seems to show us nothing new about meaning. For an English speaker, the sentence seems trivial because the sentence on the right adds nothing to the meaning of the sentence quoted on the left. Davidson modifies Convention T so that it can illuminate meaning no less than truth. He proposes that T-sentences have the same form as Convention T, but that the sentences represented by “S” and “p” need not be in the same language. This change enables Convention T to serve as a platform for defining the meaning of sentences and gives a new purpose to the theory of interpretation. In particular it offers a resource for the practice of translation (Davidson 1984: 24–25).

In Davidson's view, Bob has begun to construct a truth-theory for Kurt's German. The T-sentences whose truth-conditions an interpreter has come to accept or believe become theorems in a truth-theory for that language. Since they are theorems, all other sentences like them follow as well. Should Bob converse with others in the German-speaking community, he will likely discover that they too regard "*Es regnet*" as true when it is raining in the vicinity of its utterance. A speech community is defined by the fact that its members accept roughly the same truth-conditions for sentences of the same kind. By these means Bob obtains additional confirmation of his belief that "*Es regnet*" means what "It is raining" does in English. Obviously, Bob would need to acquire many more sentences and learn a great deal more about their interrelationships before he could be said to know German, but this example gives a glimpse of his first steps in learning a foreign language. As he continues to progress he will listen to Kurt or other German speakers as they utter sentences under observable conditions. When there is a match between the observable truth-conditions of German sentences and those of his own language, he will know that he has translated correctly. His knowledge of German develops as he commands an ever-increasing number of German T-sentences. Convention T is simply a convenient format for tracking Bob's progress. He (1) assumes the truth of his interlocutor's statement, (2) translates the original sentence into his own language, (3) finds a statement in his own language that has the same truth-conditions, (4) checks it against normal truth-conditions, and (5) if the truth-conditions for the two sentences match, he knows that he has correctly translated the German sentence into English. Within the frame of Convention T, Bob has translated the right-hand side into his own language and in so doing has given the truth-conditions (expressed in English) for the quoted German sentence on the left-hand side.

Since any language may yield an infinite number of T-sentences, it is necessary in learning a second language to gain command of a core of T-sentences that embody salient logical features of the language.⁵² Examples of sentences that are essential to the core: T-sentences that represent quantified statements, such as singular, particular and universal statements; T-sentences that represent compound statements, such as conjunctive, disjunctive and implicative statements; T-sentences that represent the other modalities, such as necessity and contingency, possibility and impossibility; T-sentences whose structure

⁵² "Since there is an infinity of T-sentences [satisfying Convention T or a variant] to be accounted for, the theory must work by selecting a finite number of truth-relevant expressions and a finite number of truth-affecting constructions from which all sentences are composed. The theory then gives outright the semantic properties of certain of the basic expressions, and tells how the constructions affect the semantic properties of the expressions on which they operate" (Davidson 1984: 70). Beyond their utility in learning a language, the selection of T-sentences is also important for theoretical reasons; for the truth-predicate is first defined for basic sentences and then defined recursively for compound sentences.

may call for special analysis, such as those expressing positive, comparative and superlative relationships. There is, of course, no fixed number or variety of statements that are required for learning a language. The quantity of factors will depend on the subject-matter and nature of the discourse. To interpret a short conversation with a neighbor about the weather requires fewer and less complex T-sentences than interpreting a report on nuclear reactor safety or a political debate in the *New York Times*.

Davidson's Principle of Charity enjoins the radical interpreter to regard the statements people make about their familiar surroundings as *prima facie* true.

I propose that we take the fact that speakers of a language hold a sentence to be true (under observed circumstances) as *prima facie* evidence that the sentence is true under those circumstances. For example, positive instances of “Speakers (of German) hold ‘*Es schneit*’ true when, and only when, it is snowing” should be taken to confirm not only the generalization, but also the T-sentence, “‘*Es schneit*’ is true (in German) for a speaker x at time t if and only if it is snowing at t (and near x)”.⁵³

The Principle of Charity has precedents in the history of Western philosophy. Socrates assumed that his respondents spoke the truth. Participants in the “obligations” were required to admit at the start of the exercise any proposition that is logically possible—that is, does not entail a contradiction.⁵⁴ Where a sentence may be interpreted in more than one way, Paul of Venice favors the interpretation that makes it true.⁵⁵

In the past half-century Donald Davidson has addressed major issues in the philosophy of language. He has transformed the discipline and set language

⁵³ Davidson 1984: 153.

⁵⁴ The first rule of obligations in Paul of Venice's *Logica Parva* is: “*Omne possibile tibi positum est a te admittendum*” (Paul of Venice tr. Perreiah 1984: 214). Lorenzo Valla states as a rule, “Whatever is possible ought to be conceded,” and calls it “most absurd” (*absurdissimum*). (“*Hic te teneo. An ignoras preceptum esse philosophorum quidquid possible est id tanquam esse debere concedi?*”) (*Opera*, I, p. 1004). See Monfasani 1984: 190, n. 81. Paul of Venice and other scholastics would have agreed: the rule that Valla states is “most absurd.” However, Valla misstates, and apparently does not understand, the first rule of obligations. In an *obligatio* “admission” is not the same as “concession.” Only the initial proposition that opens the obligation is subject to “admission.” Thereafter succeeding statements are to be conceded, denied, doubted or declared irrelevant according to their truth-value in the context of the obligation. Valla's misunderstanding of this rule is another example of his ignorance of scholastic dialectic. Paul Spade reminds me that one variety of *obligatio* starts with a *positum* that is impossible. In this case the respondent would have to grant anything that followed from the *positum*.

⁵⁵ Paul of Venice tr. Perreiah 1984: 146, nos. [34], [35].

theory on a new course.⁵⁶ With the semantical theory of truth at the center of his project, Davidson offers new resources for explaining the meaning and truth of every sentence in a language. His amendments to Tarski's theory of truth clarify the relation between interpretation and translation. As the number of T-sentences in a truth-theory increases, the logical relationships between them multiply, and this expansion of discourse affects, in turn, the meaning of each sentence. A person's language builds incrementally sentence by sentence toward a unified whole. Thus, to know the meaning of a word one must use the word in sentences and know the truth-conditions of those sentences. To know the meaning of a sentence one must know the larger context in which it is stated. To identify a context one must know the language to which it belongs. To learn a language a person begins with elementary T-sentences whose truth-conditions he comprehends. With the expansion of his repertoire of T-sentences he comes to understand eventually any sentence that can be formulated in the language. Because it projects a vision of the unity of human language insofar as it embodies logical structure, Davidson's theory of language has been considered "holistic."⁵⁷

III Paul of Venice's *Logica Parva*

The *Logica Parva* is first and foremost a manual that taught thousands of students logic in Italian universities of the Renaissance.⁵⁸ It was also a means for students to gain access to the complex syntax and semantics of university Latin. We have published two commentaries on the logical content of the *Logica Parva*.⁵⁹ In the

⁵⁶ I have stressed the positive potential of Davidson's theory to explain a number of difficulties in scholastic logic. Davidson (1984: 51) was quite candid about the limits of his theory: "First, it is certainly reasonable to wonder to what extent it will ever be possible to treat language as a formal system, and even more to question whether the resources of the semantical method can begin to encompass such common phenomena as adverbial modification, attributive adjectives, of causality, of obligation, and all the rest. At present we do not even have a satisfactory semantics for singular terms, and on this matter many others hang."

⁵⁷ "To see the structure of a sentence through the eyes of a theory of truth is to see it as built by devices a finite number of which suffice for every sentence; the structure of the sentence thus determines its relations to other sentences. And indeed there is no giving the truth-conditions of all sentences without showing that some sentences are logical consequences of others; if we regard the structure revealed by a theory of truth as deep grammar, then grammar and logic must go hand in hand" (Davidson 1984: 61). See also Malpas 1992; Fodor and Lepore 1992.

⁵⁸ Book historians estimate the number of copies in an incunabular edition at 300–500. At an average rate of 400 copies, its 26 editions would have produced 10,400 copies.

