

**The Content, Context and Influence  
of the work of  
Juan Luis Vives (1492-1540)**

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## Summary

The aim of this thesis is to examine the educational and psychological theories of the renaissance philosopher Juan Luis Vives. A brief history of Vives' life is given as background information and, to place his work in context, the central concepts of Renaissance Humanism are explained. As Vives was influenced by Desiderius Erasmus and by the central tenets of Northern Humanism, information is given on these subjects.

The main focus of the research is a study of Vives' pedagogy and psychology as set out in the texts *De institutione foeminae Christianae*, *De tradendis disciplinis* and *De anima et vita*. Vives' educational work is discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, and comparison is made with other renaissance theories of education. It will be explained that his educational philosophy rests upon his theory of the soul. This led him to consider such things as the role of memory in the learning process, the need to take account of children's psychological maturation when planning a course of study, and the way in which sensate information is 'translated' into percepts. Chapter 6 deals with Vives' treatise on psychological processes (*De anima et vita*) and includes description and analysis of his epistemology together with his examination of the 'passions' and their effect on cognitive functioning.

It will be argued in Chapters 7 and 8 that aspects of Vives' work are forerunners of later theories: specifically, the philosophy of Pierre Gassendi, the study of the soul by René

Descartes, and the pedagogy of John Locke. Gassendi was instrumental in reviving interest in Epicurianism and in the work of Sextus Empiricus. In turn, this contributed to widespread interest in the classical concept of 'empirical' philosophy. Gassendi relied on the work of several earlier authors in the development of his theories, and he acknowledged Vives' philosophy as being of influence. In contrast to the empirical approach to philosophy attempted by Gassendi, and later by Locke in a more sophisticated form, Descartes adopted a rationalist approach to epistemology. As with Vives, however, he offered a description of the soul in his text *Les Passions de l'Ame*. Descartes' concepts of psychology are delineated in Chapter 7 and compared with those set out in Vives' *De anima et vita*. Chapter 8 also explores the development of empirical philosophy as evinced by the theories of John Locke.

This research offers description, analysis and interpretation of Vives' ideas which have been largely ignored in the history of education and psychology. Moreover, it places his work in its wider context of the development of humanism and philosophical empiricism in Europe.



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## Introduction

The primary interest of this thesis is the educational and psychological theories of the Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives as set out in his texts *De tradendis disciplinis*, *De institutione foeminae Christianae* and *De anima et vita*. These works will be examined in detail to illustrate Vives' pedagogy and to demonstrate how his theory of education is underscored by his inquiry into the human 'soul'. In this introduction the content of the thesis will firstly be described together with clarification of some of the main terms which arise in the work. Thereafter, the historical method used will be explained in a sub-section which will also discuss some of the alternatives available and justify the reasons for rejecting them as viable for this research.

In analyzing Vives' theories on psychology and education the case will be made that while his thought is in some ways typical of renaissance humanism, his ideas are in other respects forward thinking. To provide background for this analysis, Chapters 1-3 of the thesis will give both biographical information and information on renaissance humanism. Of particular interest will be the growth of humanism in Northern Europe and the importance of the work of Desiderius Erasmus. As the biographical detail explains, Vives was a 'product' of Northern European humanism and, as such, was influenced by Erasmus. Discussion of Erasmus' thought is merited in its own right, given its dominance of the intellectual climate of Northern Europe in the early decades of the sixteenth century, quite apart from its influence on individual humanists such as Vives. Erasmus' work is therefore dealt with in Chapter 3.

Vives' main texts are examined in Chapters 4-6. Thereafter, those elements of his thought which anticipate the work of later authors will be described in Chapters 7 and 8. The authors concerned are Pierre Gassendi, René Descartes and John Locke. When studying the three principal areas of concern in Part 2 ( Vives' ideas on the education of women, and his theories of pedagogy and psychology) information will be given to place the discussion in context. The development of thought relevant to each area will be delineated and, where necessary, mention will be made of specific authors whose work contributed to intellectual trends. There is a possibility that such an enquiry will become infected with what Georges Canguilhem referred to (with respect to the history of scientific ideas) as the "virus of the precursor"<sup>1</sup>, of making this type of analysis the mainstay of historical research. However, as Gary Gutting comments, Canguilhem's statement does not mean that he "denies the need to understand the influence of earlier scientific work on later. Because science is a part of human culture, its discoveries are conditioned by the (explicit and implicit) education of those who make them... "<sup>2</sup> The intention in this thesis, then, is not to give the impression that historical development is being viewed as a linear progression. An evolutionary continuum of some overarching concepts may be discernible in an historical period, but it is recognised that historical development does not necessarily occur in a structured sequence of events.

Arising from the discussion of Vives' theories about the intellect and epistemological processes (as elaborated in *De anima et vita*), attention is given to the development of scientific method. Although study of this aspect is not afforded primacy in this thesis, it underlies the arguments presented in Chapters 6-8. The Renaissance has been regarded as a time when 'natural philosophy' was the overriding means to investigate the world, and 'science' based on empirical research was not evident. This is not quite the case, despite evidence that philosophical speculation about the nature of physical phenomena was still apparent. Moreover, during the Enlightenment, the 'new' science was still regarded as



dangerous where it related to such primary considerations as the soul. It is this focus on the soul and its relation to the body that determines much of the debate about what the new science meant. Because of the uncertainties concerning the definition of the soul, the issue of the passions and the imagination also came to be of major importance.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, in the eighteenth century there remained a drive to describe the faculties of the soul, with the role of the 'passions' commanding as much importance as it had in Vives' analysis two hundred years before. This highlights the relevance to this thesis of studying psychological theory as it was depicted in *De anima et vita*, and of considering this text in relation to the concern with psychological and emotional motivation which was shown later by writers like Descartes and Locke.

Emergence of a scientific approach to the study of natural phenomena is often viewed as one characteristic of the Enlightenment in Europe, although aspects of such an approach may be discernable in earlier historical periods. Progressive adjustments in the connotations associated with the term *science* indicate how complex and multilinear was the evolution of a scientific outlook. Jorge Gracia notes that

until the eighteenth century the word 'science' (*scientia*, from *scio*, to know) was commonly used to refer to philosophy as well as to what today we refer to as the natural sciences, and the word 'philosophy' was used to refer to the natural sciences as well as to philosophy. The uses of 'science' and 'philosophy' in these rather broad (senses), if measured by contemporary usage, ...go back to the Middle Ages, although their ultimate bases are to be found in ancient Greek thought. These uses can easily be illustrated in the philosophical and scientific literature of various times... Newton, for example, thought that he was doing philosophy in his *Philosophiae naturalis principia mathematica* (1687) and Descartes thought he was doing science in *Le discours de la méthode* (1637).<sup>4</sup>

Precisely because of such alterations in the concepts associated with these terms it is difficult, in dealing with this aspect of the history of ideas, to define exactly what it means - and what it *meant* - to adopt a 'scientific approach' to the study of natural phenomena. It is

generally accepted that use of empirical methods of gathering information is central to scientific method. If one aspect of empirical method is said to be the observation of natural phenomena, then Vives can be said to utilise rudimentary empiricism (in *De anima*). While use of observation alone cannot define 'scientific method', it is a significant aspect of a scientific approach to the research of natural phenomena. What is of concern to this thesis is the use of elementary empirical methods to gather information although that information is located within an essentially philosophical form of discourse. It will be argued that this is significant in the overall evolution of a scientific approach to studying the world. Furthermore, the elaboration of an empirical approach was of fundamental importance to the growth of scientific method and, with respect to the history of ideas, 'empiricism' was of particular relevance to the epistemology of John Locke.

However, the use of a term like 'empiricism' should not obscure the complexity inherent in the attempt to characterise such bodies of thought. The work of Vives and Locke can be described as displaying elements of empirical philosophy, whereas the work of Descartes - who did not eschew experimentation - is primarily 'rationalist'. Aspects of Vives' work stress the acquisition of knowledge through observation and experience. As with Locke, Vives no longer accepts intellection *a priori* (except in the case of belief in God). Knowledge about the world and the nature of man is thus knowledge *a posteriori*, and it will be argued that this is an important shift from earlier methods of natural inquiry. It is a shift that characterised the intellectual climate which facilitated the growth of scientific method.

