CHAPTER 1

Early Humanist Critics of Scholastic Language: Francesco Petrarch and Leonardo Bruni

Introduction

From the time of Petrarch (1304–1374) onward, humanists found the Latin language as used in the schools and universities ungrammatical, ugly, abstract, technical, in short barbarous. The language simply did not conform to the classical standards that had been so painstakingly rediscovered and held up for emulation by the humanists. Their target was, of course, not only scholastic language as such. The language was an expression of a way of doing philosophy that many humanists considered hopelessly abstract and out of tune with the way in which people actually talked, argued, believed, and thought. They were convinced, for instance, that many of the problems treated in logic and theology arose only because language had been used in an artificial way. The humanists thus criticized not only the grammatical constructions and individual words introduced and newly coined by the scholastics, but also their style and approaches and indeed the entire scholastic culture, which was often thought to be totally irrelevant for society or even dangerous to Christian faith (as in the case of Averroes's followers). Of course, humanism and scholasticism are not monolithic opposite entities, and it is better to imagine a spectrum with the two "-isms" at both ends with lots of intermediary ground where the two could and did meet. But this does not alter the fact that for many humanists scholastic language was a kind of jargon that was used to impress, but in fact served as a smoke screen to hide one's own ignorance. It was their use of good classical Latin and their study of the heritage of classical antiquity by which the humanists liked to distinguish themselves.

Perhaps more interesting than the precise wording of this critique are the premises from which humanists – often tacitly, sometimes openly – departed. Some of these premises have become so ingrained in the European historiography in which the classical tradition looms so large

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that it is easy to overlook the fact that they are not so straightforward at all. The first and most central premise is that classical Latin should be the alpha and omega in all intellectual pursuits. As the language of the Roman Empire, it had proven itself as the medium and vehicle of so much high culture and civilization that for the humanists it was axiomatic that we should return to this language for the recovery of arts and sciences as well as for conversation and communication for the benefit of society. While some humanists such as Leonardo Bruni and Leon Battista Alberti envisaged the vernacular as an equally powerful instrument with which to express ideas, thoughts, and beliefs, Latin remained for many, and for a long time, unquestionably *the* language, and any departure from it was seen as the beginning of the end.[1]

A second premise was the idea that the Latin to be emulated was the Latin of roughly 100 BC–AD 200. Some humanists famously restricted the chronological range to the life of one man, Cicero, whose eloquence and style were profound sources of inspiration for almost everyone, but this Ciceronianism was famously attacked by Erasmus in his *Ciceronianus*. Perhaps even more basic than these two premises was the belief that classical Latin should not be tampered with, since as a means for the expression of thought it could hardly be improved. It was a highly regimented language, an *ars*, and yet a natural, common language that had been the living tongue of a vast empire (even though discussion arose as to exactly what kind of Latin had been spoken in antiquity); it had served through the ages as a vehicle of higher learning, even though its existence had often been precarious. It should be studied and revived in its pristine, most glorious form, and breaches of the rules of grammar and the introduction of postclassical words were rejected or – as for instance in the case of biblical and ecclesiastical terminology – accepted with more or less reluctance. What these basic convictions also imply is the idea that the use of language matters. The critique of scholastic language seems to be founded on the belief that the choice of a language or a particular form of Latin had important repercussions for the way we think about the world, including ourselves; humanists were convinced that bad Latin leads to bad thinking and vice versa.

In the first chapters we will see how these convictions worked out in the thought of some major humanists. In this chapter we will set the stage by looking at two key figures in the humanist movement: Francesco Petrarch (1304–1374) and Leonardo Bruni (1369–1444), ignoring the contributions

[1] See Introduction, n. 20.

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of many others, for example Coluccio Salutati, Poggio Bracciolini, and Flavio Biondo.[2] Petrarch was the most celebrated and influential humanist of his time, and the first to launch a serious attack on the culture of the schools and universities. Bruni was the first to attain a highly accomplished level of Latin prose style, as testified by his many translations from the Greek as well as his orations, treatises, letters, lives of famous men, and dialogues. Both humanists considered the revival and imitation of classical Latin as essential for the reform of learning, morals, education, and the arts.[3] It is impossible to do justice here to the multifaceted nature of their works nor is it necessary to study all the aspects of the revival of ancient learning they promoted in order to see on which basic assumptions this revival was based. This is not to say that they always clearly saw the implications of these basic assumptions and convictions. They famously preached the Ciceronian union of reason and eloquence, and of philosophy and rhetoric, but they were generally not interested in the more theoretical implications of their views. We must therefore be cautious in our interpretations while teasing out these implications to avoid foisting on them positions they did not hold or could not hold. Yet, it is not difficult to see that their views on language, translation, meaning, and Latin were anything but philosophically neutral.

Petrarch

Though he had his predecessors, Francesco Petrarch can be considered as the first serious critic of the language, thought, and culture of the scholastics. Petrarch's criticisms were voiced in a number of works and letters, setting the tone for later generations. The modern philosopher who is looking for serious argumentation about the use of language in philosophy will probably be disappointed by the invectives Petrarch heaped on the scholastics and "impious" philosophers from antiquity and his own time, but the ancient genre of invective, revived by him, required of course something other than tight reasoning or careful balancing of arguments pro and con. More importantly, it was practice rather than theory, "love" rather than "truth," "willing" rather than "knowing" that were the central coordinates in Petrarch's search for an alternative to the reigning paradigm of scholastic reasoning and teaching. A highly celebrated and influential

[2] Seigel 1968, 63–98; Witt 2000, 292–337; Celenza 2018; Hankins 2019.

[3] While the theme of this book is language, humanists should of course not be reduced to "language specialists."

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man of letters and one of the greatest of Italian poets, Petrarch is a canonical figure in Renaissance humanism, and scholarship on his life, work, and influence is vast. For our purpose it will suffice to look at the basic convictions and assumptions of his humanist critique of the language and the culture of the schools – convictions that were often but not always shared by later humanists, some of whom we will study in the chapters to come.[4]

For Petrarch it was an article of faith that ancient Latin should be revived as the language of literary, moral, and religious reform, something that was the driving force behind much of what he wrote.[5] Linguistic and moral reform were two sides of the same coin: while he took great pains to create a classicizing style by immersing himself in the great writings of the ancient Romans, the study of antiquity was not something to pursue just for its own sake but also as a way to reform a culture that had failed, according to Petrarch, to address the intellectual, moral, and religious needs of the time. The reform was essentially a return to Christian virtue as preached by Augustine, who, like Petrarch, saw Cicero's eloquence as an ally for Christianity. Petrarch held a special devotion for Augustine, who was a Ciceronian before he became a Christian. Times had changed of course. As Stephen Menn comments: "The mature Augustine takes Cicero's ideal of the perfect philosopher-orator for granted; he is concerned to defend Christianity, not Ciceronianism. The humanists, however, finding a Christianity universally professed but scarcely felt, are moved to revive Ciceronianism as a means to reawakening Christianity."[6] Petrarch strongly believed that by studying and imitating the style of his ancient heroes, he could guide himself and his readers to Christian virtue. This was not a straightforward strategy of course. Cicero may have written beautiful Latin, but his thought remained essentially pagan, just as that of many other writers from classical antiquity. And while many humanists were happy to concentrate on literature and style, Petrarch's humanism had

[4] For instance, while Bruni never voiced any suspicion about rhetoric, Petrarch and Salutati, at certain points in their careers, were not so sure; for the latter the philosophical ideal could have an independence from rhetoric, an independence Bruni usually did not accept; Bruni's faith in the union of philosophy and eloquence remained strong and unabated. While for Bruni, as we will see, Aristotle was a highly eloquent writer, Petrarch had his doubts. And Christian piety played a prominent role in Petrarch while it was largely absent in Bruni. While in broad outlines similar, their humanist programs could show considerable differences on such points.