⁵⁹ Paul of Venice tr. Perreiah 1984; ed. Perreiah 2002.

following paragraphs we will explain how that work supported the learning of university Latin. Professor Spade has called attention to the difficulty of defining the purposes of particular scholastic tracts, namely, those on supposition (*suppositio*), obligation (*obligatio*) and proof (*probatio*)—especially exposition (*expositio*) and resolution (*resolutio*). Since, as we have noted, the tracts on inferences (*consequentiae*), insolubles (*insolubilia*) and sophisms (*sophismata*) have well-established purposes, we will focus on those that are problematic.⁶⁰

The first chapter of the *Logica Parva* lays down some basic definitions and outlines a framework for the remaining seven chapters. It defines signification (*significatio*) as that property of a term whereby it represents something to the mind of a speaker, hearer, writer or reader. “Baf” or “Buf” awaken no thought in us; the terms “man” or “dog” immediately call something to the mind of an English speaker. Signifying terms divide into those that signify independently, categorematic terms, and those that signify only with other terms, syncategorematic terms. Categorematic terms fall within one of the ten categories, and each may be further classified according to the predictable relationships—genus/species, property, accident and so on. Syncategorematic terms both signify with categorematic terms and define the logical forms of sentences in which they occur. Thus, they have systematic effects on the truth-conditions of those sentences. Chapter I identifies the range of syncategorematic terms to be treated in detail. They include: signs of affirmation and negation, standard quantifying words (for example, “all,” “some” and singular terms such as “Socrates” or “this man”—pointing to one and only one individual; demonstratives “this,” “that”; relatives “who,” “which”; exclusives “only,” “alone”; exceptives “except”; sentential connectives “... and ...,” “... or ...,” “if ... then ...,” “... is equivalent to ...” and so on) as well as certain terms that were important for medieval science such as “whole,” “part,” “instant.”

A categorematic term (whether substantival, adjectival or adverbial) signifies just in virtue of its being a term. However, it cannot convey its signification of an object unless it is used by someone in a declarative sentence. The declarative sentence (*propositio*) as a bearer of truth or falsity is the centerpiece of every tract of the *Logica Parva*. In addition to being either affirmative or negative,

⁶⁰ In an article that summarizes over 35 years of research on the *insolubilia* literature and addresses “The Format and Purpose of Medieval Sophisms,” Spade (2010: 185–195) describes the medieval sophism as a platform for the discussion of theoretical issues in logic and the philosophy of language. Comparing their role to paradoxes discussed by Bertrand Russell and Gottlob Frege, he states: “In each case, there is a substantive philosophical point to be made, and the quoted sentence is merely the vehicle chosen for making it. So, too, with medieval sophisms. There is always a theoretical matter underlying their discussion, even if it is far removed from the truth or falsity of the sophism sentence itself. If one does not realize what it is, the sophisms can appear utterly inane.” Notably, Spade does not include sophisms among the medieval topics whose purpose he calls into question.

declarative sentences have one or more of six properties. They may be either true or false, possible or impossible, necessary or contingent. Of these properties “true” or “false” are the most frequent attributions. Chapter I states a basic definition of sentential truth. A categorical sentence is true if its primary and adequate significate is true. A categorical sentence is false if its primary and adequate significate is false. Example of the first, “You are a man,” of the second, “You are a donkey.” The primary and adequate significate is expressed in an accusative plus infinitive construction—for example, in the above case, “for you to be man” (*te esse hominem*).⁶¹ Later, Paul calls the adequate significate “the customary significate.”⁶² Adequate significates are also defined for propositions of the other modalities.

Finally, we offer a note about the vocabulary and specimen sentences that occur throughout the *Logica Parva*. The vocabulary needed to express logical properties and relationships—that is, the syncategorematic terms—is, of course, technical and students had to master it. The non-technical vocabulary, however, is notably sparse. Repeatedly, we find specimen sentences with the nouns “man,” “animal,” “Sortes” (that is, Socrates), “donkey,” “Brunellus,” and, occasionally, “God.” The variety of verbs is also sparse; the most common are “sits,” “runs,” “moves.” There is no reason in logic to limit the vocabulary to such a narrow range. There are good reasons in language pedagogy, however, to confine both the vocabulary and the specimen sentences to a small, manageable and familiar number of expressions. To the extent that language-learning involves translation of Latin sentences into the vernaculars it is important to keep words to a minimum and sentences as simple as possible. To repeat familiar words in sentences of different forms is not only important for language instruction: it is an efficient way to construct a truth-theory for a given language.

Supposition

Supposition (*suppositio*) is one of the most controversial topics in medieval logic. There is still no consensus about what the property of supposition is or what the theory of supposition was supposed to accomplish.⁶³ For many years I have questioned whether supposition is even a “theory” and have proposed instead

⁶¹ In general, a declarative sentence whose terms correctly signify things as they are is true. Affirmative sentences whose subject and predicate terms stand for (*supponunt pro*) the same are true; otherwise, they are false. “The same” is “the primary and adequate significate” of the proposition. Negative sentences whose subject and predicate do not stand for the same—that is, the primary and adequate significate—are true; otherwise they are false. Paul of Venice 1984 tr. Perreiah: 124.

⁶² Paul of Venice tr. Perreiah 1984: 255.

⁶³ Perreiah 1971.

that it is a system of notation for articulating the logical forms of sentences. Unlike Frege's *Begriffschrift*, a symbolic system for the written representation of concepts, supposition was used in oral disputation and was, therefore, a "Begriffssprache." Where Frege's notation was a system of *showing* logical structure, supposition was a system of *telling* or *describing* the logical form of sentences. Over the past quarter-century I have not seen anything to contradict that interpretation. On the contrary, Professor Bos has found a passage in Marsilius of Inghen that confirms it.

Supposition was invented in order to save the truth and falsity of propositions that are simultaneously conceded and negated. (*Suppositio est adinuenta propter salvare veritates et falsitates propositionum comiter concessarum et negatarum.*)⁶⁴

The operative verb "salvare" means literally "to save"; its synonyms are "servare," "to preserve," "to lay up," "to protect," and "conservare" "to keep." It does not mean "to rescue" as Novaes appears to believe.⁶⁵ The principal context in the Middle Ages where propositions were conceded and denied is, of course, dialectic. It has always been the job of the dialectician to concede or deny propositions. "To save" the truth or falsity of a proposition in a dialectical exchange is simply to record it accurately for future reference, and this is in fact how supposition works in the *Logica Parva*. Thus, supposition is a notational system for identifying and keeping track of the logical form of a sentence for the sake of future reference in the context of dialectical debate.

Since the rules of supposition are used to articulate the logical forms of sentences, they also point to a sentence's truth-conditions. Two scholarly practices have tended to obscure these aspects of supposition: (1) piecemeal study of the concept of truth and (2) segregated treatments of formal and material supposition. We will comment briefly on each of these in turn.

Piecemeal Treatment of Truth

Over the past half-century scholars have discussed truth largely in connection with the logical paradoxes. Truth-theory was brought in as an accessory to justify one or another proposal for "solving" the paradoxes.⁶⁶ Despite its importance for the entire field of logic and language, few have attempted to formulate

⁶⁴ Novaes 2005: 14.

⁶⁵ Idem.

⁶⁶ Spade 1975 examines a wide range of views on truth in relation to insolubles (*insolubilia*) and proof (*probatio*), including those in the *Logica Parva*, but he does not treat the topic of truth in the *Logica Parva* as a whole. Spade 1971: 1–18 and Spade 1981 discuss Tarski's Convention T in relation to insolubles.

a general account of truth in scholastic logic. This is understandable in part because scholastic logicians held different theories of truth. Nonetheless, some scholars have given general accounts of truth. For example, Gabriel Nuchelmans has written extensively on truth in many authors. In the case of Paul of Venice, however, he cites exclusively the *Logica Magna* attributed to Paul of Venice and all but ignores the *Logica Parva*, which differs markedly from the *Logica Magna*.⁶⁷ In what follows we offer an interpretation of Paul of Venice's views on sentential truth in the *Logica Parva*.

Segregated Treatment of Formal and Material Supposition

Supposition is a property of a categorematic term whereby what it signifies in a proposition is conveyed to an object or objects. Just how that conveyance comes about is of great importance. The *Logica Parva* divides supposition into formal or personal supposition and material supposition. These two kinds of supposition have been treated routinely as marking the difference between “using” (formal or personal supposition) versus “mentioning” a term (material supposition). This familiar gloss on the distinction works for casual reading, but its familiarity has led to a general neglect of systematic relations between material and formal supposition. This has obscured the larger picture where material supposition can serve as a referential or naming device that systematically relates expressions in material supposition to those in formal supposition.⁶⁸ Material supposition is the signification of a term that stands for itself or its like as a language sign. Formal or personal supposition is the signification of a term that stands for an individual or individuals. There are several species of formal supposition—for example, statements that are universal “All men are ...,” particular “Some men are ...,” and singular “Socrates is ...” While most theories do not divide *suppositio materialis* into species, the *Logica Parva* is an exception.⁶⁹ The *Logica Parva* replicates all of the species of *suppositio formalis* in *suppositio materialis*. This parallel system

⁶⁷ Paul of Venice tr. Perreiah 1984: Appendix. Also, Perreiah 1986: Chs 4 and 5.

⁶⁸ Only one scholar, Claude Panaccio (2004: 295–309), has discussed the idea of material supposition as a quotation device in a general theory of truth. Panaccio rightly criticizes Tarski's theory as unsuitable as a theory of truth for natural languages; however, he does not take into consideration Davidson's important revisions of the theory for that purpose. For example, Panaccio argues that Tarski's idea that a sentence taken materially “names” its like taken formally does not apply to medieval supposition. Davidson (1984: Ch. 6 “Quotation”) also objects to the proper name theory of quotation and offers several alternatives to it.

