Juan Luis Vives

J. L. Vives: De ratione dicendi. Critical Edition with Introduction, Translation and Notes by David Walker. Selected Works of Juan Luis Vives, Volume II. Leiden: Brill, 2018. Pp. viii + 499. Hb, \$121.

Juan Luis Vives (1493–1540) was probably the ablest and best known northern European humanist after Erasmus and Thomas More. Indeed, Vives manifested a stronger social conscience than Erasmus and he wrote on more diverse topics than More. Although born in Valencia, Vives was a northern Christian humanist because he attended the University of Paris, served Queen Catherine of Aragon in England, and made his permanent home in Bruges, where he died.

In 1533 (Louvain: Rutgerus Rescius) he published *De ratione dicendi libri tres* (Three books on the art of rhetoric), which was reprinted only twice in the sixteenth century. This volume presents a Latin critical edition based on the 1533 edition plus the first English translation. It also includes a seventy-two-page Latin edition and English translation of *De causis corruptarum artium* (On the causes of corruption of the arts), the first part of *De disciplinis* (Antwerp: Michael Hillenius, 1531), of Vives, a critical survey of all aspects of learning, plus proposals for renewal, because it is connected to some of the points that Vives made in *De ratione dicendi*.

In *De ratione dicendi* Vives offered his analysis of what rhetoric should be, the ideal rhetoric or writing style. The work bears some resemblance to the much better known *De copia* of Erasmus. But it is also different, because *De ratione dicendi* is fundamentally a treatise on what the foundations of true rhetoric should be, while Erasmus's work gave many examples to follow. Vives, the humanist, rejected medieval rhetoric. Following the *Ciceronianus* (1528) of Erasmus, Vives also criticized Italian humanists and George of Trebizond, who taught in Italy, for their excessive imitation of Cicero. He rebuked them for detaching rhetoric from morality, which enabled them to argue either side of an issue. Nor did Vives unreservedly endorse ancient rhetoric. Although Vives offered much favorable commentary on the ancients, he believed that their rhetoric was more weighted toward winning cases than speaking truth.

Vives argued strongly that rhetoric has a moral basis. Rhetoric was moral because it was closely linked to human morality. Eloquence comes from the moral nature of the man; it expresses the true person. According to Vives, a man's style, the way that he speaks and writes, expresses and exposes his character. There was a bond between rhetoric and the true person. Alas, every day Donald Trump demonstrates the accuracy of what Vives wrote in 1533.

When it came to the specifics of style, Vives argued that the best style was a natural style, one based on the simplicity of ordinary speech. It should be a

style that comes from one's own feelings, and it should communicate with the feelings of others. Rhetoric should convey sincerity, something that Vives found lacking in classical rhetoric and that he wished to insert into humanist rhetoric. Vives understood extremely well the many different aspects of classical rhetoric, and he commented on practically every rhetorical device, figure, and genre. But his overall message was that rhetoric has a moral base. In his introduction, Walker makes the point that Vives was fundamentally anti-rhetorical, because he wanted a writing and speaking style that was so much a product of the person that one could not distinguish between style and person.

Because *De ratione dicendi* was, for Vives, an educational treatise, he commented on the disciplines that made up humanistic studies. His thoughts about history in Book Three are particularly interesting, at least to this historian. Vives began with the simple comment that history is the explanation of an event. Note that it was an explanation, not just a narration, which he examined in some detail. In other words, history might be explanatory or analytical narrative, which is what many historians today try to write. History should be true, "as far as the writer's talents will allow," (347) a realistic caution. He also emphasized the humanistic moral approach toward history. History is more useful and valuable if it can show the best course of action and help the reader avoid the wrong road. He wanted history to offer good examples. And he wrote that "the historian should be a man without a country, independent, subject to no sovereign, for the sake of the freedom of his writing" (347). One can only agree with Vives.

In the introduction Walker provides a good summary of the thrust of *De ratione dicendi*. However, one wishes that he had explained the circumstances of Vives's teaching at the University of Louvain, because it may have shaped his ideas about rhetoric. In his notes Walker identifies Vives's many references to ancient sources. The notes and explanations for Renaissance individuals and commonplaces are less complete. Walker uncritically accepts the sometimes negative assessment of Italian rhetoricians that Erasmus and Vives offered, in part because some secondary sources consulted are old and one-sided. Italian Renaissance humanists from the beginning wrote that *res non verba* (things, not words) were the basis of good rhetoric. Things meant moral principles plus practical experience, such as that acquired through history. Walker does not include in either his Latin edition or the English translation a table of contents. Assuming that the 1533 edition had one, including it would enable readers to comprehend more quickly the structure of *De ratione dicendi*. There are some proofreading slips. On the other hand, the translation is clear, forceful, and fluid. Most importantly, it is very good and useful to have a Latin critical

edition and English translation of an important treatise on rhetoric from a major Renaissance humanist.

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