[5] Vasoli 1974; Trinkaus 1979, 52–89; Witt 2000, 230–291; Celenza 2018; Zak 2015; Hankins 2019. On Petrarch's influence see for example Rotondi Secchi Tarugi (ed.) 1997; Trapp 2003; Enenkel and Papy 2006; Hankins 2007–2008 (on Petrarch's shifting reputation between two generations of humanists, from Salutati to Bruni and Poggio); Kircher 2015 (a brief overview).

[6] Menn 1998, 43.

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a Christian stamp, and at times he emphasized inner devotion and pious simplicity much more than eloquence and classical learning. He was a Christian after all:[7]

> If admiring Cicero is being a Ciceronian, then I am a Ciceronian. For certainly, I admire him, and I marvel at others who do not admire him. If this seems to be a new confession of my ignorance, I confess that it reflects my feelings and my wonder. But when it comes to pondering or discussing religion – that is, the highest truth, true happiness, and eternal salvation – then I am certainly neither a Ciceronian nor a Platonist, but a Christian.

Cicero, alas, did not know the true God, a fact even a counterfactual wish ("I feel certain that Cicero himself would have been a Christian if he had been able to see Christ or grasp his teaching") could not alter, even though he could come close to speaking like an Apostle.[8]

So the perennial question for Christian readers throughout the ages who felt uncomfortable in their love for a pagan culture was felt even more acutely by Petrarch: why on earth spend so much time studying classical antiquity while "unlearned" people such as fishermen and peasants could attain the same goal of living a devout Christian life without all this learning? After all, "Aristotle was a great man and a polymath" but, as Petrarch notices, "he was completely ignorant of true happiness that any devout old woman, or any faithful fisherman, shepherd, or peasant, is happier, if not more subtle, in recognizing it."[9] He had "failed to see this one great truth, which many unlearned people have seen and continue to see."[10] From this perspective, Ciceronian eloquence, for all its civilizing and saving qualities, could hardly be considered as a necessary, let alone a sufficient condition for the moral and religious reform that inspired Petrarch in his study of and attempt to emulate a classicizing style.

But, then, the reform was not aimed at pious "unlearned" people of course. What Petrarch had in mind was a union of eloquence and philosophy, where eloquence meant inflaming the mind toward love of virtue and where philosophy was roughly identified with moral philosophy, in much the same way that his great example Augustine had redefined classical philosophy in Christian terms.[11] Whatever did not contribute to virtue or the attainment of the blessed life – such as the study of the natural world – was rejected as pretty useless by Petrarch, at least in his more

[7] Petrarch 2003, 333 (*On His Own Ignorance* V). Almost all of the quotations that follow come from this text.
[8] Ibid.; cf. 275 (*On His Own Ignorance* IV). [9] Ibid., 265. [10] Ibid., 271.
[11] Rist 1994 for an analysis of Augustine's Christian reappropriation of ancient thought.

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polemical moments (which were frequent): God "promises the knowledge of Himself. And if He grants this, it will appear superfluous to concern myself with the things He has created."[12] Central to Petrarch's critique was therefore not so much scholastic language as such but the anti-Christian tendencies he detected in Aristotelianism and in particular Averroism, notably doctrines such as the unity of the intellect, the preexistence of the soul, and the eternity of the world. And even if Aristotle's moral philosophy is not anti-Christian in itself – indeed, it contains something of value, even for Petrarch – it is too abstract and too theoretical for improving our moral lives:[13]

> I see how brilliantly he defines and distinguishes virtue, and how shrewdly he analyzes it together with the properties of vice and virtue. Having learned this, I know slightly more than I did before. But my mind is the same as it was; my will is the same; and I am the same. For it is one thing to know, and another to love; one thing to understand, and another to will. I don't deny that he teaches us the nature of virtue. But reading him offers us none of these exhortations, or only a very few, that goad and inflame our minds to love virtue and hate vice.

A certain anti-intellectualistic sentiment thus marks Petrarch's vision: "It is more prudent to strive for a good and devout will than a capacious and clear intellect. As wise men tell us, the object of the will is goodness, while the object of the intellect is truth. But it is better to will what is good than to know what is true."[14] Aristotle's philosophy is aimed at understanding and truth but it does not bring us closer to Christian virtue.

But much worse than Aristotle are his followers, who populate the schools and the universities, to Petrarch's great sorrow. They stupidly believe that Aristotle is the sole embodiment of timeless wisdom: his critics "are so captivated by their love of the mere name of Aristotle that they consider it a sacrilege to differ with whatever 'He' said on any subject."[15] Moreover, they had corrupted his works in their bad translations, for Petrarch had learned "from Greek witnesses and from Cicero's writings that Aristotle's personal style was sweet, copious, and ornate." Not daring to "write anything of their own," they often limit themselves to expounding the works of others, in particular the great master himself or Peter Lombard's *Sentences*.[16] Their disputes are "windy," their doctrines

[12] Petrarch 2003, 311 (*On His Own Ignorance* IV); cf. 239 (*On His Own Ignorance* II).
[13] Ibid., 315 (*On His Own Ignorance* IV); cf. Martin 2014, 29–30.
[14] Ibid., 319 (*On His Own Ignorance* IV). [15] Ibid., 313 for this and the following quotation.
[16] Ibid., 323.

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"outlandish," their attitude "arrogant," their language "babyish and puzzled babbling," their dialectic "empty words and fleeting trifles."[17] It would, of course, be anachronistic to complain that Petrarch is exaggerating and that his critique is unfair. As already indicated, calling for a wholesale reform of the dominant culture requires something less subtle than a reasoned discourse or an argument; and the polemical attacks follow the literary conventions of the invective.[18]

As the expression of what Petrarch considers the impious, muddled, and confused thinking of "the mad and brawling mob of Scholastics,"[19] one would expect him to focus on their technical, abstract, and barbarous Latin, but his critique of language remains at a general level; he does not analyze it in the way a later humanist such as Lorenzo Valla would do. He duly denunciates dialectics, syllogisms, "crooked enthymeme" and so on, yet he seems at times willing to admit that scholastic language might be suited for certain philosophical pursuits such as "the intricate path of rational philosophy or the hidden one of natural philosophy";[20] but as soon as we are dealing with moral issues – which is also what is most important in life – it only leads to confusion; the jargon-ridden language encourages "outlandish fabrications," and vice versa: such fabrications cause this kind of language to be concocted as well.