⁶⁹ Read (1999) explains this doctrine by claiming that Paul of Venice in the *Logica Magna* rejects Ockham's view that terms in material supposition are not significative. In the *Logica Parva*, Paul divides terms into “significative and non-significative” and places terms in material supposition in the latter group. However, he goes on to speak of a “material

means at least two things. First, Paul recognizes generalization over terms taken as language signs no less than over terms taken in the ordinary way to stand for persons or things. Second, Paul recognizes that every kind of sentence whose terms are taken in *suppositio formalis* can also be expressed as a sentence whose terms are taken in *suppositio materialis*. Thus, so far as the capacity to generalize over language signs is concerned, material supposition is just as broad as formal supposition. With universal material supposition one could generalize about all terms “man” in a language no less than about “all men.” With particular material supposition one could make a claim about particular terms, such as “Some term ‘man’ no less than about ‘some man.’” With singular material supposition one could make reference to a singular instance of a term, such as “This term ‘man’ no less than to this instance of the term ‘this man.’”

Although the material supposition of a term may be signaled by words that precede it, such as “this term” or “this proposition,” the *Logica Parva* is unique in recognizing the expression “*ly*” as “the most powerful” indicator of quotation.⁷⁰ Note that the rules of formal and material supposition apply to utterances or inscriptions of a conventional language, and not to units of a “natural” language such as those of a “mental language.”⁷¹ All supposition of terms in mental language is formal or personal. Thus, the *Logica Parva*’s system of material supposition is able to support functionally the kind of quotation that is essential to a semantical conception of truth.⁷²

In his famous article on the semantical definition of truth, Alfred Tarski cites a systematic relationship between material and formal supposition to elucidate Convention T. He describes a clear connection between a sentence with words taken in material supposition and a sentence with the same words taken in formal supposition. Commenting on his favorite T-sentence,

T: The sentence “snow is white” is true if, and only if, snow is white,

significate” for such terms. Read finds similar theories in Thomas Maulvelt and Marsilius of Inghen. See also Karger 1982: 331–343.

⁷⁰ “*Signa materialitatis sunt ista ‘ly’, ‘iste terminus’, ‘ista propositio’, ‘ista oratio’ et huiusmodi. Sed potissimum est ista vox ‘ly’*” (Paul of Venice tr. Perreiah 1984: 145). Roger Bacon (tr. Burke 1928: 87) noted, “[T]he article [*ly*] has the property of showing the truth of a thing; but this force does not appear in Latin, since it lacks the article. But it does appear in the Gallic tongue; and hence when they say in Paris, *li reis vient*, the article *li* designates the particular and actual king of such a place, since they are speaking of the king of France. This would not suffice to denote the arrival of the English king to the city of Paris. For no one would say of the English king’s coming to Paris, *li reis vient*, but would add something, *li reis de Engleterre vient*. Therefore the article alone suffices to designate the truth and property of the thing under discussion.”

⁷¹ For the relation of Latin to mental language, see n. 7, pp. 124–125.

⁷² Paul of Venice tr. Perreiah 1984: 143 ff.

Tarski states: “Employing the medieval logical terminology we could also say that on the right side the words ‘*snow is white*’ occur in *suppositio formalis*, and on the left in *suppositio materialis*.⁷³ Tarski’s use of the language of supposition is no mere historical flourish. His major professor, Tadeusz Kotarbinski, was among the first Polish scholars to compare scholastic logic to modern formal logic. Kotarbinski’s *Elements*, “a textbook for those preparing for the examination covering ‘the principles of philosophy’ in Polish universities,” explains linguistic ambiguity as the confusion of two kinds of supposition.⁷⁴ Tarski knew this book well: “[in] writing the present article I have repeatedly consulted [Kotarbinski’s *Elements*] and in many points adhered to the terminology there suggested.”⁷⁵

When Tarski borrowed the language of *suppositio* to explicate the differences between the left-hand side and the right-hand side of Convention T, he knew that supposition’s fundamental function is that of substitution of one expression for another. The sentence taken in material supposition substitutes for the sentence taken in formal supposition. When the former is called a true proposition (“... *est propositio vera*”), the latter is an ordinary sentence of the same form that gives its truth-conditions. Alternatively, when the truth-conditions of a sentence are satisfied, a quoted version of that sentence can be said to be “true.” Thus, Tarski concludes that the sentence on the right-hand side is equivalent to the sentence on the left-hand side.

⁷³ Recall Tarski’s criterion of material adequacy (Tarski [1935] 1983: 615; Tarski 1944: 341–375): “More precisely, I consider a definition of truth to be adequate with respect to a given language if it implies all statements of the type: ‘*x* is true if and only if *p*’, where ‘*p*’ is to be replaced by any sentence of the language under investigation and ‘*x*’ by any individual name of that sentence.”

“*S*’ [a quoted sentence of determinate form] is true in [a language] *L* if, and only if, *p* [an unquoted sentence from *L* of the same form as ‘*S*’],”

T: “**The sentence ‘snow is white’ is true if, and only if, snow is white.**”

Tarski’s allusion to supposition in the exposition of Convention T suggests that supposition is similar to a fundamental principle in his theory of truth, namely, “satisfaction.” Davidson (1984: 47) comments on the role of satisfaction in the determination of truth: “The entities that are satisfied are sentences both open and closed; the satisfiers are functions that map the variables of the object language on to the entities over which they range—almost everything, if the language is English.” If we construe most specimen sentences in the medieval texts as closed, and regard the syncategorematic terms as functions and the categorematic terms as variables of the object language, the entities over which they range are the *significata* of the propositions in which they occur. “Satisfaction” would then be a relation between signifying terms and their *significata* in a true sentence.

⁷⁴ Kotarbinski 1929: Preface to the first edition.

⁷⁵ Künne 2003: 209 observes that “[Tarski] will keep on referring to this book for many years.”

That supposition is used to express truth-conditions is evident in the *Logica Parva*'s chapter on Suppositions where truth-conditions for basic categorical forms are defined.

“Every man is animal” is true if, and only if, every man is animal.

The sentence on the right is proved by showing that the following conjunction is true:

“This₁ is a man and this₁ is animal *and* This₂ is a man and this₂ is animal *and* so forth for all men and animals. Therefore, every man is animal.”

In this case the universal quantifier governs a term that applies to all relevant men and animals. Again,

“Some man is animal” is true if, and only if, some man is animal.

The sentence on the right-hand side is true if at least one of the following disjunctions is true: This₁ man is animal *or* This₂ man is animal *or* This₃ man is animal.” Otherwise it is false, and its contradictory is true, namely, “No man is animal.” Similar definitions of truth-conditions could be carried out for the remaining types of categorical statement. It is plain to see how Convention T expresses correctly the relationships between a statement held to be true and its unquoted version stated in the normal way.

Professor Spade has shown that the supposition rules for ascent and descent are incoherent when interpreted as a theory of reference.⁷⁶ But if supposition is not a theory, it cannot fail as a theory. Understood as a notational system, it would yield two (or more) competing interpretations of the original statement. In that case, the author of the *Logica Parva* favors the interpretation that makes the sentence come out true.⁷⁷

The rules of ascent and descent generate a hierarchy of sentence types located on an axis between two extremes: universal sentences are at the top and singular sentences are at the base. Singular sentences are confirmable or disconfirmable in relation to an observable world of persons and things. Universal sentences are verifiable either by induction from singulars, by their form (for example,

⁷⁶ Spade 2000. See also Spade 1988: 187–224. Geach (1968) was the first to point out problems with “supposition of the predicate.” Assuming the function-argument model of predication, Geach criticizes William Hamilton’s logic, but his indictment of medieval supposition was largely guilt by association. Professor Spade has demonstrated that the interpretation of the medieval “modes of supposition” as a nascent theory of quantification leads to incoherence, and his demonstration, I submit, is a very good reason against such an interpretation.

⁷⁷ Paul of Venice tr. Perreiah 1984: 146.

definitions) or by agreement with other sentences known to be true. As part of a notational system, the rules of ascent and descent map out possible relationships between sentences of standard logical forms. Lacking formal grammars for their vernaculars, students had no idea of the structure and organization of a technical language.⁷⁸ We submit that the classification systems for personal and (in the *Logica Parva*) material supposition were useful because they displayed how sentences of a formal language can be interrelated. To students unfamiliar with linguistic structure they gave a map of language.