In discussing these issues, a distinction will be made between philosophers whose work rests upon methodological rationalism (Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes) and those who accord some importance to philosophical empiricism (Vives, Locke). However the terms rationalism and empiricism require some explanation as they are used in this thesis. Where



rationalist philosophy is spoken of, it is considered to have specific underlying assumptions. Description of these assumptions follows that given by Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias<sup>5</sup>, namely that rationalism, and rationalist philosophy, assume:

- a) that the human mind can understand the world independent of phenomena;
- and
- b) that forms of knowledge exist which are prior to personal experience.

Therefore, to state that Aristotle's (or Descartes') philosophical method was predominantly rationalist does not mean that they never observed the natural world. It means, rather, that they regarded abstract formal logic as the way to understand certain aspects of the world, and that they did not regard empirical observation as the principal method of acquiring knowledge. Although, as Gracia states, many philosophers from the Classical era to the Enlightenment believed that there were limiting factors on "the human capacity to know"<sup>6</sup> - for instance, factors arising from a reliance on sensate information - they remained confident that "the natural faculties possessed by human beings, namely reason and perception, were effective for the accomplishment of the task" of knowing and describing "what there is"<sup>7</sup>. In terms of the case which will be advanced in this thesis, the crucial consideration is that these philosophers (including Descartes) regarded metaphysical enquiry as a valid means to understand the world as it is, and to understand this with certainty. Despite holding reservations about the reliability of sensate information, many pre-Enlightenment philosophers did not consider that "such limitations necessitated fundamental changes in the mode of philosophical enquiry"<sup>8</sup> that they used to inquire into natural phenomena.

In arguing that a shift occurred in the method used by 'natural philosophers' to describe physical phenomena, it will be accepted that there was development of a 'scientific

approach' to observing, describing and analysing such phenomena. The term 'scientific approach' is again regarded as having key underlying assumptions. Once more the delineation of these by Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias<sup>9</sup> is useful:

that nature is orderly (where 'nature' refers to all empirically observable objects, conditions and phenomena existing independently of the observer);

that man can know nature (that is, by way of empirical observation);

that all natural phenomena have natural causes;

that nothing is self-evident (truth must therefore be demonstrated objectively and not accepted *apriori*);

that knowledge is derived from the acquisition of experience.

The scientific approach relies above all on perception, experience and observation. While Vives' approach to study of the soul and processes of intellection can in no way be said to epitomise such an approach, a case will be made that his work displays specific elements of the approach, in an early form (for example, reliance on observation and the perceptual process, and appeal to reasoning *a posteriori*.) Where empirical observation is described as occurring in Vives' work, it is of a rudimentary type and principally related to his epistemological and psychological theory. Thus, the main concern will be his analysis of how perceptual information is accessed by the percipient. Two elements are deemed central to this discussion: reliance on observation and denial of *apriori* knowledge. Thus it will be argued that his philosophy indicates tentative use of a method which begins to move away from the rationalist philosophy typical of earlier historical eras, towards the epistemological position adopted by John Locke.

## Historical methodology

In undertaking historical research it is necessary to consider the possible methods which are available for the task. Description of the main alternative methods will be given, and the methodology which underlies this thesis will be discussed. Perhaps the place to begin is with the traditional view of historical research, one which might best be called *realist*.

Those who accept the use of a realist methodology in historical research regard certain historical data as existing outwith the mind and perceptions of the researcher. They will regard such data as 'facts' and look upon history as an empirical endeavour. Maurice Mandelbaum has written that "in laying claim to truth [historical research] must be able to advance external evidence that vouches for its truth; in default of this, it is not to be considered a historical study."<sup>10</sup> The realist position considers history to be capable of being an objective pursuit which can lead to objective knowledge about the subject of the research. Thus the fundamental structure of an historical account is imposed by the evidence on which the account rests rather than by the historian's analysis.

However, alternative methodologies evolved from traditional acceptance of the realist position. Theorists such as Becker and Beard developed concepts of historical methodology (partially relying on ideas advanced in an earlier form by Hegel and Marx). They promoted a sceptical element, prompting the question: how can we prove that the historical data we utilise is *true*. The sceptical standpoint introduced a relevant caveat to processes of historical research in that it stressed the importance of the historian's role in interpreting historical data. According to this approach, historical research is a subjective undertaking where claims to *truth* are not verifiable in any *strong* form. The heart of



Becker's methodology lay in his contentions that members of every generation will understand the past in the light of their own contemporaneous experiences. He believed that knowledge of history is "worthless except to those who have made it... a personal possession. The value of history is... not scientific but moral..."<sup>11</sup> For Becker, historical knowledge could give those who studied the moral lessons in history the means for self, rather than social, control.

Arguably there is some validity in the sceptical position in that it induces historical researchers to consider their associations with the evidence which they gather, and on which they build their historical analyses. It is acceptable to stress the relationship which the historical researcher has with the artefacts of the past, and to highlight the possibility that historical research does not uncover truth about past events but instead represents the researcher's subjective, qualitative, analysis of the artefacts under study influenced by current societal values and beliefs. Of course, in undertaking any historical research, the researcher must rely on historical artefacts (for instance, documents and texts). This thesis rests upon evidence which lies in primary textual sources. The research process thus recognises the need for evidence to underpin the analysis of Vives' ideas, but the researcher accepts that the evaluation of the evidence is based on a subjective interpretation of the primary texts and the secondary sources. This does not mean that the research disregards any attempt to construct a reasonable analysis based on the evidence used. It does attempt this. Further, it is recognised that historical researchers must guard against making claims which textual evidence does not support. There is therefore acceptance of the importance of textual evidence, but the subjective element in interpretation is acknowledged.

However, it should be pointed out that while every effort has been made to ensure that the analysis is reinforced by textual evidence and embedded in ideas supported by more recent

interpretations of historical events, there is a problematic aspect to any such form of research. That is, there is an inevitable imposition of coherence and structure on historical events/ideas which may or may not reflect past actuality. To an extent this is due to the narrative and analytical structure of historical research, especially research which is undertaken with respect to the conventions imposed by a doctoral thesis. In order to present historical analysis in a structured, logical way, imposition of coherence on historical events/ideas may well be unavoidable unless there is a conscious rejection of traditional forms of historical methodology.

Such a conscious rejection of traditional historical methods might be attempted through acceptance of postmodernist theory and the rejection of what the postmodernists would call meta-theory and meta-narrative. To do so would mean that an historical researcher would have to attempt to understand the past by embracing historical discontinuities and fragmentations while consciously rejecting the imposition of coherence or cohesion upon the events/ideas being studied. Historical research would therefore become a search for understanding largely based on describing disparate, isolated historical elements. While Michel Foucault would be termed a poststructuralist rather than a postmodernist, the method of historical research which he outlines in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*<sup>12</sup> could well be the most apposite one for those who reject the imposition of coherence.

Foucault's archaeological method is not designed to facilitate a search for truth, or to analyse historical events with regard to cause and effect. Instead, it is an attempt to uncover historical artefacts and accept them for what they are in themselves (not for any signifying aspect they might be said to have). This extends even to discourse, which Foucault writes should not be treated as a "*document*, as a sign of something else"<sup>13</sup>, but as "*a monument*. [Archaeology] is not an interpretative discipline..."<sup>14</sup> Foucault writes that his method does not "try to restore what has been thought, wished, aimed at, experienced,



desired by men in the very moment at which they expressed it in discourse"<sup>15</sup>. Archaeology is instead "nothing more than a rewriting", a "regulated transformation of what has already been written... ; it is the systematic description of a discourse-object"<sup>16</sup>. Foucault's historian ceases to be an interpreter or analyst and becomes instead an "archaeologist" of knowledge - the historian becomes a describer of discourses, rather than an analyst of "the thoughts, representations, images, themes, preoccupations that are concealed or revealed" in them<sup>17</sup>.

