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L'insegnamento delle discipline by Juan Luis Vives

Review by: Charles Fantazzi

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Juan Luis Vives. *L'insegnamento delle discipline*.

Immagini della ragione 13. Trans. Valerio Del Nero. Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2011. xlvi + 260 pp. €24. ISBN: 978-88-222-6075-8.

Valerio Del Nero, one of the foremost scholars of Vives in our time, has presented us once more with a splendid translation into Italian of a very important work of Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, which is the second part of his three-part monumental treatise on education, *De disciplinis*. The entire work consists of twenty books, of which *De tradendis disciplinis* constitutes five, followed by an essay on the qualities requisite of the teacher, *De vita et moribus eruditi*. Del Nero felicitously chose as the base text for his translation the editio princeps, published in Antwerp by Michael Hillen in 1531, in which the full title is *De tradendis disciplinis seu de institutione Christiana*; in doing so, he preserves the religious framework of Vives's concept of education, combined with classical culture, as in Erasmus's educational ideal of *pietas erudita* (learned piety). He also takes into consideration the most available edition of Vives's complete works, the Valencia eighteenth-century edition of Gregorio Mayans y Siscar (reprint, 1964). It is the first edition to divide the books of *De disciplinis* into chapters with synopses of the contents of each chapter. Del Nero considers this a betrayal of Vives's concept of an *encyclios paideia*, in which the various disciplines form a continuous whole, reinforced by frequent intertextual techniques. However, for the convenience of the reader who

may wish to consult the Latin text, Del Nero retains the chapters and the headings (much abbreviated) and gives page references to both editions.

The only translation of this work into English is that of Foster Watson, published in 1913 and reprinted in 1971. He was a professor of education in Wales who tried to revive interest in Vives in England, with little success. Watson's translation is accurate enough, although he misinterprets certain key words of Vives, and his annotation is practically nonexistent. Yet it is almost impossible to read this immensely learned treatise without the support of an adequate scholarly commentary. Del Nero has now provided this, tracing almost every one of the hundreds of references in *De tradendis disciplinis* from classical, biblical, patristic, medieval, and Renaissance sources. This is a feat in itself and allows us to read the text with much greater understanding. Vives shows an extraordinary familiarity with the educational treatises of antiquity and quotes from them frequently: these include the pseudo-Plutarch *Education of Children*, which was accepted as genuine in the Renaissance; Quintilian; Cicero's rhetorical works; and even less-canonical works, like Galen on the temperaments. At the same time he does not neglect the fathers of the church, especially Basil, John Chrysostom, Jerome, and Augustine. Since the scope of Vives's purview of universal knowledge is all-embracing, he cites more arcane writers, both ancient and modern, in his discussion of such subjects as geography, astronomy, agriculture, medicine, technology, even oceanography. For these disciplines he quotes from such figures as Joannes Sacrobosco, the thirteenth-century astronomer at the University of Paris and author of *De sphaera*, a commentary on Ptolemy's *Almagest*; Georg von Peurbach (1423–61), an Austrian astronomer, and even his commentator, Francesco Capuano; and Pietro de' Crescenzi (ca. 1223–ca. 1320), a Bolognese agronomist.

Vives speaks of justice and language as the two pivots of human society, but gives the palm to the latter. The third book of the treatise is an exaltation of language, which, according to Vives, flows directly from reason and intelligence as from a fountain. It is the instrument of human society, without which the mind, confined by the grossness of the body, could not be revealed. He also gives primacy to Latin, drawing on Valla's *Elegantiae linguae latinae*, which championed classical Latin; but in contrast to both Valla and Erasmus, Vives was also open to the study of the vernacular languages, including Arabic and even Arabic dialects. As in his youthful attack against the scholastic logicians of Paris, Vives emphasizes usage and custom against the construction of artificial languages, known only to their select practitioners. Unlike medieval grammarians, he advocates a descriptive rather than a prescriptive grammar, based on the usage of the best authors.

We are now in possession of a sure guide to this landmark in the history of education, rendered into a clear, elegant Italian and prefaced by a lucid introduction to Vives's thought.

CHARLES FANTAZZI
East Carolina University