Proof: Exposition and Resolution

“Proof” (*probatio*) and its cognates “it is proved” (*probatur*) and “it is clear” (*patet*) are found on practically every page of the *Logica Parva*. Proof in a generic sense is an analytical procedure that exhibits the conditions under which a sentence that contains a problematic syncategorematic term is decidably true (or false). As the authors of *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* point out, “The activities of *expositio* or *interpretatio* and *translatio* were complexly interrelated.”⁷⁹ For example, Hugh of Pisa defined “translation” (*translatio*) as “the exposition of meaning through another language” (*expositio sententiae per aliam linguam*).⁸⁰ Reading “*expositio*” as “*translatio*” helps to explain some problematic texts in the *Logica Parva*.

Chapter IV “On the Proofs of Terms” (*De probationibus terminorum*) examines several kinds of sentence that call for special analysis.

⁷⁸ Schemata of this kind may also have served a mnemonic function to aid a student’s memory of possible relations between propositions. Carruthers (1990: 104) discusses the importance of mnemonics in the works of a number of medieval philosophers—for example, Albert the Great, Thomas Holcot and Thomas Bradwardine.

⁷⁹ Minnis and Johnson 2005: 363.

⁸⁰ Ibid. Rita Copeland cites several texts that identify exposition with translation—for example, Richard Ullerston in 1401: “[T]hey are called translators who take or apportion out one language to another, or who expound one language by another. And speaking in this way, it is evident that the verb “to translate” is taken to mean “to interpret,” that is, to expound one language through another; and “translator” is taken to mean “interpreter.” Whence translators are called interpreters and vice versa ... Thus “interpret” is sometimes taken to mean “expound,” “reveal,” “explain,” or “unlock” the sense hidden in the words” (Copeland 1991: 90–91). “In the *Ovide Moralisé* we see how ... translation can be carried on under the aegis of *expositio*” (Copeland 1991: 107–108). Similarly, Douglas Kelly (1997: 55): “*Translatio* is a term ranging in meaning from translation through adaptation to metaphorical transfer and allegory. Yet all these terms presume some restatement ... They all illustrate *interpretatio*.”

1. Resoluble propositions are indefinite, particular or singular propositions without a demonstrative pronoun in subject position.
2. Exponible propositions are either universal propositions or propositions with various terms that determine their logical form such as exceptives, exclusives, comparatives and reduplicatives.
3. Officiable propositions are those that contain relative clauses introduced either by a modal term or a term signifying an act of mind—for example, “necessarily,” “possibly,” “knows,” “believes.”
4. Describable propositions are those containing a term that signifies a mental act followed by a singular term—for example, “I know Socrates.”
5. Provable propositions are those that have several “causes of truth”—that is, several immediate propositions taken disjunctively. In late medieval science a number of terms such as “begins” (*incipit*) and “ceases” (*desinit*) were of this kind.

Sentences in each of these classes are analyzed according to a standard procedure designed to lay bare the “immediate” propositions that establish their truth or falsity.

Paul’s methods of proof analyze an original sentence into a concatenation of sentences whose terms are “immediate.” Scholars have generally defined “immediate” as any term whose meaning is known directly by sense perception or intellection. This definition is sound so far as it goes. However, as we will show later, it may be necessary to amend the definition in order to account for certain anomalies in the medieval texts. The formula that underlies all five methods of proof is the following:

$$\text{Analysandum (probandum)} \leftrightarrow \text{analysans (propositiones probantes)} \\ P \leftrightarrow (Q, R, S, \dots)$$

The sentence on the left has a complex logical form. The compound sentence on the right expresses the truth-conditions of the sentence on the left. For example, the resoluble proposition “Some man runs” is analyzed as a conjunctive, “This is a man and this runs.”⁸¹ This analysis may be expressed in the form of a conditional:

If some man runs, *then* this is a man and this runs.

The immediate propositions are, in turn, expressed in the antecedent of a conditional:

⁸¹ This example assumes that the demonstrative pronoun indicates a person who is running at the time of the assertion.

If this is a man and this runs, *then* some man runs.

Clearly, the conjunction of these two conditionals is the equivalence:

Some man runs *is equivalent to* this is a man and this runs.

Because the author of the *Logica Parva* takes a sentence to be true unless there is a reason to take it to be false, we may restate the above sentence in the frame of Convention T:

(1) “Some man runs” is true if, and only if, this is a man and this runs.

In Latin that is:

(2) *“Aliquis homo currit” est propositio vera aequipollet hoc est homo et hoc currit.*

In each of these T-sentences, the sentence on the right gives the truth-conditions of the sentence on the left. When both sentences are expressed in the same language, the one on the right tells us little more than we already knew when we uttered the sentence on the left.

As we noted above, in the British Middle Ages vernacular languages facilitated the learning of Latin.

In the medieval schoolroom, as in medieval England throughout the thirteenth century, Latin, French and English were complementary, supplementing deficiencies of vocabulary in each other according to the nature and origin of the subject, e.g. plant names, medical terms, courtly manners. Such a case of language switching means, quite simply, that the use of any one of the languages is not exclusive and that they may even be mixed ... The first aim of the present study was thus to emphasize that Latin and the vernacular were not rigorously separated by the techniques of medieval education, the evidence of which reaffirms the normality of language switching ... The juxtaposition of Latin and vernacular which characterizes almost every page of teaching material edited in the present study leaves no room for doubt: schoolmasters in medieval England explained difficulties to their pupils in both French and English.⁸²

Given the British origins of the *Logica Parva*, specimen sentence (2) above, and in general any expression on the right-hand side of Convention T, can expand our knowledge if it is open to colloquial translation. For when the sentence

⁸² Hunt 1991: Vol. 1, 434–435.

on the right is translated into our vernacular, it tells us something new and important about the Latin sentence on the left.

(3) *“Aliquis homo currit” est propositio vera aequipolleth* **this is a man and this runs.** [In the following examples bold represents the vernacular equivalent.]

(3) enables us to check the right-hand branches of (1) and (2) against their formal significates and, if they express the same truth-conditions, to determine the meaning of the Latin sentence on the left.

Paul Spade has raised some serious questions about the purpose of scholastic methods of proof and especially exposition (*expositio*) and resolution (*resolutio*). He cites Ockham’s definition of exposition: “any categorical [proposition] from which there follow several categorical propositions [that are] so to speak its ‘exponents’—that is, they express what the proposition conveys by its form—can be called a proposition equivalent to a hypothetical proposition.”⁸³ Assuming a modern analytical standard, Spade rightfully expects “the full exposition of a proposition to be more logically perspicuous, more explicit, than its unexpounded original.”⁸⁴ He then examines several examples to show that exposition fails to do this.

(1) “A white thing runs” is expounded as “Something runs, and whiteness is in it.”

Spade objects that, far from being simpler and more explicit than the original, the *analysans* is more complex and includes anaphoric cross-reference, a complication not in the original proposition. Hence, it fails as a logical analysis. He considers Claude Panaccio’s suggestion that the purpose of the exponent is “to render conspicuous the *ontological* import of the proposition under analysis.”⁸⁵ If this view explains exposition in Ockham, Spade raises several other problems.

Richard Billingham expounded the following proposition:

(2) “Every man runs” as “A man runs and nothing is a man unless (*quin*) it runs.”⁸⁶

⁸³ *Summa logicae* II.11 cited in Spade 2000: 6.

⁸⁴ Spade 2000: 8.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

This example includes not only anaphoric cross-reference (“it”) but also a notoriously difficult “*quin*-clause.” As an analysis, Spade declares this a “net loss.”⁸⁷

Finally, Spade considers an example from Richard Lavenham:

(3) “You are stronger than a man” as “You are strong, and a man is strong, and it is not the case that a man is *as* strong *as* you.”

Spade notes that this conclusion is false since it implies that you are not as strong as yourself; nonetheless, he expresses interest in the strategy of analyzing comparatives as positives plus negation. Then he goes on to show that Lavenham reverses himself and expounds:

(4) “You are *as* strong *as* a man” by “You are strong, and a man is strong, and no man is *stronger* than you.”

Spade finds “no gain in ontological explicitness either way, and if the point is supposed to be increased clarity or explicitness we end up in a vicious circle.”⁸⁸

What, then, is the point of expositing or expounding a proposition? Spade’s careful interpretation of exposition as a procedure akin to modern analysis demonstrates, we submit, the failure of that approach to account for exposition. Pannacio’s ontological reading of exposition may work for Ockham, but it is questionable whether that is its purpose in other authors. Paul of Venice, for example, does not discuss ontology in the *Logica Parva*. If neither the logical nor the ontological interpretations can explain exposition, we propose an alternative reading close to the generic definition of exposition as “the expression of meaning in another language.” Exposition is translation of an original sentence into another language. If, as Ockham stated, the original sentence has a logical form that is disclosed in the exponents, the exponents give at the same time the truth-conditions of the original sentence, and they can do this *in more than one language*.

The *Logica Parva* has no examples of propositions whose exponent contains an abstract term as in (1); however, it gives examples comparable to (2) through (4).