This method has grave repercussions for such disciplines as the history of ideas, and was rejected by this researcher as being too problematic to utilise successfully. Foucault's method abandons such a concept as the history of ideas in what he intends as a "systematic rejection of its postulates and procedures, an attempt to practise a quite different history of what men have said."<sup>18</sup> Yet Foucault's own analyses of historical trends and events do not follow successfully the method he suggests. His historical work, as opposed to his philosophy, generally adopts a fairly traditional Marxist/structuralist method of inquiry. And as Gary Gutting suggests, when Foucault is more attuned to the archaeological method, for instance in *The Order of Things*, he "seldom makes any effort to show that his claims are supported by the relevant texts of a given period, nor does he pay much attention to the apparent counterexamples to his views."<sup>19</sup> Although this refers to Foucault's work from a conventional standpoint, the remark demonstrates one difficulty which his method encounters: that what is written by the historian, using this method, is prey to the accusation of simple assertion.

Furthermore, as Adrian Kuzminski states, the poststructuralist "refusal to elevate any type of representation over any other" leads to an insistence that "no representations [of experience] are real... they are equally illusory"<sup>20</sup>. Thus, Kuzminski notes, the poststructuralist can dispense with the "worry of doing justice to objective truth", while the

question of what might actually have happened in the past becomes "irrelevant, even meaningless"<sup>21</sup>. Kuzminski's critique of the method advocated by poststructuralists leads him to state that the

initiate in such matters is invited into a difficult and abstruse form... aimed at the elucidation of various second-order meta-speculative abstractions; or, alternatively, such privileged second-order abstractions are presupposed in the unmasking or "deconstruction" of the pretensions to privilege of first-order abstractions. This prolix and complex meta-speculative "play," simultaneously dogmatic and ironic, is achieved at the expense of the texts taken up in the exercise; the destruction of the integrity of past texts is synonymous with their metahistorical appropriation.<sup>22</sup>

It is a significant deficiency of poststructuralist method that it too easily appears to abandon "commitment to accurate description of past events by postulating contextual notions to define what is to be recognised as evidence"<sup>23</sup>.

Foucault's archaeological method centres on discourse, and in particular it is concerned with the notion of "knowledge as the outcome of linguistic practices"<sup>24</sup>. The stress on linguistic practices is also evident in the theory of Quentin Skinner, who claims that it is unacceptable to assume either that a text can be considered autonomously in the search for its meaning, or that the religious and socio-political context of a text can lead to understanding of the work.<sup>25</sup> Instead, Skinner advocates that any given statements in an historical text have to be comprehended in terms of "*how* what was said was meant"<sup>26</sup>: people are a product of the time in which they live and because this influences the language they use to express their ideas the linguistic contexts of an historical text must be fully understood and must take precedence over other aspects of historical analysis. The task of the historian is therefore to convey the original author's *actual* meaning rather than what the researcher *perceives* the meaning to be. Thus Skinner maintains that it is possible to



understand authorial intent from knowledge of the linguistic context of an historical work. Moreover, he insists that the result of accepting the validity of studying the socio-political background of an historical text will be "a series of conceptual muddles and mistaken empirical claims"<sup>27</sup>.

In contrast with Skinner's case, this thesis does offer context for the primary sources which are discussed and for the analyses presented. It does so as evidential underpinning for the central arguments posited in the examination of Vives' ideas as represented in his major works. The importance of taking care in the analysis of textual evidence is not denied, particularly where the texts being used have been translated from the original. In this research, Vives' *De anima et vita* was accessible to the researcher in its entirety only in Lorenzo Riber's Spanish translation. Similarly, *De tradendis disciplinis* and *De institutione foeminae Christianae* were available only in English translations by Foster Watson. Given this, it is important to recognise that terms and expressions used in the translated versions may not always reflect, in an entirely accurate way, Vives' original meanings and intentions. Illustrative of this is the problem of applying the term *psychology* to renaissance and pre-renaissance investigations of the soul, given the modern connotations of the term. Accordingly, this aspect is taken account of in the thesis (in Chapter 6) when Vives' *De anima* is discussed. But being alert to such problems, acknowledging that they exist and that they influence historical interpretation, does not mean that linguistic contextualism must be accepted as the only legitimate method for textual elucidation.

As with Foucault, if Skinner's hypothesis is accepted there are serious repercussions for historical research in the history of ideas. Skinner asserts that "tracking a grand but elusive theme" is an "inadequacy", and histories which attempt to do so "can never go right" because they involve the study of an "idea"<sup>28</sup>. Study of the history of ideas should not involve the search for any "essential" meaning, he writes, but must study

all the various situations, which may change in complex ways, in which a given form of words can logically be used - all the functions the words can serve, all the various things that can be done with them.<sup>29</sup>

This would be a colossal undertaking, one which could well prove impossible - a point accepted by Skinner, although he continues to argue that linguistic contextualism is the only form of study which is "at least conceptually proper"<sup>30</sup>. As Mark Bevir observes, linguistic contextualists argue that

considerations in the philosophy of meaning show that we can understand an utterance only if we grasp the paradigm to which that utterance belongs or if we place that utterance within contemporaneous linguistic conventions. Consequently, if historians wish to understand a text, they must study the linguistic context of that text.

The injunction to consider linguistic contexts is seen as a prerequisite for writing good history in the history of ideas. If, the argument goes, historians stubbornly refuse to consider linguistic contexts, they will be bad historians.<sup>31</sup>

However, the method advocated by Skinner and the linguistic contextualists inevitably rests upon a subjective interpretation of what historical figures meant when they used a particular word, and what the common meanings associated with the word would have been in a contemporaneous setting. Skinner's description of *correct* historical research has an aim which may not be achievable: is it really possible for an historian to know, unequivocally, what an author's intent was when (s)he wrote a text? It would seem that unless authorial intent is explicitly expressed the answer must be a negative one. The historical researcher may infer authorial intent but cannot derive absolute knowledge. To attempt to do so via study of the text's linguistic context could well be to impose the researcher's assumptions about authorial intent onto the research findings, and then to suggest that on the basis of doing so the researcher understands the meaning of the text more successfully than would have been possible using any other method. Linguistic

contextualism denies the claims to accuracy of any other historical method. Yet, as Bevir rightly states, linguistic contexts

have no greater claim on the historian than do other possible sources of evidence, such as other texts by the author, or the biography of the author, or the social and political context of the text in question. Historians will consider as much evidence as they can, selecting therefrom whatever they think most relevant. Linguistic contexts have no privileged status.<sup>32</sup>

Bevir concludes that the test of a sound historical analysis "lies... in the accuracy and reasonableness of the evidence that historians offer to support their understanding of a text"<sup>33</sup>. It is in this spirit that the analyses contained in this thesis are put forward.



## Chapter 1: Vives' life and background

Science is not a neutral or innocent commodity which can be employed as a convenience... Rather it is spiritually corrosive, burning away ancient authorities and traditions. It cannot really co-exist with anything. Scientists inevitably take on the mantle of the wizards, sorcerers and witch-doctors. Their miracle cures are our spells, their experiments our rituals.<sup>1</sup>

Such is one contemporary view of science. Yet how did science develop to the stage where such a comment can fairly be made of it? Arguably, the embryonic form of empirical science - Brian Appleyard's ritualistic experiments - had its renaissance inception in the work of Juan Luis Vives, amongst others. Similarly, this is the case with the beginnings of 'modern' psychology. Writers in the empirical tradition such as Francis Bacon, Pierre Gassendi and John Locke were both directly and indirectly influenced by Vives' work. They have been hailed as innovators in areas of science, education and psychological observation in which Vives was writing a century or more beforehand, towards the end of that period of humanism which saw 'science' move significantly from the realms of the occult. However, while the work of men like Bacon and Locke has been accorded fame, if also criticism, Vives' work remains largely forgotten.