A fundamental assumption here is the intimate connection between speech (or style) and thought:[21]

> Our speech is not a small indicator of our mind, nor is our mind a small controller of our speech. Each depends upon the other but while one remains in one's breast, the other emerges into the open. The one ornaments it as it is about to emerge and shapes it as it wants to; the other announces how it is as it emerges into the open.

Clarity of speech, as Petrarch repeatedly stresses, is a reflection of a clear mind:[22]

> clarity is the supreme proof of one's understanding and knowledge. Whatever is clearly understood can be clearly expressed, so that one person's inner thoughts can be transferred to the mind of his listeners . . . Such an art

[17] Ibid., 305; 233 (*On His Own Ignorance* II); ibid., 135 (*Against a Physician* III, 162).
[18] See Vasoli 1974, 143; Marsh 2015, 167–176. On invectives see Rutherford 2005; Helmrath 2010.
[19] Petrarch 2003, 322 (*On His Own Ignorance* IV).
[20] Quoted Witt 2000, 268 from Petrarch's *Familiar Letters* XIV.1. See especially *Against a Physician* III (in Petrarch 2003) for a highly polemical attack on dialectics, which led Trinkaus to observe that "it is easy to become lost in the labyrinth of his polemics" (Trinkaus 1979, 98).
[21] Petrarch, *Rerum familiarium* I.9 as quoted by Witt 2000, 241; cf. Seneca, Letter, 114.
[22] Petrarch 2003, 303 (*On His Own Ignorance* IV).

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> [of teaching] must be based on clarity in one's intelligence and knowledge. Besides our knowledge, we need such an art to express our mental concepts [*conceptus*] and to impress them on others. But no art can produce clear speech from a clouded intellect.

Such passages as these might seem to mitigate the anti-intellectual attitude in Petrarch just mentioned. If a clear mind is essential for clear speech, and if clear speech is an important instrument in spurring the mind to virtuous action, then how could Petrarch also claim that "it is more prudent to strive for a good and devout will than a capacious and clear intellect"? Perhaps there is not much of a conflict here. Petrarch's Augustinian emphasis on will, love, pious devotion, virtuous action, and practical morality is meant to counteract what he sees as the theoretical, rationalist approach of the Aristotelian scholastics, including theologians who "make the greatest mistake of all by seeking to know God rather than loving him."[23] This does not mean that knowledge and a clear mind, filled with our mental concepts, are not important. Clarity of thinking and clarity of speech intrinsically belong to each other, and they both serve to instill the message of loving God and virtue. It depends on the immediate context which point Petrarch wants to emphasize. As so often, Petrarch's statements are not to be taken as steps in an argument but as polemical moves in an oratorical declamation that aims at persuasion and moral reform and reflection. Petrarch's statement about transferring one person's inner thoughts "to the mind of his listeners" has therefore a rhetorical rather than an epistemological background. The main task of the orator is to influence our beliefs and behavior, spurring us to virtue and the love of God. By contrast to Aristotle, "who barely arouses and excites our minds to virtue," the Latin authors "touch and pierce our vitals with the sharp, burning barbs of their eloquence," which in the end must inspire us to gaze upward, toward "lofty thoughts and noble desires."[24] For "speech" we must often read "style," as style for Petrarch is a reflection of one's individual personality:[25]

> I have read Vergil and Horace and Boethius and Cicero ... and these materials poured themselves into me so intimately and were attached not just to my memory but to my marrow itself and became one with my own nature.

[23] Ibid., 319. Petrarch's view seems to reflect Augustine's criticisms of philosophers in *Confessions* VII.
[24] Ibid., 317.
[25] Petrarch 2017, 341–343 (III.18 = *Rerum fam.* XXII.2) for this and the next quotation.

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But from all this reading a personal style is confected that is an expression of one's own mind:

> I would much prefer my style be my own, however rough and unrefined, but well fitted like a robe, made to measure for my intellect, rather than another man's style decked with ambitious adornment but originating from a greater mind and overflowing on all sides in a way unfitted to a mind of humble stature.

This raises the question how Petrarch could reconcile the search for his own, distinctive Latin style with the desire to imitate and emulate ancient Latin. According to Ronald G. Witt, "Petrarch's idea of confecting his style from the most congenial aspects of pagan writing, however, militated against an in-depth inspection of individual styles."[26] And he continues:

> Petrarch had no conception of language as a developing constellation of verbal practices: style for him was solely a matter of individual achievement. While he had certain ingredients of a historical approach to language – he considered Cicero the acme of ancient eloquence and the Latin of the Middle Ages a great falling away from ancient standards – he had no idea of a "classical style" and tended to envisage a wide range of pagan authors and Christian writers at least down to Augustine as potential models for imitation.

This of course is only to be expected: Petrarch stands at the beginning of the humanist project to revive the language and styles of the ancients; as Latin still retains "an amorphous character" for him, his program must be considered as only a first stage in the process of entangling the various stages of the Latin language, a process Salutati was soon to take a step further.[27]

We cannot therefore expect a detailed analysis of the relationship between language and thought, or style and mind, or eloquence and philosophy. Petrarch crucially believed in the impact that classical style had on one's mind, emotions, and (virtuous) behavior, and thereby on one's personality. Hence, it had great potential for moral and religious reform. Much argumentation was not to be expected at a time when first and foremost an alternative to the scholastic culture had to be formulated in terms of a Christian reform based on the fusion of Augustinian

[26] Witt 2000, 270. Salutati had already recognized that Petrarch's style did not always meet classical standards; ibid., 326; Celenza 2018, 58; Hankins 2007–2008, 914 on *res* as the truth of things in Petrarch and Salutati. On the conflict between what Petrarch sees as the "weak," effeminate style of Ovid and the "strong" style of Cicero, Virgil, and Seneca, see Zak 2015.

[27] Witt 2000, 325–326, refers to Salutati as writing "the first literary history of Latin literature."

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meditation and Ciceronian eloquence. Such tensions, as already mentioned, were inevitable: the admiration for antiquity versus the fact that it was a pagan antiquity, the admiration of a style that had been the vehicle of much pagan thought, the passionate defense of eloquence versus the need for an inner dialogue and meditation, the imitation of ancient Latin prose style versus the creation of one's own distinctive style, the belief in ancient style as a yardstick versus the need to accept and use later forms of Latin (e.g. ecclesiastical Latin), praise of knowledge and clarity of thinking versus extolling willing and loving over knowing and having a clear mind, and so on. But these inner conflicts are not something to be deplored: they show the meeting of different traditions, different allegiances and commitments, in one and the same mind that struggles to bring them all together into one vision. Petrarch's vision of an alternative culture to the predominant scholastic paradigm proved to be a powerful vision that exercised an immense impact on his contemporaries and future generations, even though later humanists such as Leonardo Bruni did not always have the same qualms about loving antiquity for its own sake as he did.