Stated in the form of Convention T:

(2’) “Every man runs” is true is equivalent to “Man runs and nothing is man unless it runs (*quin illud currit*).”⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Spade 2000: 9

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Paul of Venice tr. Perreiah 1984: 184.

Given their repetition in the *Logica Parva* example, the anaphoric cross-reference of “it” and the *quin* clause were apparently not seen as problems for what the exposition was supposed to accomplish, namely, giving truth-conditions for the original sentence. Still, as we saw above, the right-hand side hardly advances our knowledge beyond what we knew already when we uttered the sentence on the left-hand side. When the right-hand side is translated into our vernacular, however, there is a notable advance in knowledge.

(2'a) “*Omnis homo currit*” est vera aequipollent **Man runs and nothing is a man unless it runs.**

Since the job of the sentence on the right-hand side is to express the truth-conditions of the sentence on the left-hand side, it advances our knowledge by stating in English (or other relevant vernacular) the meaning of that Latin sentence.

(3') “Socrates is stronger than Plato” is true is equivalent to “Socrates is strong and Plato is strong and Plato is not as strong as Socrates.”⁹⁰

This version of the exposition is slightly different from (3) in that its exponents do not entail a false sentence. Nonetheless, the expansion still does not advance our knowledge of the original sentence. With translation into our vernacular, however, there is an advance in our knowledge of Latin.

(3'a) “*Sortes est fortior quam Plato*” est vera aequipollent **Socrates is strong and Plato is strong and Plato is not as strong as Socrates.**

(4') “You are as strong as some man in the world” is true, if and only if, you are strong, and some man is strong, and it is not the case that some man in the world is stronger than you.⁹¹

Again, stated in the same language, the exposition seems to be without point. Translation of the right-hand side of the biconditional into a vernacular, however, makes a great deal of difference.

(4'a) “*Tu es ita fortis sicut aliquis homo mundi*” est vera aequipollent **You are strong, and some man is strong, and it is not the case that some man in the world is stronger than you.**

⁹⁰ Paul of Venice tr. Perreiah 1984: 194.

⁹¹ Paul of Venice tr. Perreiah 1984: 192.

Here the vernacular sentence expresses the truth-conditions and gives the meaning in English of the Latin sentence.

Since these examples occur in a logic textbook, they have, of course, logical import. As Ockham said, the original sentence has a logical form that the exponents express. The exponents, in turn, give the truth-conditions for the sentence of that form. But truth-conditions need not be expressed in only one language. Because they occur on the right-hand branch of Convention T, they may be expressed in any language that can give the truth-conditions of the sentence on the left-hand branch. The purpose of exposition, therefore, is not exclusively logical. Nor, we submit, is it ontological. Exposition has a much more modest purpose altogether. In addition to expressing truth-conditions, it generates sentences for colloquial translation of Latin sentences. That is how it advances knowledge.

Beyond the method of exposition (*expositio*), Professor Spade raises questions about the generic topic of “proof” (*probatio*). The Oxford professor Richard Billingham gave impetus to medieval proof theory around 1350. He distinguished three species of proof: resolution, exposition and officiation. As we saw above, the *Logica Parva* adds description and what we have called “probation” or exposition through causes of truth. Billingham distinguished between “immediate” and “non-immediate” propositions. Traditionally, this distinction has been explained in the following way. The former are known directly by the senses or the intellect. They cannot be proved by any more basic propositions. The latter are proved by means of the immediate propositions. Immediate propositions are composed of immediate terms. These include personal pronouns, demonstratives and indexical adverbs such as “here,” “there.” These terms are primitive; their meaning can be known only by a direct appeal to the senses, what Spade calls “a brute pointing.” Immediate terms that appeal to the intellect are the verbs such as “the copula ‘is’ and its tensed or modal variants.”⁹² Spade goes on to show that Billingham’s proofs fail to meet his own criteria for immediate terms. For example, “A man runs” is proved by resolution in this way: “This runs and this is a man; therefore, a man runs.” Spade recognizes the argument’s soundness; but he complains that

... you already know *more* at the outset than you end up proving in the conclusion.

If you can actually point to a running man, as you do in the premises of that proof, then you not only know that *a* man runs; you can also give a particular example of one.⁹³

⁹² Spade 2000: 10.

⁹³ Ibid.

In view of these problems and of standard practice of language switching in British schools, we propose a slight revision: “immediate” terms are those “terms expressible in one’s native language.” Then, restating the proof in the form of Convention T, we have:

“*Homo currit*” est *propositio vera aequipollent* **This runs, and this is a man.**

When truth-conditions for the sentence on the left-hand side are expressed in the vernacular sentence on the right-hand side, this “proof” tells us something new. In the student’s own language it gives the truth-conditions of the original sentence, and also gives its meaning. This would be an example of interlingual translation or, for a Romance language close to Latin such as Italian, “integral transposition.” It is also what we call “colloquial translation.”

Obligations

The purpose of tracts on obligation has generated more controversy than any other part of the medieval corpus.⁹⁴ An “obligation” is a rule-governed exchange between two parties, the opponent (*opponens*) and the respondent (*respondens*). The opponent sets down a proposition that the respondent normally “admits”—that is agrees to defend. It is noteworthy that the initial proposition may be true, false or even impossible. If impossible, the respondent need not admit it. Once the starting sentence is admitted, the opponent tenders a sequence of statements that the respondent is “obligated” to concede, deny, doubt or declare “irrelevant” (*impertinens*).⁹⁵ *Logica Parva* rules require the respondent’s replies to be consistent not only with the original sentence but with his replies to all subsequent ones. Some propositions can be answered relative to those already given; others require a reply based on the respondent’s factual knowledge. This epistemic mixture may be part of a strategy to entrap the student; however, it also mirrors the normal variety of statements encountered in everyday discourse. The vocabulary associated with obligation exercises turns up in many other places throughout scholastic philosophy. The purpose of the *obligatio* in the *Logical Parva* is quite plainly to train or to test a respondent’s skill in defending a thesis. It is noteworthy that 150 years later Vives defines the obligation exercise precisely in this way and, though no fan of scholasticism, prescribes *Obligationes* for his educational program.⁹⁶ Professor Spade questions its “purely formal” purpose, namely, to see whether the starting proposition is

⁹⁴ Yrjönsuuri 1994. See also n. 5, p. 124.

⁹⁵ These, too, required a decision about whether they were to be conceded, denied or doubted though this requirement is not part of the *Logica Parva Obligatio* rules.

⁹⁶ Vives tr. Watson 1913: DT, IV, 165.

successfully defended, not whether it is true. In the end the only result seems to be that the respondent is declared to "have the art."⁹⁷ It should be clear that an opponent must be skilled in the ancient forensic art of cross-examination. A respondent who successfully evaded the traps and pitfalls of cross-examination would also have demonstrated a mastery of that art. It is easy to see how *obligationes* could be useful for purposes of academic exercise or examination.

Davidson's radical translator advances his knowledge of a new language by observing the conditions under which native speakers utter their statements. He takes those statements as *prima facie* true and through time he takes account of which statements his interlocutor "holds true." The assemblage of statements that a speaker "holds true" represents the speaker's beliefs and these add to the meaning of his discourse. If a speaker's "holding a sentence true" is essential to language acquisition, what better way to learn what that activity means than to do it yourself? Since the rules of *consequentiae* govern the *obligatio* format, the student gains invaluable practice in relating statements logically to one another. In the field setting the linguist may not know the meaning of sentences that the native speaker utters. However, if he records the sentences the speaker holds true under observable conditions, in time he will be able to discern their meaning. Likewise, the medieval respondent in the *obligatio* is delivered a host of sentences that may agree or disagree with the *positum* (or *depositum*) he is bound to maintain. Since logical relationships are essential to the sentences tendered in the exercise, the student develops an awareness of the locus of any given sentence in a logical network. The *obligatio* is an exercise in the ramifications of holding a sentence true. "Having the art" means, therefore, that he has developed a capacity to see the logical relations between any one sentence and others that might be set before him. This skill serves the language learner by adding to his repertoire of T-sentences a systematic inferential structure that is necessary for language competence.

Conclusion

We began this chapter with a question. If perfection is defined as fulfilling a purpose, and the purposes of scholastic logic tracts have proven difficult, if not impossible, to define, how can scholastic logic be considered a "perfect language"? Setting aside the tracts with well-established aims, namely, *Consequentiae* and *Insolubilia*, we examined the doubtful ones in the wider context of medieval learning. Recent research has established that despite the central importance of Latin for advanced study, grammar instruction in Latin syntax was sparse. Since students came to the university speaking primarily their native vernaculars, we

⁹⁷ Spade 2000: 5.

inquired how they were able to learn university Latin. Because Latin–vernacular translation had been a common practice in Britain since the twelfth century, we illustrated its utility in making sense of certain texts whose purposes have eluded modern scholars. We showed how translation could have served the process of learning both logic and Latin.