In preparation for an examination of Vives' possible influence on certain philosophers (Gassendi, Descartes and Locke) and of claims to his originality in the fields of education and psychology, it is first necessary to describe something of his background. Explanation

of those humanist influences which formed the intellectual atmosphere in which he worked will be given in the following two chapters to demonstrate that Vives' work was part of an historical continuum that was not perfectly linear but which presented a complex of ideas affecting his epistemology, ontology, and pedagogy. Vives' reputed influence on Bacon has been studied elsewhere<sup>2</sup> and falls outside the scope of the present study. However, what will be considered (in chapters 7 and 8) is the direct effect his work may have had on Gassendi and Descartes and in what ways Vives' epistemology and pedagogy is a precursor of Locke's. These considerations will be made in the context firstly of the application of theories of psychology to education and secondly of the emergence of empiricism as an accepted scientific method. Vives' work on education and psychology will be discussed in chapters 4, 5 and 6.

### **Vives' origins**

In recent work on the history of education and science Luis Vives usually merits little comment, if any. Authors who write in English about his work (for example, Brubacher, Cole, Good and Teller<sup>3</sup>,) tend to rely almost exclusively on what was produced by Foster Watson in the early decades of the present century. Those whose concern is the history of science or of metaphysics generally neglect to mention his contribution to these subjects and it is rare to find a history of science which accords him some credit as does Mason<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, in analyses of renaissance humanism, where Vives' work is discussed at all he is presented as someone whose educational thought takes second place to the more famous figure of Desiderius Erasmus. This arises because Erasmus dominated the cultural world in the first two decades of the sixteenth century. While it may be of some interest to debate which of these men developed the more original, or sophisticated, theories of pedagogy, the important point to realise is that Vives was not merely Erasmus' understudy,



regurgitating wholesale Erasmian concepts. On the contrary, Vives' educational philosophy and analysis of empirical and psychological investigation were, to a considerable extent, original in outlook, despite the fact that aspects of them seem naive today. They also departed in many respects from the views of his forerunners, even one as distinguished as Erasmus.

Luis Vives was born in Valencia in 1492. At this time Valencia City was the most prosperous town belonging to the Crown of Aragon, and was a centre of administrative skill and cultural life. Although Vives left the town when he was seventeen, he remained permanently nostalgic about his time spent in this place which "is so beautiful that there is no time of year in which both the meadows and the abundant trees are not clothed and painted with foliage, flowers... and a variety of colors."<sup>5</sup> The countryside and the cultural life may have been agreeable, but the policies of the Spanish Crown often were not, particularly with regard to religious tolerance. This aspect of Spanish internal policy had an immense effect on Vives: his family was Jewish during a time in which Ferdinand and Isabella expelled, directly or by threat alone, approximately one hundred and fifty thousand Jews. (The edict of expulsion was signed at Granada in 1492.) Vives' parents were, socio-economically, typical of many in the Valencian Jewish community: educated, respected, prosperous. And, like many others, they would be forced to convert to Christianity. The prosperity and status of certain of the Jewish community had been long established, but was to be eroded following the consequences of the edict of expulsion. An explanation of the background to the tradition of antisemitism which so drastically affected this community will set Vives' life and heritage in context. Although the crown (through its instrument the *Consejo de la Suprema y General Inquisicion*) was to inflict appalling 'punishment' upon Jews for a trumped up cultural 'crime', things had not always been so. The process of 'cleansing' which would directly affect Vives' family was one which gradually increased in virulence from disparate origins to become a concrete expression of Spanish crown policy.

## Inner exile: the legacy of Spanish policy against the Jews.

In the twelfth century a general ethos of religious tolerance meant that

[in] the commercial sphere, no visible barrier separated Jewish, Christian and Saracen merchants during the major period of Jewish life in Spain. Christian contractors built Jewish houses and Jewish craftsmen worked for Christian employers. Jewish advocates represented gentile clients in the secular courts. Jewish brokers acted as intermediaries between Christian and Moorish principals.<sup>6</sup>

However, political rivalry during the thirteenth century was to undermine this way of life. Anti-Jewish legislation became increasingly prevalent throughout Europe, although for a time such legalised bigotry was resisted in the Spanish Kingdoms (where Jews represented a sizeable socio-economic group). But the *Cortes* repeatedly argued for antisemitic rulings amidst growing hostility to the Jewish community. This hostility largely came from

the urban elites who were debtors to the Jews, from the ordinary Christian population who lived beside the Jews in the towns but resented their separateness and their apparent success, and from some rural communities which considered the urban Jews as their exploiters. Jews were, of course, culturally different; but they were Spaniards and in no sense a separate race, nor at any time were their numbers augmented from abroad. Their spoken language was moreover the same... in the Muslim kingdoms they spoke Arabic... and in Castille they spoke Castilian.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, Jews continued to follow a variety of professions and trades. Many owned or leased rural properties (small farms, vineyards, orchards,) or were chemists, doctors, butchers, jewellers, financiers, grocers, weavers. Indeed, there was a tradition of cosmopolitanism amongst the Jewish community in Spain:

[R]arely did Christian or Muslim scholars visit the cultural centres of the opposing faith, but there were many Jews who... travelled extensively. Moreover when Jews conversed with Christians or Muslims they had to use the language of the people they were talking to. The result was a formidable linguistic proficiency even



at non-scholarly levels... Jews, therefore, made excellent diplomats and ambassadors... More importantly they played a vital role in the translation of scholarly works and in the transmission to Europe of Arabic-Greek learning<sup>8</sup>.

By the fourteenth century, economic conditions were causing distress and the period of *convivencia* crumbled. Riots occurred against those deemed to be privileged and these riots spread through Seville, Valencia, Cordoba and Barcelona. But Jewish prosperity had become exaggerated in the public perception. Henry Kamen<sup>9</sup> states that contemporary statistics for many *aljamas* (Jewish 'quarters') show that while Jews were most active in trade, they were rarely wealthy merchants. In addition, the numbers of Jewish farmers and peasants was increasing<sup>10</sup>. Legislation was to deny Jews the right to hold political office, bear a title, bear arms, change their 'domicile', practice the trades of butcher, carpenter, tailor, grocer, and to hire Christian employees. This legislation was not always enforced, but indicates a change in how Jews were regarded in political spheres, if not indeed in public opinion.

It may be argued that institutional antisemitism reached its apogee during the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella, although the charge of antisemitism would surely not have been recognised by the monarchy, or by members of church and state hierarchy. Legislation curtailing the freedoms due to Christian groups had long been instigated against Jewish citizens, and such legislation was accepted as legitimate by the Spanish monarchy. Seemingly at odds with this legislation, Isabella did give protection to some Jewish communities (in 1477 to that at Trujillo, in 1479 to that in Caceres) though protectionist policy was to change. Initially it may have been that these communities were protected because of benefits accruing from their commercial activities rather than because Isabella viewed Jews as meriting crown protection as people. On the subject of crown protection, Kamen writes:



[A] policy of partial expulsion of Jews, with the aim of separating them from their converso brethren, was gradually introduced by the Inquisition. At the end of 1482, a partial expulsion of the Jews of Andalusia was ordered. In January 1483 Jews were ordered to be expelled from the dioceses of Seville, Cordoba and Cadiz; the crown delayed implementation and they were not actually driven out from Seville until summer 1484. In 1486 Jews were expelled from the dioceses of Saragossa, Abarracin and Teruel in Aragon... Though Ferdinand and Isabella intervened repeatedly to protect their Jews from excesses (as late as 1490 they began an enquiry into Medina del Campo's ban on Jews setting up shops in the main square), the monarchs appear to have been thoroughly convinced by Inquisitor General Torquemada of the necessity for the separation of Jews. When the local expulsions failed, after ten long years, to stem the heresies of the conversos, the crown decided on the most drastic measure of all - a total expulsion of Jews.<sup>11</sup>

It could be reasoned that certain of these protective policies were mere lipservice paid to what was after all a significant minority group. Questions are raised as to how consistent Ferdinand and Isabella were in their intention to protect the Jews as a people, and to how much sway Torquemada had over them. Crown policy regarding Jewish subjects seems at best erratic, at worst antisemitic.

