Sperone Speroni's first programmatic writing to tackle the problem of the vernacular and its relations with philosophy and logic is the treatise *Del modo di studiare*. It is, as has been noted, a text full of pedagogical ideas defining a new concept of the humanist intellectual and civic life in the Cinquecento. The work consists of two discourses, was probably written around 1530 at the behest of the Venetian nobleman Giovanni Cornaro for his son Luigi, and focuses on the relationship between wisdom and eloquence.

Speroni's indebtedness to the philosophy of Pomponazzi is immediately obvious. The work opens with a statement which for us now is surprising: “nothing... Peretto was wont to say is given by nature for the glory and usefulness of mortals, is more specific to human nature, than the marriage of eloquence and wisdom”. This idea seems in direct and complete contradiction to what was said earlier about Pomponazzi’s philosophy, but in fact it is not. Speroni clarifies that only wisdom has a foundational character, while eloquence is simply ornament and has the function, as in Pomponazzi, of persuading people.

The first discourse is devoted to the investigation of knowledge, while the second is devoted to eloquence. Speroni departs from the Aristotelian theory that words are signs or images of the concepts of the intellect. It is only the intellect with its concepts that distinguishes us from beasts, and as much as words and languages are beautiful or ornate, they are not sufficient to distinguish the human being from other animals, which, experience and history show, are capable of producing them. Language is

2 Speroni 1740, Vol. 2, 486: “niuna cosa... dir soleva il Peretto esserci data dalla natura a gloria ed utilità de’ mortali, più propria all’umanità, che sia il congiunger insieme l’eloquenzia e la sapienzia”.
3 Cf. Ibid., 487.
4 Cf. Ibid.
just a tool used to express and articulate the concepts of the mind.\(^5\) This first observation, according to Speroni, already shows the error of those who abandon the study and cognition of things and waste their lives on the study of languages, thus “learning not the reasons why truth manifests itself, but with which diction a Greek or Latin writer signified something in his times”.\(^6\) Speroni thus shows how much more important the search for the truth about things is than the elocution of ornate language, which is nothing more than the futile oration of ignorant people, filled with a thousand images that are devoid of any real feeling and are communicated as lies to baffle fools. Eloquence needs wisdom, otherwise it is nonsense. But wisdom also needs eloquence, as it allows us to better communicate what is known, which is the basis for all progress in knowledge.\(^7\)

Neither wisdom nor eloquence characterize all human beings in the same way, and there are very few human beings who can penetrate the mysteries of nature, and equally rare are those capable of speaking in an excellent manner. Speroni’s goal is to explain how wisdom and eloquence are attributable to the human being.

There are two types of wisdom, one is called contemplative and concerns knowledge of God and nature, the other is active and concerns any virtuous operation of human beings.\(^8\) Following Pomponazzi, Speroni states that contemplative or speculative science is properly and solely the domain of God, and, only in an analogous and diminished manner, of human beings. So it is said that a human being is wise only because it can sometimes catch a glimpse of the knowledge that God has at all times. But the various opinions and conjectures of philosophers on the causes of things show that it is in fact not really possible to have complete knowledge, which belongs only to the one who produces them.\(^9\) This attitude, however, must not lead to contempt for the sciences. For human beings have the opportunity to investigate the order of the universe, its parts and how each depend upon the other, and can study the course of nature and how things are generated and corrupted. Instead, the study of “presumptuous questions” (presuntuosi quesiti) such as fortune, the void, the infinite, time, eternity, the motion of the heavens, the celestial intelligences and the wisdom and providence of God are best left to the enlightened

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\(^5\) Cf. Ibid., 488.

\(^6\) Ibid., 488.

\(^7\) Cf. Ibid., 488.

\(^8\) Cf. Ibid., 488.

\(^9\) Cf. Ibid., 490–91.