Leonardo Bruni

The humanist critique of scholastic language, as launched by Petrarch, was further developed by Bruni in his famous denunciation of the medieval translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Bruni thought that the translation was rendered in "such a puerile and unlearned fashion," full of transliterations of Greek words and unclassical Latin, that he decided to make a new translation in good classical Latin, which he published in 1416.[28] Aware that a new translation of such an important philosophical work that had been studied for almost two centuries in the universities would meet with suspicion or even downright hostility, he explained in his preface why he thought a new translation was necessary. Critics of Bruni's translation, however, were not slow to point out that philosophy should not be subordinated to rhetoric. On their view, philosophical arguments require precision and rigor in terminology, something which they thought was lost in a translation or work written in a Ciceronian style. Bruni responded to his critics in several letters and in an unfinished treatise *On the Correct Way to Translate*, "the first treatise on translation produced in western Europe since antiquity."[29]

[28] Bruni 1987, 213.

[29] Botley 2004, 42; Hankins in Bruni 1987, 210, where Hankins describes this as "the first treatise on translation ever." On this work see also Den Haan 2016, 103–108.

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The debate has usually been depicted as a clash between two cultures, already announced in Petrarch's program of linguistic and moral reform of some decades earlier: the humanist culture in which the text of Aristotle – and indeed texts in general – are approached from a primarily linguistic, philological, and historical perspective versus a scholastic approach in which texts are treated as expressions of philosophical truths.[30] The clash has sometimes been described in even stronger terms, namely as opposing a humanist approach in which language is treated (often implicitly) as an active, creative, and formative power, against a scholastic-medieval approach that sees language as referring to and ideally mirroring a stable order of essences.[31] Humanists treated language as a social institution, shaped by the conventions and practices of its users, while scholastics used language primarily as a tool for approaching and describing the world of timeless essences. Such claims are often too general to do justice to the vast complexity and heterogeneity of both scholasticism and humanism, but in this particular case of Bruni's controversy they find support in some of the statements made by his main adversary, Bishop Alfonso of Cartagena. We find Alfonso, who had no Greek, saying things like "whatever is consonant with reason is what Aristotle must be considered to have said, and whatever our translation wisely expresses in Latin words, we may conclude was written in the Greek," and "we ought not to pay attention to what Aristotle says, but to what is consonant with moral philosophy."[32] Such statements indeed express a fundamentally different attitude from Bruni's historical and philological approach that starts from the Greek text of Aristotle.

In whatever terms we describe the clash, it is clear that some fundamental issues are at stake here. For our purposes the most important question, put in its most succinct and simple form, is: What are the requirements of philosophical language? Bruni's criticisms, while directed at the scholastic, postclassical terminology and transliterated Greek words in the medieval translation of Aristotle, are by extension a critique of the language and methods of medieval scholastics *tout court*. His conviction was that only classical Latin could render the thought and style of the ancients perspicuous, and perhaps – given the contours of his humanist program – this applied to thought in general. For him it was axiomatic that a classicizing style, which he so successfully imitated, was crucial for clear thinking: "The reading of clumsy and corrupt writers imbues the reader with their own vices, and infests his mind with similar corruptions."[33]

[30] For example Harth 1968; Gerl 1981; Hankins in Bruni 1987, 204; Hankins 2003; Roick 2017, 109; Celenza 2018, 71–93.
[31] Gerl 1981, 32–36, 93, and passim; Harth 1968, 49–52 and 56; Waswo 1979.
[32] Alfonso in Birkenmajer 1922, 166; trans. Hankins in Bruni 1987, 204 and Hankins 2003, 201–202.
[33] Bruni 1987, 241.

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But if style is more than just the wrapping of the content, as Bruni's Ciceronian defense of a unity of reason and eloquence, or *res* (things, the subject matter) and *verba* (words), seems to imply, does translation not necessarily bring with it an alteration of the content? Languages are different in grammar, vocabulary, structure, and so on, and authors have their own different style, so that Bruni might have concluded from his own wide experience in translating not only from Greek into Latin but also from Latin into the vernacular, that a perfect match is impossible and that the meaning of the original text does not remain wholly intact in the process of being translated, something captured by the saying "traduttore, traditore" (translator, traitor).[34] And what does this word "meaning" (*sensus*, *significatio*) mean for Bruni? Is the meaning to be sought at the level of words or do we have to transcend the level of words and take larger textual unities (sentences, paragraphs, the entire text) as locations of meaning? As a humanist and practicing translator with no interest in such theoretical questions about meaning as such, Bruni did not raise this issue, yet implicit ideas about it are likely to influence the translator's approach to the text (word for word, sentence for sentence, etc.).[35] As we will see, Bruni's emphasis on the importance of an author's style might imply a position according to which meaning is not something beside the expression, as if it were a fixed entity indifferent to its linguistic expression, but something that emerges from an investigation into linguistic usage.

Bruni's criticisms of the thirteenth-century translator Robert Grosseteste, whose identity Bruni did not know, are basically twofold: the medieval translator was deficient in both Greek and Latin, and his knowledge of philosophy was insufficient in order to correctly render important philosophical terms such as good, moral worth, useful, pleasure, pain, and terms referring to the virtues. The two points are clearly related, and we have already seen Bruni claiming that "the reading of clumsy and corrupt writers imbues the reader with their own vices, and infests his mind with similar corruptions."[36] Without further elaborating on the connection between thinking and language, he accuses the translator of "making confusion of the subject matter as well as the vocabulary."[37] At the end of the preface he writes that he undertook his translation because he saw to his

[34] On Bruni's translations into the vernacular see Hankins 2006.

[35] Apel 1975, 182 warns not to overestimate the philosophical implications; see Gerl 1981, 92, 98, and 152 on Bruni's lack of theoretical interest; cf. Harth 1968, 55 and 58.

[36] Bruni 1987, 241.

[37] Ibid., 214–215; Latin in Bruni 1928, 79 (not in Bruni 2013): "ipsum res quoque simul cum nominibus confudentem." "Simul" seems to point to the close connection that Bruni sees between words and things.