Comparing the medieval university student to that of the modern field linguist or “radical translator” who must learn a new language from scratch, we outlined the stages in Donald Davidson’s theory of radical translation and compared them with tracts in the *Logica Parva*. The “radical translator” learns a language by an interlocutory process. He records statements made by native speakers in observable circumstances. He takes those sentences as *prima facie* true and considers what he would say in a similar situation. Upon careful study of the evidence (interlocutor’s gestures, behavior and so on) he compares both the Latin sentences and his own sentences against their truth-conditions. When these match he translates the sentences into his own vernacular. Thus, he states in his own language the meaning of the interlocuter’s original sentence. We used Tarski’s “Convention T” as a convenient device for tracking this process and identifying the point where translation can add to meaning. As the radical translator gathers a repertoire of T-sentences, he constructs a truth-theory for the new language. Because the T-sentences are theorems in the theory, other sentences like them follow as consequences. Since a language can produce an infinite number of T-sentences, it is important that the learner acquire a basic core of them that represent salient logical features of the language that s/he is trying to learn. As s/he comes to understand more fully their logical interrelations and systematic connections, s/he gains competence in the language.

Turning to the *Logica Parva*, we found parallels to the essential steps in Davidson’s program for radical translation. Davidson conceives of language as a formal system of sentences composed of logical and non-logical expressions. The former have systematic effects on the latter insofar as they determine the logical forms of the sentences. Chapter I presents a similar picture of language with its distinction between categorematic and syncategorematic terms as basic components of sentences. When terms are used in sentences they are said to have “supposition” (Chapter II). We offered textual confirmation of the view that supposition is not primarily a “theory” but rather a notational device for articulating, and keeping track of, the logical forms of sentences. We noted the distinction between material and formal supposition and showed how the divisions of material supposition in the *Logica Parva* can support the quotation of any expression that can occur in formal supposition. We introduced Tarski’s Convention T as a platform for locating the juncture where Latin and the vernacular meet. Citing examples from the chapter on proof, we showed how the insertion of vernacular translation could advance the language-learner’s grasp of Latin. While we discussed only two kinds of proof, namely, exposition

and resolution, the remaining kinds of proof—officiation, description and probation—exhibit similar patterns and tell a similar story. Of course, proof in a general sense is practiced throughout the *Logica Parva* as any sentence declared to be true is normally taken as proved or provable. In Davidson's theory of language-learning the purpose of proof is to establish the truth of sentences, and proof has the same purpose throughout the *Logica Parva*. Beyond its role in solving sophisms and insolubles, the semantical theory of truth facilitates language-learning by allowing expression of the truth-conditions of alien (Latin) sentences in the student's native language. Because knowing how to "hold a sentence true" is no less essential to the art of defending a thesis than to language-learning, the obligations were indispensable to progress in learning both logic and language.

As a popular manual, the *Logica Parva* includes the standard treatises of scholastic logic. In addition to its central aim to teach logic, it had a secondary purpose, namely, to facilitate the learning of Latin. We have shown how each of its tracts supported language-learning and how logic was a bridge language between Latin and the vernaculars. In addition to being a first-rate logic textbook, the *Logica Parva* served as a translation manual through a long period when official grammar instruction in Latin syntax was often poor and did not meet the needs of university students. Where both were taught effectively, logic supplemented grammar in the learning of Latin. Despite the often vehement criticism of some humanists, scholastic logic remained an essential course in the university curriculum for more than 300 years. Its resilience and durability, not to mention its effectiveness in teaching logical syntax, justify its claim to some measure of linguistic perfection.

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Concluding Reflections

The correspondence between Pico della Mirandola and Ermolao Barbaro in 1485 has been a *locus classicus* for examining the relationship between humanism and scholasticism in the Renaissance.¹ Franz Bruchard's reply to Pico confirms its significance well into the Reformation. Modern scholarship has rendered these letters a mixed blessing with an uncertain message, for scholars are divided over the question whether Pico's defense of scholasticism is serious or an elaborate joke. Some argue that Pico defends scholastic philosophy against humanist rhetoric.² Others contend that his letter is "paradoxical," a "mock encomium" or "serious playfulness"—a humorous exercise whose purpose is to "undermin[e] the apparent thesis, showing it to be ridiculous, and drawing attention to a continual double message at work."³ In other words, Pico does not defend scholasticism; rather, he means the opposite of what he appears to say and agrees, or half agrees, with Barbaro's negative opinions about scholasticism. It remains an open question how Pico might have responded to Bruchard's letter which, like other late criticisms of scholasticism, was no laughing matter. One consequence of this controversy has escaped notice. If Pico's words are not to be taken at face value—that is, as a defense of scholasticism—the exchange would no longer be a debate about the merits of scholasticism, the appropriate language for philosophy, the relation of philosophy to rhetoric, the nature of linguistic usage or countless other topics that scholars have found there. It would not be a debate about any of these substantive issues because it would

¹ Barbaro's three letters and Pico's reply as well as a fourth letter replying to Pico "in behalf of Barbaro" are translated in Breen 1968: 1–68. As Rummel (1992: 302–305) has demonstrated, the last letter, formerly attributed to Philip Melanchthon, was written by one of his students, Franz Bruchard, in 1558.

² For example, Kristeller 1964: 58; Breen 1968: 1–11; Kraye 2008: 13–36.

³ Panizza (2000: 153). Pico's defense is "paradoxical" according to Moss (2003: 68 ff.), a "mock encomium" (Vickers 1988: 184–196). In our opinion, Kraye best defines the tensions apparent in the main lines of interpretation. "Both interpretations [playful or serious], however, are one-sided and fail to provide a convincing explanation of the contrast between the substance of the letter—the positive assessment of scholastic philosophy, which, as we have seen, there is good reason to believe represents Pico's own attitude—and the rhetorical, humanist style in which it is written" (Kraye: 2008: 35). Any interpretation of the correspondence must take seriously the fact that Pico spent many years studying scholastic thought and that his major work, the 900 *conclusiones*, is hardly intelligible without a thorough background in scholasticism.

not be a debate at all. It would be merely another exercise in ideology—the self-absorbed musings of renaissance humanists mocking their ill-informed fantasies about scholasticism—to advance a practical agenda.⁴ Nor is this kind of thinking confined to humanism. Sixteenth-century scholastic replies to humanist criticisms display a similar pattern where profound reasoning and grave admonitions thinly disguise professional aims and ambitions.⁵

The humanist–scholastic debates often confused philosophy with ideology. To be sure, many philosophical issues were at stake: What is the relation of wisdom to eloquence? What is philosophy’s relation to poetry? How is dialectic related to grammar and to rhetoric? What is the appropriate language for philosophy? For dialectic? For rhetoric? How should students be introduced to the liberal arts? When and how should they study Latin or Greek or the grammar of their own vernaculars? What is the best method for scientific, philosophical or theological research? How should scripture be interpreted? Who is best qualified to do it? These questions and countless others arise in the humanist–scholastic debates of the Renaissance; however, they are rarely, if ever, answered or resolved. Instead they are smothered in language that betrays ideological aims and practical agendas. These preoccupations intrude upon the integrity of philosophical investigations and obscure whatever lessons might be learned from them.

Generations of humanists have castigated scholastics for their “initiate jargon,” “arcane sentences” and “interminable quibbling.” With the Pico–Barbaro controversy the tide turned inward as humanist scholars contended among themselves about the meaning of their own primary sources. To avoid the hazards and pitfalls on both sides of these debates, we have considered humanism and scholasticism within a new frame of reference. We have tried to show how each tradition advanced the modern search for the perfect language. To this enterprise, whether knowingly or not, humanists and scholastics contributed in equal measure. Here is a summary of their achievements.

Linguistic Determinism

Although linguistic determinism is a modern hypothesis about language, several scholars have adopted it for study of the Renaissance. We have clarified the assumptions of linguistic determinism and considered the reasons that some thinkers might have had for assuming it. At the same time, we have noted its

⁴ For our distinction between “philosophy” and “ideology,” see Chapter 3, n. 42, p. 89.

⁵ The tension between philosophy and ideology is brought out in Jardine’s “Seeking truth, following faction,” a review of Rummel’s *The Humanist–Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance and Reformation* (Jardine 1996: 23).

problems. Although the thesis that human language is determined by linguistic usage may have an initial plausibility, its consequences are so serious that it calls for critical assessment.