Jews were a significant minority in Spain and were integral to commercial society and to urban economics. Initial crown policy has a tone of appeasement, of doing just enough to seem to protect Jews without really wielding much authority over *cortes* or Inquisition to stop their antisemitism. (The hope may have been to retain the loyalty of the majority.) At first, Ferdinand and Isabella were reluctant to expel all Jews because they did not want to "lose revenue from the disappearance of a community whose taxes were paid directly to the crown, and which moreover had helped to finance the war in Granada"<sup>12</sup>. Their decision to expel could have been based upon religious conviction and no doubt a prevailing ethos of Christian superiority gave rise to an atmosphere in which Jews, for political purposes, could be regarded as non-people having no rights within the law to live as they chose. The decree of expulsion of 1492 gave the Jews a simple order: convert to Christianity within four months or leave the country. Many *conversos* were, or would become, powerful members

of Spanish society (including Torquemada, who was of Jewish ancestry) but this does not alter the fact that the policy of expulsion had considerable, irreversible effects.

Furthermore, on the question of whether the Inquisition was motivated by faith or not, it should be noted that in 1482 Pope Sixtus IV issued a bull which complained that the Inquisition was motivated not by faith but by greed. He wrote:

many true and faithful Christians, on the testimony of enemies, rivals, slaves... have without any legitimate proof been thrust into secular prisons, tortured and condemned as relapsed heretics, deprived of their goods and property and... executed, to the peril of their souls...<sup>13</sup>

In the face of written pressure from Ferdinand, Sixtus renounced this bull. It seems that by “giving their blessing to the persecution of conversos, Ferdinand and Isabella gained support among the popular masses and the clergy, while at the same time they increased the power of the state.”<sup>14</sup> Subsequently, the text of the 1492 edict may have given a religious reason for expulsion, but many of the documents which followed it are “concerned with the appropriation of Jewish capital and property”<sup>15</sup>. Eleazar Gutwith makes a further point, that

[in] a number of cases, the expulsion meant that the quarters in which there had been a Jewish presence for centuries became abandoned and hence degraded, creating municipal problems and devaluing the property. Thus, in Teruel, after the expulsion, there followed looting, mainly of the door posts, the windows and the beams of Jewish houses which were used for rebuilding or as firewood.<sup>16</sup>

This stands as a metaphor for what was happening to Jewish culture in Spain; under *Suprema* procedure the accused was “a priori guilty and had to prove his innocence”<sup>17</sup>.

Even before the 1492 edict, then, Ferdinand and Isabella had organised the *Consejo de la Suprema y General Inquisicion* to investigate *conversos* who were suspected of relapsing to Judaism. The holy war against Moslem settlement in Spain had ended in 1492 and the



reinforcement of a common (Catholic) faith had obvious political overtones. Spanish territorial unity did not of itself ensure a common concept of nationality. Indeed the creation of nations as singular entities was still in its early stages, though a “feudal organization of society was giving place to a more modern concept, that of the state, enclosed by precise boundaries and endowed with rights over all who lived within them.”<sup>18</sup> A new ‘emotional’ bond had to be created between the peoples of Spain who had individualised perceptions of cultural identity: to be Aragonese was far different to being Castillian and factionalism was an incipient possibility where cultural identity was fragmented. One overt way of creating such a bond was to direct a common cause. Now that the infidel had been driven out, Ferdinand and Isabella capitalised on a tradition of antisemitic feeling dating at least from the middle ages (though interspersed by periods of religious tolerance). By their policies they attempted to encourage Spanish Catholics to view the indigenous Jewish community as an infection of which ‘their’ nation must be cauterised. The Inquisition would burn two thousand condemned *conversos*. These deaths, coupled with the exodus of those expelled, were an enormous drain on the population and the loss of these people weakened the economic base of the country and constituted a constriction of cultural identity. In addition, with regard to religious identity, force could rarely provoke anything but a nominal conversion, particularly since an unwilling Jewish convert to Christianity could hold to the Talmudic principle that a Jew “even though he has sinned remains a Jew”<sup>19</sup>. This was a principle which covered subsequent generations brought up in the Christian faith as well as the *converso* him/herself. Thus in most ways, the decree of expulsion was “a scourge but not a final solution”<sup>20</sup>.

Only superficially does the argument hold that the Inquisition was set up principally to investigate *conversos*; the reality was more complex. The case of the Inquisition’s dealings in Valencia will serve as illustration:



[W]hen the Inquisition began its operations in the mid-1480's it found three categories: those who were Jewish in all but name; those who practised both religions simultaneously; and those who held themselves to be complete Catholics. In the first group hundreds were executed. Those in the second group were also executed. The third group contained Christians with inherited remnants of Jewish ways, subsequently abandoned; but if they failed to confess they were prosecuted and could be executed. Informers and witnesses were often servants who had been mistreated, or others with a grievance against the accused. So the Inquisition provided the community with a powerful weapon of social control, by permitting them to settle disputes at the expense of outcasts, and to frustrate the ambitions of conversos.<sup>21</sup>

The Inquisition was thus the agent of antisemitism and many of its officials were automatically suspicious of *conversos*.

Haim Beinart stresses<sup>22</sup> that many *conversos* had no real allegiance to their new religion, having been converted by force. And conversion did not "open Christian society's gates to the converted; they were left to their fate. Neither Christian society in Spain nor the Church created means for their assimilation, doing nothing to teach them its tenets or to accept them as equals in its fold."<sup>23</sup> Actually, *conversos* were forbidden to leave Spain, so even in their apparent obedience to the edict they were still being victimised by the crown and the Inquisition. As Moshe Idel writes,

... one of the most dreadful consequences of the decision to expel the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula was to augment the existing numbers of conversos. Faced with the depressing alternative of either leaving the Peninsula or converting to Christianity, many of the Jews preferred water to wandering... [After] the expulsion the conversos became a major problem for both Jews and Christians... [who] tried to ensure the complete divorce of the neophytes from their former religion.<sup>24</sup>

Those who remained were condemned to an "inner exile, usually just as terrifying and fateful as that embarked upon by the refugees"<sup>25</sup>. The impact of this hidden imprisonment was one of such enormity that, for instance, Sephardi communities "always remembered the expulsion as crucial both materially and spiritually", a time in which important "centres of

learning disintegrated; great spiritual leaders died; and in the new environments into which the Jews were thrown... [the focus of cultural identity] had to be rebuilt.”<sup>26</sup>

Wider Spanish society may have supported the Inquisition passively as a social organism but at an individual level

[t]he records of the Inquisition are full of instances where neighbours denounced neighbours, friends denounced friends, and members of the same family denounced each other. Many of these cases would have arisen through sheer malice or hatred. But there were others, more significant and terrible, where fear of denunciation alone became a spur to confession and counter-denunciation.<sup>27</sup>

Racism was encapsulated in Church and State office. By the time of Vives' birth the concepts of “honour, pride and reputation” had become “chauvinistic and exclusivist... It was felt by many that one's faith and nation could be preserved only by ensuring that one's lineage was preserved free of contamination by Jews and Muslims.”<sup>28</sup> Worse, the acceptance of *limpieza* (‘purity’ of the blood line) meant that ancestry could be termed a crime of which generations could never be free and though

*limpieza* was practised in only a limited number of public institutions, those were undeniably so important that a serious barrier to status and mobility was created. In theory canon law limited the extent to which the sins of the fathers could be visited on their sons and grandsons. But *limpieza* in practice adopted no such limits. If it were proved that an ancestor on any side of the family had been penanced by the Inquisition or was a Moor or a Jew, the descendant could be accused of impure blood and disabled from office. Applicants for many posts had to present genealogical proofs of the purity of their lineage. The fraud, perjury, extortion and blackmail that came into existence because of the need to prove *limpieza* was widely recognized as a moral evil.<sup>29</sup>

This was a legacy which Luis Vives experienced, as shall now be explained.



## Vives' family

Once Vives had left Valencia to go to the university of Paris to study, he was never to return to his "beloved Spain". His childhood was shaped by his parents who were *conversos*. He was given a Christian education at home, though it seems likely that he would also have been taught in the Jewish tradition. As late as March 1500, Valencian inquisitors "raided a fully equipped clandestine synagogue" which was operating in the home of Vives' uncle, Miguel<sup>30</sup>.