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dismay "how books that in Greek are utterly delightful are become harsh and hispid in Latin, with their vocabulary twisted, their matter obscured, and their doctrine undermined."[38]

Bruni's attack on the style of the translator is driven by his belief that Aristotle was a master of eloquence, something the scholastics in general had failed to recognize. Aristotle's copious and beautiful style should be matched in Latin so that Aristotle would recognize the Latin translations as his own, for "he would surely wish to appear among the Latins as he had made himself appear among the Greeks."[39] A similar point is made by Bruni in an early letter from 1400 addressed to Niccolò Niccoli where he spoke about his translation of Plato's *Phaedo*: "For those earlier translators followed Plato's words and idioms [*syllabas atque tropos*] whilst abandoning Plato himself, I, on the other hand, stay close to Plato; I imagine that he knows Latin, so that he can judge for himself; I will call him a witness to his own translation; and I translate as I think would please him best."[40]

Bruni's belief that Aristotle was an eloquent writer will probably puzzle the modern student of Aristotle. And also in Bruni's own time, as he tells us, there were "certain learned men" who had concluded from Aristotle's writings that "he is muddled, obscure, and awkward," to which Bruni replies that these texts are "simply the nonsense of the translations"; they are "*not* Aristotle's works – and if he were alive, he would himself repudiate them."[41] Bruni was convinced that Aristotle was a rhetorically skilled writer, whose style was ornate, polished, and beautifully crafted. In this he was probably inspired by Cicero, who had had access to the polished and ornate works of the early Aristotle that have since been lost. In the words of a modern scholar: Bruni was "the victim of a complicated trick of fate."[42] However, Bruni was not totally dependent on Cicero for his judgment, and forty years of engagement with Aristotle's works had made his conviction only stronger.[43] That conviction was not limited to Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics* but extended to the *Physics* and the *Metaphysics* – odd as that may seem to the modern student of these works. Further, the introduction in the fifteenth century, for example of the *Eudemian Ethics* and works attributed to Aristotle such as the *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* and *De mundo*, may have fostered this belief in Aristotle's eloquence and concern about rhetoric; confirmation could also be found in another text that had recently become available, Diogenes Laertius' *Life of*

[38] Bruni 1987, 217; Latin in Bruni 1928, 81. [39] Bruni 1987, 213; Latin in Bruni 1928, 77.
[40] Trans. Botley 2004, 51–52.
[41] See his *Life of Aristotle* in Bruni 1987, 290; Latin in Bruni 1928, 46 and Bruni 2013, 340.
[42] Seigel 1968, 110; cf. Stinger 1977, 105–106. [43] Botley 2004, 44–51.

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Aristotle. Moreover, Bruni's notion of eloquence seems to include also Aristotle's construction of arguments, the skillful disposition of the material, the frequent quotation from the poets, and the role of examples (e.g. in the *Politics*, believed by Bruni to be Aristotle's most rhetorical work).[44] Still, it is hard to avoid the impression that Bruni's belief could be held only because he was not well acquainted with the *Physics*, the *Metaphysics*, and the *Posterior Analytics*, possibly due to his own disinterest in the more theoretical parts of Aristotle's *oeuvre*. But Bruni could believe that even if Aristotle seems to lack eloquence in his theoretical writings (which, as we just saw, was something that Bruni denied) this was due only to mistreatment by Aristotle's medieval translators. What he, Bruni, had done for Aristotle in the field of practical philosophy was also possible for theoretical philosophy, which would then show Aristotle to be a master of eloquence in these disciplines too.

Another conviction, closely tied to Bruni's belief that Aristotle and Plato were highly rhetorically gifted authors, though each with their own distinctive features,[45] is that we need to transcend the level of individual words in order to do justice to their style. Words alone cannot convey a good sense of the overall effect, beauty, and expressiveness of the author's language. The whole seems more than the sum of its parts.[46] Word-for-word translation may be used when it does not lead to absurdity, but Bruni's emphasis on prose rhythm, sentence structure, literary polish, and everything that constitutes the author's style, requires a wider scope than word level, even though the majority of Bruni's examples of good and bad translations concern words. In order to replicate what Bruni's calls Plato's "majestic" style, its rhythmical qualities, its elegance, and its expressiveness, we cannot limit ourselves to jumping from one word to the next, connecting meanings of words as links in a chain. Rather, we must try to capture the spirit of the piece, or rather the spirit of the author. To do so we have to

[44] *Life of Aristotle* in Bruni 1987, 290–291. According to Bruni's older contemporary, Roberto Rossi, who produced a translation of the *Posterior Analytics*, Aristotle's eloquence "was due to his skillful disposition of his material" (Botley 2004, 49).

[45] For some qualifications of Plato's philosophy and style of philosophy see Bruni's *Life of Aristotle*, in Bruni 1987, 288–289 (Latin in Bruni 1928, 45 and Bruni 2013, 339), though he does not criticize Plato's literary style. See also Celenza 2018, 76–80 on Bruni's translation of Plato's *Phaedo*, stressing also the function it had for fifteenth-century readers on how to live well and die well.

[46] Copenhaver 1988, 87–88 mentions some obstacles to a consistent *ad verbum* method: (1) idiomatic expressions (e.g. *gero tibi morem*, I humor you); (2) the need to translate a word (e.g. *logos*) by using a variety of words in Latin; (3) to render a single Greek word by using a set of words (*aistheta* as *ea quae sensibus percipiuntur*, those things that are perceived by the senses).

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recreate the text anew in our own language by summing up all the linguistic and stylistic powers available to us:[47]

> Just as men who copy a painting borrow the shape, attitude, stance and general appearance therefrom, not thinking what they themselves would do, but what another has done; so in translation the best translator will turn his whole mind, heart, and will to his original author, and in a sense transform him, considering how he may express the shape, attitude and stance of his speech, and all his lines and colors.

Bruni's conception of the translator as an artist was classical in inspiration, reflecting a period when translations could be considered as independent works of art, but it is also interesting to compare it with a modern view, according to which the act of translating is not just transferring wordless ideas, as if pouring the same wine from one bottle to another. With only expressions at his or her disposal, the translator creates expressions that match the original, that is, when there is a correspondence between their uses. As W. Haas has argued:[48]

> the translator chooses *what* units to translate, and he chooses such units as correspond or can be *made* to correspond to one another. He tries to keep the size of his translation units to a minimum. But he cannot, generally, avoid having to deal with units larger than the word.

But given the openness of the matching units, the translator

> is able to *create* expressions for his one-to-one mapping. This is how languages are fashioned and re-fashioned by translation. The translator, dealing with "free constructions," constructs freely. He is not changing vehicles or clothing. He is not transferring wine from one bottle into another. Language is no receptacle, and there is nothing to transfer. To produce a likeness is to follow a model's lines. The language he works in is the translator's clay.

At first sight, the similarities in formulation are striking. Both Bruni and Haas exploit the familiar notion of the translator as a kind of artist. A translation, if done well, is a new product, perhaps even a new work of art. In doing so, the translator will keep an open eye to what matches with what, not restricting him- or herself to the level of individual words. Bruni

[47] *On the Correct Way to Translate* in Bruni 1987, 220; cf. 218; Latin text in Bruni 1928, 86 and Bruni 2013, 111.

[48] Haas 1962, 228 for this and the following quotation. For the classical inspiration see Botley 2004, 53 referring to Pseudo-Cicero, *De optimo genere oratorum*. Salutati made some similar remarks about translation; Seigel 1968, 116–119, referring also to Eugenio Garin's conclusion that the humanist versions of Aristotle are often mere revisions of the medieval texts rather than wholly new renderings.

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does not exclude word-for-word translation, when, for example, he writes that a good translator must have a thorough command of the target language: "he must have it completely within his power, so when he must render word for word, he will not beg or borrow or leave the word in Greek out of ignorance."[49] But the preservation of the author's style requires attention to much more than individual words. Bruni would therefore certainly agree with Haas's advice to the translator first "to determine the required 'style of speech.'"[50] While words form the basis of any text, Bruni's focus on style and rhetorical techniques leads to a focus on the matching of units broader than individual words.