Stephen Pinker sets out three criteria for a genuine demonstration of linguistic determinism.⁶

(1) *The speakers of one language find it impossible, or at least extremely difficult, to think in a particular way that comes naturally to the speakers of another language (as opposed to merely being less in the habit of thinking that way).* Both Valla and Vives declare many times their inability to understand scholastic dialectic. Valla, as we saw, simply remained aloof from it; Vives, who was trained in scholastic idioms and practices, does not deny knowing it. However, both repeat the standard clichés about scholastic language, namely, that it is “invented,” “artificial,” “unnatural,” “barbaric,” “sophistical,” etc. Dante described Latin as “artificial” because it could be learned only through formal education. The vernaculars, on the other hand were “natural.” Renaissance humanists are at pains to prove that classical Latin is “natural.” In this way humanist critics of scholastic Latin repay with the same coin earlier scholastic views of Latin. Nonetheless, these debates confirm what both Valla and Vives declare, namely, that they find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to think in the language that comes naturally to the scholastics.

(2) *The difference in thinking involves genuine reasoning, leaving speakers incapable of solving a problem or befuddled in paradox, rather than merely tilting their subjective impressions in inkblot-style judgments.* Let us assume that both humanists and scholastics are equally competent to engage in reasoning processes. When Valla and Vives encounter scholastic arguments, however, they both declare their inability to reason as the scholastics claim to do. They say that their frustration is the result of the objective complexities of scholastic discourse and not merely their own impressions of it. Where Valla ignores the contexts as well as the rational justifications of scholastic doctrines, Vives knows and even adopts some of them, but he declares the others “unintelligible.”

(3) *Most important, the difference in thinking must be caused by the language, rather than arising from other reasons and simply being reflected in the language, and rather than both the language and the thought pattern being an effect of the surrounding culture or environment.* Both Valla and Vives attribute the unintelligibility of scholastic theory to the idiom of Latin that scholastics speak and write.

We considered linguistic determinism in connection with Valla’s and Vives’s representations of scholastic thought. The texts we have examined support

⁶ Pinker 2007: 135–136.

the conclusion that Valla and Vives both assume a strong form of linguistic determinism when criticizing scholastic dialectic. Apart from those polemical contexts, however, it is debatable whether they embrace linguistic determinism in their own philosophies of language. When they discuss problems of meaning they give primacy to classical Latin and its influence on thought. This is especially evident in Valla's devotion to usage as the sole determinant of linguistic meaning. At the same time both affirm that language expresses thought. When they turn to questions of truth both follow a conventional model: they recognize that thought and language refer to an objective world that is the basis for the truth or falsity of sentences. The view that Valla was an "ordinary language" philosopher seems only to galvanize the element of linguistic determinism in his philosophy of language. Although Vives stresses the primacy of classical usage, his texts are resistant to that interpretation. Whether their evident assumption of linguistic determinism can be reconciled with their otherwise conventional views of meaning and truth is an open question. It is, perhaps, superfluous to add that scholastics also accepted the conventional model but would have rejected linguistic determinism and its implications for the incommensurability of languages.

Communication, Vernacularity and Translation

Linguistic determinism implies that human languages are incommensurable, and this consequence raises problems about how speakers use language. Here are two.

Communication

One implication of the incommensurability thesis is that communication between speakers of different languages would be impossible. This does not mean that the parties simply talk past each other or refuse to talk to one another. It is the much stronger claim that interlocutory exchanges between them are not possible. There is no linguistic bridge between their languages such that sentences spoken in one language are intelligible to speakers of the other language. On this view, speakers of humanist Latin and scholastic Latin would be unable to communicate with one another. This conclusion is questionable, however, since there is a well-documented history of humanist-scholastic debate.⁷ That is not to say that their exchanges were always amicable or that they agreed on specific issues. As we know, they disagreed about many things and often bitterly. It is simply to acknowledge that their disagreements and hence

⁷ Rummel 1995.

their communications were, and remain, intelligible. If that is so, the two idioms of Latin cannot be “incommensurable.”

Vernacularity and Translation

Incommensurability has ramifications for the relation of Latin to the vernacular languages. If humanist Latin and scholastic Latin—two dialects of the same language—are not mutually intelligible, translation of the new Latin into the vernaculars would also be impossible. Both traditions give ample evidence that this was not the case. Scholastic logic provided a medium of translation between university Latin and the vernaculars. Classical Latin was translated into the vernaculars in the sixteenth century when humanists began to compose Latin grammars in the vernacular. Moreover, vernacular translation of neo-Latin texts continues to our own day.⁸ But translation of one language into another presupposes that the two are commensurable. Thus, the view that humanist Latin was incommensurable with other languages is false.

Compositionality

Both humanists and scholastics believed that language is compositional—that is, that the meaning of larger linguistic units, such as sentences, is a function of the meaning of their component parts. Just as consonants and vowels make up words, words of two kinds (called “significative” and “co-significative” by humanists, “categorematic” and “syncategorematic” by scholastics) combine to form sentences. In turn, sentences conjoin to produce narratives. This threefold understanding of language is reflected in the way that both traditions present their discoveries about language. Lorenzo Valla’s *Dialectical Disputations* divides into three books that deal respectively with words, sentences and arguments. Vives’s treatises on language and Paul of Venice’s tracts in the *Logica Parva* follow the same format. Hence, humanist and scholastic approaches to language are similar in subject-matter, organization and in the broad lines of theory. Of course, one is a grammarian; the other is a logician. Differences between them arise from the methods each employs to analyze language. Although Valla subscribes to a compositional view of language, his preoccupations with classical usage soon foreclose on the promise of this idea. His attention to grammatical perfection—that is, syntactical correctness and stylistic elegance—and his aversion to “logical formality” blind him to the evidence that human languages manifest logical regularities that preserve consistency both within a language

⁸ For example, see the volumes in the I Tatti Renaissance Library published by Harvard University Press. For an introduction to this series, see Grafton 2006: 44–50.

and across languages. In contrast, Vives represents language as systematically ordered. He identifies the basic sentential connectives and sees their role in structuring rational discourse, but he shows no interest in a logical system that would explain them. In like manner, Paul of Venice takes for granted the componential nature of human language. Having identified the elementary units of signification and co-signification that make up sentences, he gives rules for their systematic re-combination. He sees human language as a signifying system developing incrementally—sentence by sentence and argument by argument—toward larger totalities and, eventually, to a unified whole.

Meaning

As noted above, humanists and scholastics agreed that the meaning of words in a particular language is determined by convention—that is, the common usage of speakers and writers of the language. Ancient Romans set the meanings of classical Latin words, just as patristic and medieval authors established the meanings of words in scholastic Latin. Lexical meaning is, for the most part, culturally determined. But words alone are not complete thoughts. The mind combines words to create thought and its expression, and that creative act is not culturally determined. Linguistic determinism ignores this central fact about thought and language. Because they are primarily descriptive disciplines, neither grammar nor logic changes the nature of the language that it studies. Just as rules of grammar govern sentences in normal use, logical rules apply to those same everyday sentences. Much has been made about “scholastic metalanguage” as if it were some rare, oneiric idiom uttered by the mentally challenged. Scholastic logic is a metalanguage only in the sense that it is discourse about language, and in that respect it is comparable to humanist grammar. Moreover, both are formal to the extent necessary to analyze their appropriate subject-matter.

Truth

Any study of language would be incomplete if it did not address the most important property that a language can have: namely, its capacity to express truth. All of the attention to elementary words, sentences and reasoning processes would be without point if language were not used to express and preserve truth. Both traditions contributed to this topic. Humanists like Valla and Vives stress the power of language to express literary, historical, philosophical and theological truths, and this capacity of language is central to their efforts at educational reform. In addition to maintaining the language of the university where past learning was preserved, scholastics emphasize the

power of language to articulate scientific theory as well as the verities of everyday speech. Both recognize a distinction between truth (*veritas*) and truth-likeness (*verisimilitudo*). Valla's various comments suggest that truth is an epistemic property of judgment. In addition to his allegory of truth in *Veritas Fucata*, Vives's notion of truth as "congruence" rests on a figure of speech borrowed from grammar and geometry. Grammatical correctness, rhetorical eloquence and consonance with canonical Latin literature are, of course, essential factors in both of their accounts.

Scholastic logicians straightforwardly regard "true" and "false" as properties of sentences uttered by speakers (or writers) at particular times and places. They establish the conditions under which sentences of determinate forms are either true or false. This approach is similar to a modern semantical theory of truth. Their attention to syncategorematic terms that determine the logical forms of propositions, their regard for the truth or falsity of propositions based on form, and their criteria for validity and invalidity of arguments ensure that every component of rational discourse is transparent and testable with respect to truth. If a given sentence, (1) "God exists," is proven true, one may state that (2) "'God exists' is true", and these two sentences are equivalent. Once the truth of a sentence has been justified by proof, the predicate "... is true" is predicable of it, or a translation of it, in any language. Translation here is the substitution of equals for equals *salva veritate*. A scholastic with sufficient reason to hold "*Deus est*" to be true knew that a competent translation of that sentence into any other language would also be true. Rules of proof secure the integrity of the truth-predicate, and rules of inference enable the truth (or falsity) of sentences to be commuted throughout a language or across languages.