With regard to family life in general, Vives' mother (Blanquina March y Almenara) made a great impression on him. He wrote:

[No] mother loved her child better than mine did me, nor any child did ever less perceive himself loved of his mother than did I. She never lightly laughed upon me... and yet, when I had been three or four days out of her house, she wist not where, she was almost sore sick... [A]fter I came to a young man's estate there was nobody whom I delighted more to have in sight [than Blanquina]; whose memory now I have in reverence, and as oft as she cometh to my remembrance, I embrace her within my mind and thought, when I cannot with my body.<sup>31</sup>

Luis Vives was Jewish by maternal and paternal heritage. His mother had converted to Catholicism one year before the edict of expulsion was passed, but she was descended from the March and Almenara lineages and this was to pose problems. Both families were investigated by the Valencian inquisition, indeed the "converso origins of the Almenara family, in particular, were so well known in Valencia that as recently as... 1697, the Suprema had stated categorically that no descendant of that family could ever be considered by the tribunal" for an official post<sup>32</sup>. Vives' father, Luis Vives Valeriola, was probably the son of *conversos*, but had been periodically investigated by the Valencian wing of the Inquisition since the age of sixteen <sup>33</sup>. Vives' parents were never considered by the



authorities to have remained Christian and the discovery of the clandestine synagogue in Miguel Vives' home would have been taken as confirmation of their suspicions.

Vives' father was executed in 1524 by the Inquisition and his sisters were deprived of any rights to the family property. Vives watched his Jewish heritage being used to destroy his father's life, his mother's reputation (she was reinvestigated after her death and deemed to have relapsed to Judaism during her lifetime), and his sisters' economic security. It is not unfounded to claim, as Carlos Noreña does, that Vives' "concrete introspection of the self, his increasing isolationism from friends and society, the startling mixture of his biting scepticism and comforting religious faith"<sup>34</sup> are, to some extent, a legacy of his experience of being a part of an unfairly despised, outcast and devalued social group. In 1529 Vives wrote about the concept of 'homeland' in *De pacificatione*. He refers to the effects of Inquisition policies in Spain and comments that some people forget their homeland and go to

a place where life passes quietly and peacefully... Such a place they regard as their homeland... and they regard as the place of their exile the place where one citizen harasses another or a newcomer... where one's spirit is disturbed by a relative, a friend, a slight acquaintance, or an utter stranger, and one is torn from his repose. It is not only impossible to endure this; to see it is so revolting that *many prefer to abandon their houses and their homeland... and go away to distant lands, where they will not perceive such disagreeable things... Who can regard the dissensions of citizens or neighbors with pleasure, knowing that the tempest will either suddenly or little by little engulf him?*<sup>35</sup>

Clearly, Vives has his own situation in mind.

Apart from the situation created by the 1492 edict of expulsion, Vives lived in a time when population decrease and migration occurred for other reasons and where persecution of various groups was widespread in Europe. Sixteenth century Europe was a place where every four to five years (usually for climatic reasons) there was a harvest failure in most countries, where disease was endemic and malnourishment commonplace, where fifty per

cent of children died in the first year of life, where urban violence was frequent, born out of "sheer misery"<sup>36</sup>. Migration to find work was epidemic as was emigration to escape persecution. It was also common for those who wished a university education to leave their country of birth and travel elsewhere to a centre of learning, as Vives was to do.

### **Vives' education**

In 1509 Luis Vives left Valencia to go to Paris, to the college of Montaigu (where Erasmus had also studied). He was to endure the rigorous asceticism of Montaigu for three years, studying only for a Bachelor of Arts degree. He did not continue to gain a Master's or to do Doctoral work. At Montaigu he studied philosophy but became quickly disenchanted by the "silly and empty sophismata" which he had to learn, by the "folly of academic honours and degrees"<sup>37</sup> and by the archaic influence of the teachers. His time at Montaigu gave him experience of teaching methods and of educational content firmly rooted in medieval practices, for example disputation, reliance on the study of rhetoric and an emphasis placed on Aristotelian logic. The beliefs which he began to develop while he was studying there were written down six years after Vives left Paris in his first major work (*In pseudodialecticos*, 1519). This text was both an attack on the University of Paris and a rudimentary attempt to analyse the existing system of teaching there with a view to stating why it had become an educational irrelevance. Vives left Paris profoundly aware that, as far as his intellectual development was concerned, his time there had been wasted. The universities of Louvain and Oxford were similarly to disappoint him when he taught there. He began teaching at Louvain in 1517 but was put off by the petty controversies and personal rivalries which were endemic to academic life. In general, he felt that universities



acted for the benefit of the existing intellectual establishment rather than to encourage educational relevance or progress. His view may have been jaundiced, however, because he seemed not to like the actual business of teaching. In a letter to Erasmus written in 1522 Vives states that he has been teaching in Bruges but adds: "I am so tired of teaching that I would do anything rather than return to this dreary life and have schoolboys for company."<sup>38</sup>

Before going to England in 1523, Vives spent time in Bruges and Louvain. Bruges would become his home and he would eventually marry a woman from the town, Margaret Valdaura. During Vives' lifetime Bruges was to decline in economic importance as Amsterdam grew, and the social effects of this decline led him to write *De subventionem pauperum* in 1526 as a reaction to the growth of unemployment and the suffering caused by a failing economy. This work is a comment upon the causes of social injustice as well as a manual of public welfare. Vives wrote that he would "not have as a Christian he who, within his means, gives no help to an indigent brother"<sup>39</sup>. While Vives suggestions were at heart "undeniably trying to control the aberrant and criminal behaviour of vagabonds in an age of demographic and economic displacement"<sup>40</sup>, he did base his scheme of poor relief on ideals of (Christian) brotherhood. In his outlook Vives was "exceptional", arguing for "a fundamental unity among all Christians"<sup>41</sup>. According to Abel Athougia Alves this made Vives "despised and alien in the eyes of both arch-Catholics and arch-Protestants"<sup>42</sup>. Moreover, like many humanists, he did not extend 'Christian' sympathy to non-Christian peoples. This was most notably the case with his attitudes towards the Turks, the subject of his *De Europae dividus et bello Turcio* and *De conditione vitae Christianorum sub Turca* (both 1526).



## Crisis In England

There was to be a period of tension and uncertainty in Vives' life, though at first there was no hint of the unsettling events to come. His work and study continued, and, as with many humanists living and working in Northern Europe, he was influenced by Erasmian concepts. Vives and Erasmus met, as far as is known, in 1516 and were to correspond until 1534. But once Vives began to develop his own philosophy, independent of Erasmian thought, the friendship cooled and letters became infrequent. For Erasmus the relationship seems to have been that of teacher and pupil and it was cordial at least until 1520, with Erasmus ending one letter to Vives: "Farewell, Luis my scholarly friend, and pray let us see you here (in Louvain) well and cheerful, as soon as possible."<sup>43</sup> The breakdown began in 1521 during the preparation of Augustine's *De civitate Dei*, which Erasmus had asked Vives to annotate. While working on the project, Vives became ill but, despite this, Erasmus pressed for completion of the text. Vives wrote to him saying that although six books were completed they had not yet been sent. He apologised, explaining:

I thought it better to postpone Augustine than to work myself to death, or end up useless for anything else, laid low by sickness... Augustine, if he is put off, I can easily pick up again whenever I please. I beg you urgently, if you do not think the blame for this lies with time or fate... at least to forgive this mistake, if I really was mistaken.<sup>44</sup>

But Vives' decision to suspend work on Augustine was no mistake; his health was poor and his patron, William of Croy, had recently died leaving him with little income. However, Erasmus appeared to be annoyed at the delays, while Vives became anxious at Erasmus' lack of communication. He ends the above letter: "Be sure and send me an answer by the bearer of this letter... and if you either cannot or will not do so in writing, at least let me know by word of mouth... how things are going."<sup>45</sup> The annotated *De civitate*

*Dei* would not be published until 1528 and Erasmus would blame Vives for the financial failure of the commentaries<sup>46</sup>. What may have been underlying the breakdown of the relationship was that Vives intellectually outgrew dependency on Erasmus' counsel as far as work was concerned and this did not suit Erasmus' ego. Erasmus offered Vives no support when he really needed it during the time he was in England and involved in the problems arising from Henry VIII's moves to divorce Catherine. By 1522 Erasmus was addressing Vives as "my admirable friend" to which Vives responded "I do beg you not to be so distant with me"<sup>47</sup>. Eventually, exasperated at Erasmus' tone, Vives wrote: "If from now on you allow your amanuenses to write to me in this style I will have to throw away your letters"<sup>48</sup>.