The differences are as telling as these similarities, however. Bruni does not voice any skepsis about the notion of meaning; he would be puzzled by the phrase that "there is nothing to transfer." In Haas's view there is nothing to transfer because meanings are not the type of things that reside somewhere or can be moved, or can be attached to objects that they can be said "to denote" or "to refer to": "What an expression 'means' cannot be found as a separate entity beside the expression . . . Meanings, we have learned, are the *uses* of expressions; they are the work expressions do."[51] On such a view, the meaning of a word is "a collection, an organised recollection, of many individual uses of it, i.e. of various occurrences of it: in verbal and non-verbal contexts, and in positions in which it contrasts with other words." Meaning is not a "pure idea," "which is supposed to be indifferent to its linguistic setting, and therefore transportable from one linguistic vehicle to another." Such a Wittgensteinian critique of meaning is of course wholly foreign to Bruni, indeed to virtually everybody up to the twentieth century. For Bruni it is quite unproblematic to say that words have meaning, and indeed to learn their meaning – as well as the meaning of idiomatic expressions, figures of speech and tropes – is the first step in becoming a good scholar and translator. Study of words involves an examination of their etymology and classical usage. Following grammatical tradition, Bruni frequently talks, quite traditionally, about words having "force and signification (*vim significataque*)," using very frequently words such as "to signify" (*significare*), "signification" (*significatum*), "sense" (*sensus*), and "meaning"/ "what the author has in mind" (*mens auctoris*).[52] What a classical Greek or Latin word means can be found only by carefully studying how it was used by the great authors of antiquity, but there is no

[49] *De interpretatione recta* in Bruni 1987, 220; Latin in Bruni 1928, 85 and Bruni 2013, 111.
[50] Haas 1962, 227. [51] Ibid., 212 and 213 for the next two quotations.
[52] Bruni 1987, 218, 220, 221, and 224 (Latin in Bruni 1928, 84, 85, 87, and 91, and in Bruni 2013, 110–112, 116); Bruni 1741, 207 and 208.

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reason to think that Bruni would thereby identify the meaning of the word with its use, if only for the lack of any interest in such theoretical questions about meaning.

And yet it is not impossible to identify elements in his position that, if taken further beyond Bruni's own intellectual horizon, would go in a direction where meanings as entities, arguably, lose much of their identity as things (whether as mental concepts or as objects in the world, or both) independent of the linguistic expression: (a) Bruni's semantic investigations, in which words are explained by other words, and in which immersion in classical languages becomes an immersion in a web of words;[53] (b) his Ciceronian belief in the intrinsic connection between words and things (*verba* and *res*);[54] (c) his focus on style and larger textual unities which might render the search for a stable meaning that resides somewhere independent of the expression misguided; and (d) the focus on broad ethical and political concepts which are not objects "out there" like trees and dogs, something which makes it even more difficult to confront words with their meaning in the sense of comparing a word with a nonverbal object. Each of these points does not necessarily lead to a de-reification of meaning, and such a modern position is of course far from uncontroversial itself, but it would be out of place to enter into any discussion here. The point to stress is that Bruni's conception of the translator as an artist who has "to turn his whole mind, heart, and will to his original author" and to consider "how he may express the shape, attitude and stance of his speech, and all his lines and colors," might be said to favor a holistic approach to the text on the assumption that only such an approach can do justice to the style and broader intentions of the author.

This approach informs Bruni's list of requirements that a good translator must meet and that the medieval translator, according to Bruni, so

[53] Cf. Haas 1962, 215: "We do use expressions for the purpose of referring to things other than expressions. Our stock of significant expressions may be augmented by this operation; but only by assigning both the new expression and the new thing places among other expressions, never by merely referring one to the other." Moss 2003, 15–34 on Renaissance dictionaries in which webs of words proliferate, sometimes reflecting a "self-sufficient linguistic universe" as in the case of Perotti's *Cornu copiae* (published 1489): "a total culture is brought to life" (20). Stabilization of meaning was based on a careful examination of classical usage, summarized in increasing detail in dictionaries.

[54] Terence Cave, for example, sees a blending of word and thing in Erasmus' *De copia* (1512): "*Res* are neither prior to words as their 'origin,' nor are they a productive residue which remains after the words cease. *Res* and *verba* slide together to become 'word-things'; the notion of a single domain (language) having a double aspect replaces that of two distinct domains, language and thought" (1979, 21). For similar reasons, O'Rourke Boyle 1977 stresses the innovative character of Erasmus' view of language, an interpretation criticized by Waswo 1987, 218, who calls Erasmus's position "deliberately traditional." See also Harth 1970 on Erasmus's views on rhetoric and philosophy.

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sadly lacked. The translator must possess "a wide and extensive knowledge of both languages," knowledge that is "wide, idiomatic, accurate, and detailed, acquired from a long reading of the philosophers and orators and poets and all other writers."[55] One must know the tropes and figures of speech with their idiomatic meanings as used by the authors, for often, "words mean one thing, the sense is another." The translator should also be thoroughly familiar with the literature of the author, and "he must possess a sound ear so that his translation does not disturb and destroy the fullness and rhythmical qualities of the original."[56] The translator must get under the skin of the author: "He cannot possibly preserve the sense to advantage unless he insinuates and twists himself into the original's word order and periodic structure with verbal propriety and stylistic faithfulness."[57] It is perhaps characteristic that only on a few occasions does Bruni mention knowledge of the things spoken of in the text to be translated, as a further requirement.[58]

All these qualities are lacking in the medieval translator, who is "deficient in both languages, and competent in neither."[59] Bruni gives several examples of mistranslations and Greek words which a translator had left untranslated, such as *eutrapelia*, *bomolochia*, and *agroikos*;[60]

> For all these expressions which out of ignorance he has left in Greek can be aptly and elegantly rendered in Latin. First of all, the expression "play" [*in ludo*] he uses I think would be much better rendered by the word "jesting" [*in ioco*]. We use "play" most often to refer to ball-games and games of dice; "jesting" is reserved for words. The laudable mean, which the Greeks call *eutrapelia*, we call sometimes "urbanity" [*urbanitatem*], sometimes "liveliness" [*festivitatem*], sometimes "affability" [*comitatem*] and sometimes "pleasantry" [*iocunditatem*] . . . All these words are recommended by their frequent use in the best authors.