The Perfect Language

Each of our authors has upheld an ideal of language that may be regarded as that author's concept of "the perfect language." As we noted, Dante saw perfection in both Latin and the vernaculars. For Valla, Vives and other humanists, classical Latin was the perfect language. It not only satisfied Quintilian's criteria for a "perfect" language: it was perfect because of its pedigree. Born in the culture of ancient Rome, it was the language that formed Western civilization and for that reason was the ideal language to reform that civilization. As an exemplar of clarity, precision and style classical Latin was the ideal language for poetic expression and rhetorical eloquence. Hence, humanists found perfection in a single historical language. They cultivated, transformed and offered it as the ideal medium for future scholarship and communication. Paul of Venice and other scholastics have an importantly different idea of "the perfect language." For them language is a human invention similarly grounded in history and

culture, but those are not its only important features. Languages exhibit recurrent logical constants essential for rational thought and discourse. These elements give languages determinate logical form and enable them to express recurrent, and thus universal, features of the experienced world. Languages that analyze their own semantics become metalanguages and are perfect to the extent that they clarify the truth-conditions and inference patterns that are possible for their own sentences and those of other languages. These properties, as we saw, are indispensable to both language learning and translation. Here, then, are two very different ideals of linguistic perfection.

We have compared humanist and scholastic approaches to language in order to show that, despite their differing interests, Latin idioms and literary styles both understood human language in fundamentally complementary ways. Proceeding independently—and unfortunately at times with hostility—each of them advanced our understanding of the nature of language. In pursuit of their own ideal of the perfect language, humanist writings gave rise to modern philology and lexicography. Scholastic works prefigured modern logic and semantics. The two traditions followed separate pathways toward the same goal: to understand the nature of human language and to discover how it expresses truth.

Appendix

Paul of Venice: *Logica Parva*, Chapter III, “On Inferences”

(* = Rejection Rule)

Group I. Universal Rules of Formal Inference

Rule 1.1 If the contradictory of its antecedent follows from the contradictory of its consequent, an inference is valid.

*1.1.1 If the contradictory of its antecedent does not follow from the contradictory of its consequent, an inference is not valid.

Rule 1.2 If an inference is valid, and the antecedent is true, the consequent is true.

1.2.1 If an inference is valid and the consequent is false, the antecedent is false.

*1.2.2 If the antecedent is true and the consequent is false, the inference is not valid.

Rule 1.3 If an inference is valid and the antecedent is necessary, the consequent is necessary.

*1.3.1 If the antecedent is necessary and the consequent is contingent, the inference is not valid.

Rule 1.4 If an inference is valid and the antecedent is possible, the consequent is possible.

*1.4.1 If the antecedent is possible and the consequent is impossible, the inference is not valid.

Rule 1.5 If an inference is valid and something follows from the consequent, the same follows from the antecedent.

1.5.1 Whatever implies the antecedent also implies the consequent.

1.5.2 In a chain of propositions when all of the intermediate inferences are valid, formal and invariant, an inference from the first antecedent to the last consequent is valid.

Rule 1.6 If an inference is valid and something is consistent with an antecedent, the same is consistent with the consequent.

1.6.1 Something inconsistent with the consequent is inconsistent with the antecedent.

Rule 1.7 If an inference is valid and is known by you to be valid and its antecedent is to be conceded, its consequent must also be conceded.

1.7.1 If the consequent is to be denied by you, the antecedent also should be denied.

*1.7.2 If the antecedent is to be conceded by you, but the consequent is to be denied by you, that inference is not valid.

Rule 1.8 If an inference is known by you to be valid and the antecedent is also known by you, the consequent is known by you.

Group II. Universal Rules of Formal Inference

Rule 2.1 From a lower-level term to its corresponding higher-level term without a sign of distribution and without a confounding sign there is a valid inference.

**Rule 2.2* From a lower-level term to its corresponding higher-level term with a sign of distribution or a confounding sign there is not a valid inference.

Rule 2.3 From a lower-level term to its corresponding higher-level term with a sign of negation placed after the term and with a due mean there is a valid inference.

**Rule 2.4* From a higher-level term to its corresponding lower-level term in affirmative propositions and without a sign of distribution there is not a valid inference.

**Rule 2.5* From a higher-level term to its corresponding lower-level term in a distributed affirmative proposition the inference is not valid except with a due mean.

Rule 2.6 From a higher-level term to its corresponding lower-level term with a sign of negation placed in front of the higher-level term there is a valid inference.

Group III. Particular Rules of Formal Inference

Rule 3.1 From a universal to its particular or indefinite there is a valid inference.

**Rule 3.2* From a particular or indefinite to its universal there is not a valid inference except owing to the matter.

Rule 3.3 From a universal affirmative to all of its singulars collectively or divisively and with a due mean there is a valid inference and conversely [taken collectively].

Rule 3.4 From a singular universal negative to any of its singulars there is a valid inference and conversely with a due mean.

Rule 3.5 From a particular to its indefinite there is a valid inference.

Rule 3.6 From a particular or indefinite to all of its singulars taken disjunctively and with a due mean there is a valid inference.

Group IV. Rules of Inference

Rule 4.1 From an exclusive to its corresponding universal with the terms transposed there is a valid inference and conversely.

Rule 4.2 From a negative exceptive to its corresponding affirmative exclusive there is a valid inference.

Rule 4.3 From a lower-level term to its corresponding higher-level term on the part of the subject with an exclusive added to it there is a valid inference.

**Rule 4.4* From a lower-level term to its corresponding higher-level term on the part of the predicate with an exclusive expression added to the subject there is not a valid inference.

**Rule 4.5* From a term that is determinate or confused only to a confused and distributed term there is not a valid inference.

Rule 4.6 From a confused and distributed term to a determinate term there is a valid inference.

**Rule 4.7* From a term that is confused only to a determinate or distributed term there is not a valid inference.

Group V. Rules of Inference

Rule 5.1 From an affirmative proposition with one disparate [predicate] term to a negative proposition with another disparate [predicate] term there is a valid inference; but not conversely.

Rule 5.2 From one of a pair of propositions, whose subjects and predicates are interchangeable while remaining the same in denomination to the other, there is a valid inference.

Rule 5.3 From one interchangeable proposition to the other there is a valid inference and conversely.

Rule 5.4 From one of two correlatives to the other there is a valid inference.

Rule 5.5 From a privative term to an infinite term there is a valid inference; but not conversely.

Rule 5.6 From an affirmative proposition with a privative or infinite predicate to a negative proposition there is a valid inference; but not conversely.

Rule 5.7 From a negative proposition with a finite predicate to an affirmative proposition with an infinite predicate with the due mean there is a valid inference; and conversely.

Group VI. Rules of Inference

Rule 6.1 From all of the exponents of a proposition—taken simultaneously—to the exponible proposition there is a valid inference; and conversely.

Rule 6.2 From an exponible proposition to *each* of its exponents [i.e. taken separately] there is a valid inference; but not conversely except in virtue of matter.

Rule 6.3 From any contradictory of an exponent, the contradictory of the expository proposition follows; but not conversely.

Rule 6.4 From a resoluble proposition to its resolvent[s] there is a valid inference; but not conversely.

Rule 6.5 From an officiable proposition to its officiates there is a valid inference; but not conversely.

Rule 6.6 From a description to its described proposition there is a valid inference; and conversely.

Rule 6.7 From a proposition in the composite sense to one in the divided sense and conversely there is not a valid inference.

Rule 6.8 From one cause of truth to a proposition having that cause of truth there is a valid inference; but not conversely.

Rule 6.9 From an active proposition to a passive proposition there is a valid inference and conversely.

Rule 6.10 From a three-termed proposition to a two-termed proposition without a distracting term there is a valid inference.

Group VII. Rules of Inference for Hypothetical Propositions

Rule 7.1 From an affirmative conjunctive to either of its principal parts there is a valid inference; but not conversely unless owing to the matter.

Rule 7.2 From the principal part of an affirmative disjunctive to the total disjunctive proposition there is a valid inference; but not conversely.

Rule 7.3 From an affirmative disjunctive proposition with the destruction of one of its parts to the other part there is a valid inference.

Rule 7.4 From a negative conjunctive to a disjunctive made from the contradictory parts of the affirmative conjunctive there is a valid inference [and conversely].

Rule 7.5 From a negative disjunctive to an affirmative conjunctive made from the contradictory parts of the [negative] disjunctive there is a valid inference and conversely.

Rule 7.6 From an affirmative conditional with its antecedent to its consequent there is a valid inference.

Rule 7.7 From an affirmative conditional with the contradiction of the consequent to the contradiction of the antecedent there is a valid inference.

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