Gradually, Vives' health deteriorated. Disturbed by political and religious tensions in Europe, and undergoing something of an emotional crisis, he wrote (in 1522):

Everything here in Louvain remains the same, dirty, stupid, and intolerable. There is something about this city that I simply hate and always did. Nowhere in the whole world do I feel more miserable than here.

My health is now worse than ever. My whole body is about to collapse. The uncleanness and the misery of this place is going to kill me.<sup>49</sup>

Although Vives' religious faith remained, his faith in men's ability to uphold Christian practice without hypocrisy was shaken. He wrote: "I am totally benumbed by these crazy wars. Let all these soldiers go mad. Where is the gospel of Christ? Where are the theologians now? Where are the priests?"<sup>50</sup> In his *De concordia et discordia generis humani* (1529) which examines the consequences of political and religious machinations, Vives reflected on what he saw as general Godlessness:

The world has never before seen such a lack of piety; never before was there more calumny and defamation. The reproach of impiety is mutual: individuals blame individuals, nations accuse nations of poor Christian spirit... Unfortunately, their reproach is well founded; their only mistake is that each one excluded himself from it. All are equally



impious; having lost even the shadow of Christianity they dare to inquire into the life of other people, to condemn and to punish with the loss of fame, possessions, and even life... <sup>51</sup>

Again, his allusions to the situation in Spain and the practises of the Inquisition are plain. In December 1522 matters were not helped when Vives heard of his brother's death and of his father's rearrest by Inquisition agents. Realising that he might himself be at risk should he go back to his home, Vives nevertheless decided to return, travelling via England (where he would be given a readership at Oxford University). However, his intention to travel to Spain was not fulfilled.

Once in England, Vives sought the help of Thomas More to obtain the patronage of Catherine of Aragon, which he secured. During Vives' first visit to England he met Catherine whose daughter he would tutor and for whom he wrote *De ratione studii*. Furthermore, he would write the *Office and Duties of a Husband* in tribute to Catherine and in which he gives his opinion that she has "suffered cruel fortune" with "constancy of mind"<sup>52</sup>. Vives' admiration of Catherine centred on her intelligence and she was certainly an educated woman. In his *De institutione foeminae christiani* Vives advocated a programme of learning for women which was broad in comparison with contemporary concepts of women's education (as will be argued in Chapter 4). But it would be a mistake to exaggerate the extent of Vives' influence on this aspect of learning with respect to the majority of women during the sixteenth century. A tiny minority of women became highly educated at this time, but the impact of Vives' *De institutione foeminae Christiani*, was minimal.

During the period 1523 - 1526, Vives visited England on three occasions. Between these visits he returned to his home in Bruges. After the third journey to England he remained in Bruges for a year, but was persuaded to return by Catherine who wanted him to teach Latin to the Princess Mary. Because his friendship with Catherine was by this time surrounded by the tensions caused by Henry's decision to divorce the Queen, Vives was treated as an



unwelcome presence at court. In February of 1528, Vives was cross-examined by Wolsey about his relationship with Catherine. Wolsey demanded to be told the content of Vives' private conversations with Catherine. Even though Vives did not at this stage say anything which would openly show disloyalty to, or denigration of Henry, he understood how the episode was affecting the Queen. He retorted in answer to Wolsey's questioning: "Who can blame me for listening to a sad and unfortunate woman? for talking to her with sympathy?"<sup>53</sup> Wolsey placed the Spaniard under house arrest for thirty-eight days, releasing him only on the condition that he did not return to the royal palace. Catherine sent a message to Vives advising him to leave the country for his own safety.

Once Vives was home in Bruges it is unlikely, given the circumstances of his return, that he intended ever to go back to England. He did so in November 1528 only because Catherine chose him as one of her advocates during the examination into her marriage by Cardinal Campeggio. This was to be the precursor to divorce. In the aftermath, Vives would lose Catherine's patronage and when he left England it would be as an enemy of Henry and with Catherine enraged because he would not do what she asked of him. He had told her that it would be pointless to continue in her attempt to defend her position as Queen. Vives wrote of the episode to Juan Vergara, telling him that "[t]he Queen was furious at me because I would not comply with her wishes... But I will obey my reason..."<sup>54</sup>. Vives knew that the fight for Catherine to remain as Henry's wife was, basically, over; it would only be a matter of time before Henry's cynical game would have the outcome which suited him. Vives stated: "In these rough and cruel times, my voice has been almost reduced to silence."<sup>55</sup>

The "rough and cruel times" which arose from the king's determination to divorce had also been inflicted upon Thomas More, who would eventually be killed because he would not swear an oath which denied the Pope's authority. The resolution to the "great matter" of the royal marriage would not come quickly; Henry's manipulations continued and in 1534 More

wrote to Thomas Cromwell of a meeting with Henry in which the king stated that

his mariage was not onely agaynst the posytive lawis of the Chirch  
and the written lawe of God, but also in such wise agaynst the lawe  
of nature...

...[The] Kingis Grace shewed it me hymself, and layed the Bible  
open byfore me. And there red me the wordis that moved his  
Highness and diverse other erudite persons so to thinke... <sup>56</sup>

Bearing in mind what was to happen to More, it is not surprising that Vives would comment to Erasmus in 1535: "these are times when to keep silence is as dangerous as to speak out."<sup>57</sup> Faced with Henry's requirement to be rid of his wife, any prominent person could be damned if he argued, or if, like More, he chose a course which followed their own principles against the King's. For Vives, the direct result of this episode was that patronage and regular income were to be sporadic for him after 1528. The thought of poverty terrified him, but in this whole business the emotional cost was as apparent as the financial.

### **Vives' final years**

In the last decade of his life Luis Vives had to deal not just with the threat of poverty but with ill-health. He was plagued by headaches and suffered from what was probably an ulcer. At the age of thirty-six he wrote: "In the storms of this life how can death be anything but a gift? So far as I am concerned, life is not very pleasant and I am glad that, most of it, I think, has already been thrown away."<sup>58</sup> But Vives continued to work, voicing a concern for social welfare in his treatise *De concordia et discordia generis humanii* (1529). His belief in education as a palliative for social problems gave rise to his examination of the subject in more depth than he had done previously. Also in 1529 he wrote *De disciplinis* which, although it is a treatise on the arts as a whole, contains his advocacy of a system of

education that is radical in comparison to existing educational provision. In *De disciplinis* Vives attempts to analyse the limits and purposes of culture, the causes of its corruption, and how it might eventually be reformed. In another major work, *De anima et vita*, he proposes the study of man from a psychological standpoint, utilising the techniques of observation and reflection. These works contain the essence of Vives' educational philosophy and, arguably, they were to have both direct and indirect influence upon the development of European pedagogy.

Luis Vives died in Bruges in 1540. He always appeared to be troubled by the problems surrounding the causes of human suffering, yet he did not renounce his belief that education has the ability to reform and to effect change in individuals. He retained a vision of the benefits which might be possible in (his) contemporary society, if people would study and learn from the past. Vives was, above all, a humanist educator, but before looking at his major works in depth, the term 'humanist educator' will be explored in order to clarify its meaning with reference to the time in which Vives lived. It will be necessary (in chapters 2 and 3) to address questions about which influences shaped the humanist movement and thus influenced Vives himself, before studying the importance of Vives' work to the history of education and its possible relations to the framework of the epistemology of Pierre Gassendi, René Descartes and John Locke.