Bomolochia can be translated as "buffoonery," and those trying and failing to fit into this category as "loutish." The medieval translator also uses the Latin word *bonum* (good) to translate the Greek *kalon*, while words such as *bonum*, *honestum*, and *utile* "are distinct terms among the Greeks, as they are among the Latins, and if he understood anything at all, he could never

[55] Bruni 1987, 218 for this and the following quotation; Latin in Bruni 1928, 84 and Bruni 2013, 110; cf. Pseudo-Cicero, *Ad Herennium* IV.17.
[56] Ibid., 220; Latin in Bruni 1928, 86 and Bruni 2013, 111.
[57] Ibid., 221; Latin in Bruni 1928, 87 and Bruni 2013, 112.
[58] Letter 18 in Bruni 1928, 140. In *De studiis et litteris* Bruni speaks of the combination of literary skill with the knowledge of things (Bruni 1928, 6; Bruni 2013, 175).
[59] Bruni 1987, 213; Latin in Bruni 1928, 77.
[60] Bruni 1987, 214; Latin in Bruni 1928, 79.

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have confused them."[61] Further, he writes "delight" (*delectatio*) instead of "pleasure" (*voluptas*), and "sternness" (*tristitia*) for pain, departing "from the usage of Cicero, Seneca, Boethius, Lactantius, Jerome and other Latin authors." He had taken his words from the vulgar (*vulgus*), which is "hardly to be esteemed as a teacher of diction."[62]

Bruni's semantic investigations are also aimed at showing the richness of the Latin language. Latin is praised as "abundantly rich, acquainted not only with every form of expression, but with ample embellishments as well."[63] While not sharing the view of some of his contemporaries who, perhaps out of cultural rivalry, deplored the so-called verbosity of the Greeks versus the alleged conciseness of Latin, Bruni was convinced that Latin had all the resources to match whatever was written in (beautiful) Greek; hence there was no reason to leave Greek words untranslated in the text: "there has never been anything said in Greek that cannot be said in Latin."[64] We might expect Bruni, however, to have recognized the individuality of languages. As James Hankins notes:[65]

> It would have been natural for him, faced with the impossible task of preserving the propriety of his own language while rendering the most individual expressions of another, to have admitted its impossibility and to have realized that the forms of the expression native to a language are not simply a set of arbitrary signs standing for the unchanging objects of thought, as the medieval philosophers had held, but organic and individual expressions rooted in the historical experiences of a people.

This insight however was not fully grasped by Bruni, because he assumed "the cultural unity of Greece and Rome," and hence believed "that the Greek and Latin languages were, if not exactly interchangeable sets of signs for identical concepts, in any case fundamentally equivalent vehicles of expression." This cultural unity excluded the Jewish culture and the Hebrew language, which, according to Bruni, differs from Greek and Latin "in language and figures of speech so far from us that they even

[61] Bruni 1987, 215; Latin in Bruni 1928, 79.
[62] Ibid., 216; Latin in Bruni 1928, 80. The "vulgar" are the medieval translators with their poor linguistic skills.
[63] Ibid., 213; Latin in Bruni 1928, 78; cf. Cicero, *De finibus* 3.5.
[64] *On the Correct Way to Translate*, in Bruni 1987, 228; Latin in Bruni 1928, 95 and Bruni 2013, 119. On Poggio's rather negative perspective on Greek, see Botley 2004, 48: Poggio's views are related to "an ancient stereotype of Greekness: of Roman fears of the devious fluency of Odysseus and Sinon, and of a defeated nation corrupting the simple virtues of its conquerors with its sophistries."
[65] Hankins in Bruni 1987, 11 for this and the next quotation in the text.

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write in the opposite direction."[66] There was nothing to be gained from studying Hebrew; "Greek is the language of philosophy, and for the sake of other disciplines, too, is worth learning. Together with Latin it offers the complete range of all branches of literature." It looks as if Bruni glimpsed the individuality of Hebrew here only to dismiss it as "barbarous."[67]

Bruni's conviction that Ciceronian Latin was perfectly capable of expressing all kinds of philosophical truths was of course controversial. Among contemporaries who were critical of Bruni's project were Archbishop Battista de' Giudici, a certain Demetrius, whose letter to Bruni is lost, and Bishop Alfonso of Cartagena, already mentioned, who wrote the most extensive critique. The criticisms come down to the essential point that philosophy and eloquence are not the same thing. According to Alfonso, we can already see this in Cicero, whose discussion of Aristotle's moral philosophy is not as detailed, precise, and thorough as that of the Greek philosopher himself. The elegant language comes at the expense of the subtle distinctions which Aristotle had made in his discussion of the virtues.[68] The same is true for Seneca, whose writings are praised for their moral appeal but whose philosophical discussion of the virtues is "cursory and unsuitable" (*summarie et improprie*). Further, Bruni's idea that moral discourse must be subject to eloquence goes against Cicero's own opinion that oratory and philosophy each have their own domain.[69] In short, the requirements of eloquence are not consistent with "the rigor of science" (*rigor scientiae*), which requires "strict technical language" (*sub restrictis et propriissimis verbis*) and "a strict propriety of words" (*simplicitatem rerum et restrictam proprietatem verborum*).[70]

The precise understanding apparently requires also leaving some technical terms untranslated. More in general, as Alfonso points out, Latin has always absorbed foreign words such as *grammatica*, *logica*, *rhetorica*, *philosophia,* and *theologia*, and in fact much of Latin vocabulary is rooted in Greek.[71] It would impoverish the language if we were to shut it up within fixed borders. We see this borrowing between languages all the time, not only in the sciences and arts but also in "common and forensic linguistic

[66] Bruni to Giovanni Cirignano of Lucca, 12 Sept. 1442, trans. in Bruni 1987, 335 for this and the next quotation.

[67] On medieval and early-modern polemics about the grammatical differences and the directions of writing between Latin and Hebrew, see Stein Kokin 2015.

[68] Alfonso in Birkenmajer 1922, 174 for this and the next quotation about Seneca.

[69] Ibid., 175. A later critic of Bruni, Battista de' Giudici made many similar points, referring also to Cicero's view that ornate language was inappropriate in philosophical discourse (*De officiis* III); see Hankins 2003, 213.

[70] Ibid.; trans. in Bruni 1987, 205–206.

[71] Alfonso in Birkenmajer 1922, 168.

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usage" (*communi ac forensi usu loquendi*).[72] Bruni himself uses terms such as *cola*, *commota*, *periodos*, *tropos*, and so on. A further advantage of transliterated Greek terms is that, as a modern commentator notes, "they brought no irrelevant semantic baggage with them; the words were empty tokens which could be filled with the philosopher's meaning. This practice was a familiar device to Latin audiences for whom Greek traditionally provided technical vocabularies."[73] It seems that Alfonso has such a point in mind when he criticizes Bruni for suggesting that Greek *eutrapelia* must be rendered sometimes by "urbanity," sometimes by "liveliness," sometimes by "affability," and sometimes by "pleasantry." These words do not mean the same thing, says Alfonso, and the translator was therefore right not to enter into semantic controversies (*contentiones*), which can be best settled in a commentary added to the translation.[74] Where the proper meaning of words cannot be rendered with equal brevity (*sub simili brevitate*), it is wise policy to leave the Greek word untranslated in the translation.[75] Alfonso fears that Bruni's translation confounds the conceptual distinctions which have been handed over by Aristotle, Boethius, and Augustine, and laid down for instance in a dictionary such as the *Catholicon*: "in philosophy words should not be loosened without restraint, since from the use of improper words error gradually adds to the things themselves."[76]

In the rest of his response Alfonso tries to meet Bruni on his own ground, offering explanations of the terms used by the medieval translator, sometimes giving Spanish equivalents (e.g. *alvardanus* for *scurra* and *corthesia* for *curialitas*) to make his point. Alfonso argues that in every instance the medieval translator's choice is better than Bruni's. He was right to opt for *delectatio* rather than *voluptas*, since it is a more general term; *tristitia* and *dolor* were used correctly by the medieval translator to make the point that it is sadness rather than pain we seek to restrain by moral virtue; also the distinction between several types of vicious actions was better rendered by the medieval translator, because vice (*vitium*) is not always the opposite of virtue, as Bruni's translation suggests. In his long excursions into the meaning of moral terms such as *bonus*, *honestus*, *delectatio*, *voluptas*, and *vitium* Alfonso frequently appeals to what a term "properly" means; for example, "pleasure," taken in its proper sense, means

[72] Alfonso in Birkenmajer 1922, 167; 168–169. [73] Botley 2004, 56; cf. Seigel 1968, 126.
[74] Alfonso in Birkenmajer 1922, 171 and 167. [75] Ibid., 169.
[76] Alfonso in Birkenmajer 1922, 169: "sine freno laxanda sunt."

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solely bodily delights.[77] His concern in general is therefore not to check the adequateness of Bruni's translation but whether the translation makes sense philosophically speaking, that is, captures well the conceptual distinctions developed in the philosophical traditions.

Alfonso thus made some interesting and valuable points about philosophical terminology. Such terms are rich in content, having a whole philosophical tradition behind them, and to entangle all the semantic nuances requires a full understanding of the philosophical meanings of these terms, an understanding that comes with studying Aristotle, Boethius, the Church Fathers, and so on. In fact, a lack of philosophical understanding on Bruni's part had resulted in an absurd translation of *to agathon* as the highest good (*summum bonum*), thus implying that all objects tend to man's highest good, while Aristotle's teleology suggests something completely different, namely that all things tend to some end.[78] Translating a philosophical text requires not only a sound grasp of all the things Bruni had listed but also an understanding of philosophical concepts. An eloquent translation easily misses these subtleties and distinctions. Alfonso, however, undermines his own case by making resolute statements to the effect that reason dictates what we should read in the text: "whatever is consonant with reason is what Aristotle must be considered to have said, and whatever our translation wisely expresses in Latin words, we may conclude was written in the Greek."[79] In a debate on translation, this is of course not a strong position, even more so if ignorance of the source language (in this case Greek) makes it impossible to check the translation. And the conviction that Aristotle's text has *auctoritas* because Aristotle's philosophy is more or less the embodiment of reason and truth is also not a fruitful assumption for investigating the accurateness of a translation.

Alfonso's observations about the requirements of philosophical terminology, however, are not without their merits, and to some extent it is a pity that the issue of correct translation was mixed up with the issue of the proper standards for philosophical discourse, but of course they were

[77] Alfonso in Birkenmajer 1922, 181; cf. 179: "proprie sumpta." On the significance of *proprietas verborum* in fourteenth-century linguistic theory, see Harth 1968.

[78] Hankins 2003, 198–199. Bruni's translation of *tagathon* continued to arouse passionate responses, long after his death.

[79] Alfonso as translated by Hankins in Bruni 1987, 204. For Bruni's disappointing reactions to Alfonso, see Hankins 2003, 204–207, concluding that "his impatience and asperity of tone, his very lack of serious argument, and his evident expectation of general agreement show that the body of educated opinion was already on his side, and that the hermeneutical revolution of the humanists had already been victorious" (207).

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closely related at a time when translation of philosophical texts, often recently rediscovered, presented a significant challenge.[80] Many philosophers then and now would agree with Alfonso about the need for a precise and exact terminology that expresses the conceptual distinctions in an accurate and precise way. (They might also want to point out that Bruni, too, had his own controversial assumptions, e.g. Aristotle's eloquence.[81]) But Bruni would respond by claiming that his Ciceronian Latin is as precise and exact as can be; eloquence, in the words of a later humanist, is "not a straining after refinement, but rather the ability to explain accurately and clearly the opinions and thoughts of our minds."[82] Such debates show that words such as "precise," "exact," and "faithful" are normative rather than descriptive terms. Of course, we are often able to distinguish between, for example, very loose (free) and literal translations, but following a very strict translation at the level of individual words might result in something that even the translator might not recognize, on second thought, as very faithful. Jonathan Barnes, for instance, believes that his revised translation of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* is "more faithful" to Aristotle's Greek than his first version from 1975, which betrayed "a profound misconception" of what he thought was "a stern fidelity to Aristotle's Greek" (word for word), while in fact it was written in a "sort of dog English: always inelegant and sometimes barbarous, it appeared here as comic or disgusting and there as merely incomprehensible."[83] There is no straightforward yardstick of fidelity or faithfulness, and how one understands the notion is, as we have seen, dependent on the translator's ideas about the language and style of the source text, about the author and his or her works and ideas, and the opportunities that the target language

[80] The trade-off between popular accessibility and philosophical precision was of course one of the recurrent issues in the battle between rhetoric and philosophy. The famous debate between Giovanni Pico and Barbaro from the 1480s readily comes to mind, with Pico playing the highly eloquent defender of scholastic thought and language against Barbaro who had criticized the "dull, rude, uncultured style" of the scholastics. One of the more interesting points in the debate is Pico's argument that, if language is conventional, "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." Hence, scholastics, like everybody else, may agree on a common norm of speaking. "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." Trans. in Breen 1968, 22 (originally published as Breen 1952); Moss 2003, 68–70; Kraye 2008; Hankins 2019, 21–23. There is a considerable literature on this debate; see MacPhail 2014, 21 n. 10.

[81] Cf. Seigel 1968, 125.

[82] Franz Burchard in 1558, as translated by Botley 2004, 60. Bruni's translation was criticized as too free by Johannes Argyropoulos, who made his own translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*; Seigel 1968, 245–246. There were also humanists who continued to defend Bruni; see Botley 2004, 59–60.

[83] Barnes in Aristotle 1993, xxiv.

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offers and the limitations that it seems to impose on the translator, as well as about the relation between style and content, word and meaning, rhetoric and philosophy.

The debate about translations and philosophical terminology continued among humanists who were producing ever more new translations of ever more works, and by the end of the fifteenth century almost all Greek literature as we know it today, including philosophical and scientific works, had become available. Seen from this broader perspective the debate sparked by Bruni's translation cannot be reduced to a controversy simply between humanists and scholastics. Translations always give rise to heated debates, and this was no different in the Renaissance from how it is now. But these debates were not directly aimed at scholastic language as such. To see how Bruni's critique of the so-called barbarous language of the scholastics was taken up and expanded into a comprehensive critique of scholastic language we must turn to his younger contemporary, Lorenzo Valla.

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