## Chapter 2: The growth and spread of Italian humanism

...Renaissance ideas... ran by a concealed conduit into a strange land. The humanists exerted a huge influence on art, moral philosophy, classical scholarship, historiography and political theory. Nevertheless, their chief effect was religious. Their moral notions helped to fill a vacuum in Italy where the church was weak and pastoral self-help the order of the day. They were almost always assumed by the Italian humanists to be in conformity with Christian doctrines; all the more easily could they be absorbed into the mainstream of religious thinking, and this happened after 1500.<sup>1</sup>

The religious repercussions of renaissance humanism were immense. Humanism was a movement which would create a "critical spirit with which the Reformers belaboured orthodoxy"<sup>2</sup>. (The Reformation grew partly from humanism which had itself evolved from medieval scholasticism.) Humanists challenged the accepted philosophical and educational reliance upon the works of Aristotle fostering, through education, a more analytical and critical approach to the study of classical texts. Humanist philosophy attempted a synthesis between pagan learning and Christian wisdom and this was indeed a "strange land" as it might be held that paganism and Christianity are irreconcilable. Yet humanists thought otherwise, as shall be explained in the course of this chapter.

The humanists' world-view emphasised the role of the individual in society: that is, individual wisdom, virtue and conduct centred upon an education which could teach and

enhance those values which had hitherto been the preserve of church learning. Personal values had been thought achievable only through Christianity; humanists, to a certain extent, wrested personal salvation from the organised church (which was widely regarded as corrupt). Humanism taught that through knowledge of the Bible and of classical texts wisdom could be attained; if a man had wisdom he would act virtuously to the benefit of society and to his own salvation through Christ.

Beneath the title 'renaissance humanism' lies a complex philosophy. The more famous humanists such as Francesco Petrarca, Lorenzo Valla, Coluccio Salutati, Leonardo Bruni and later, Desiderius Erasmus, created work which was of significant influence on the literary and artistic world. In general, humanists would reorient philosophical thought and education from medieval practice. This would eventually become evident in university education which had traditionally been dominated by scholastic theology and philosophy. Perhaps the main contribution of humanism lay "above all in the break with scholastic traditions of education and the incorporation of rediscovered antiquity in the mainstream of European culture."<sup>3</sup> This reorientation of pedagogy would provide "the basis of school and university curricula all over Europe"<sup>4</sup>.

In the ensuing discussion some explanation of scholasticism will be given in order to provide a framework for an analysis of the specific criteria implied by the terms 'humanism' and 'humanist education'. Because of the breadth of the subject of humanism, this chapter will deal only with Italian humanism. Northern (European) humanism will be dealt with in Chapter 3 and mention of Vives' work will not be central until Chapter 4. In the meantime, the analysis will be confined to scholasticism and to an illustration of the defining aspects of Italian humanist philosophy, involving the following aspects: humanist philosophy itself, the question of 'civic' humanism, and humanist educational provision and curricula.

## Scholasticism and the legacy of Aristotle

Aristotle's thought had been central to epistemology and to questions about man's place in the world, from the classical era to the Renaissance. Until the growth of humanism, Aristotle was considered to be the authority on non-Christian philosophy and scholasticism was founded upon that authority. Aristotle's philosophy was built on formal logic utilised less as a specialised subject area and more as the basic method of reasoning which could be used in other intellectual disciplines such as metaphysics. Formal logical rules permit argument from a premise the truth of which is known, to a conclusion the truth of which is being demonstrated. (If A is B, and B is C, then A is C.) This is a crucial aspect to Aristotle's use of logic and it was an aspect upon which scholasticism would place its faith in the logical value of the syllogism as philosophical method. Syllogistic reasoning was considered to be the means of understanding the nature of things. Central to Aristotle's epistemology and philosophy was the quest for knowledge of things and he framed four questions to be asked of particular things, but not of universals:-

1. What is it?
2. What is it made of?
3. How was it made?
4. Why was it made?

This questioning implies that to know a thing means knowing what it is for and to understand this we must know its nature or 'form'.

At the heart of knowledge, for Aristotle and for the scholastics, was knowledge of the *essence* of things, or that which makes a thing uniquely itself, and the means of gaining this knowledge was linguistic, resting upon syllogistic reasoning. In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle presupposes a straightforward correspondence between the structure of language and the



structure of the world. It is a presupposition which the scholastics also adopted. Anything which is not the subject of a proposition (the subject might be: man, cat, world) has to be an attribute or quality of a substance (tall, white, round). Aristotle's metaphysical inquiries are concerned with the study of substance but in them he attempts to apply language to the world as it is known in order to describe or discover essences of things.

### **Formal logic and scholasticism**

In his *Posterior Analytics* Aristotle developed his theories of syllogistic language as it affects 'knowing'. He wrote: "All instruction and all learning through discussion proceed from what is known already."<sup>5</sup> This holds for dialectical argument, the mainstay of scholastic logical analysis and the method used for discovering knowledge. (A simple example would be: "All dogs bark. If an animal barks, it is a dog.") Aristotle took knowing something to mean the state when we think we know the cause or reason as to why something is, or is not, the case. This requires demonstrable proof, although not all knowledge is demonstrable for Aristotle. After all, there is a starting point to knowledge, a premise from which a demonstration begins. Aristotle called these *immediate* premises and did not consider them to be demonstrable. Demonstration proceeded from prior (known) terms. ("I know that dogs bark. Therefore if I see an animal which barks, I can deduce that it is a dog.") Syllogisms were an important tool in arguing from prior points of knowledge. Scholastics accepted the belief that knowledge of the essence of things is possible while elevating syllogistic reasoning to an integral part of logical analysis in the attempt to determine 'truth'. Both these tenets were to be rejected or criticised by many humanist scholars.

In explaining the scholastic concept of syllogistic reasoning it may be seen why humanists poured scorn upon it and considered it to be spurious. Such reasoning was considered vital by scholastic dialecticians (condemned by Luis Vives in his *In pseudodialecticos*). The theories with which they worked had their inception not just with Aristotle but with the development in the twelfth century of the concept of the properties of terms. Compositely known as the Summulists (after the *Summulae logicae* by Peter of Spain), terminist logicians constructed a complex logico-semantic set of concepts. Peter of Spain's *Summulae* became the standard university textbook as terminism monopolised university curricula, and had been intended as a compilation of Aristotelian doctrine completed after the discovery of Aristotle's *Organon*. However, it spawned a dialectical logic which would, in its use by dialecticians, seem to overturn Aristotle's belief that no single person can adequately understand the nature of truth.

Terminism was central to scholasticism and entailed the study of the meaning of words both as singularities and in relation to other words. Terminist logicians argued for the possibility that a science of language could exist. Medieval nominalist scholars (such as William of Ockham) paid great attention to the analysis of the functions of terms as parts of propositions. Important to this, and following Peter of Spain, was the insistence that formal logic has to begin with the study of the properties of linguistic components (terms). William of Sherwood's work *Syncategoremata* was also influential to the terminist movement. This text contains discussion of the properties and use of syncategorematic terms (that is, grammatical modifiers like *not*, *if*, *or* - terms which cannot function as subject or predicate in a proposition and which have no referential functions). The properties of terms were central to the dialectical process of disputation which was so important to scholastic logic. The two principal properties discussed were signification (the meaning of a word regardless of its context) and supposition (the meaning of a word in context). Whatever spurious dialectical displays this would degenerate into, it was initially a serious attempt to define a



science of language useful to logic and to the pursuit of knowledge. Scholastic dialecticians may have relied upon disputation of convoluted syllogisms ("Socrates, confined in prison and seeing one star, sees every star, although he may not see every star"<sup>6</sup>) but this was a bastardisation of the original intent of scholars like John of Salisbury who deplored the "use of dialectic as a sort of game, as an instrument, that is, of verbal acrobatics or in the discussion of unimportant questions and, still worse, as an instrument for gain"<sup>7</sup>. This is exactly what would happen, however, and, until the Renaissance, scholastic logicians and dialecticians, who relied upon sophistry as a method of logical analysis, held a virtual monopoly on education.

Humanists were concerned with education as a means to develop an individual's humanity and, given this aim, they were disparaging of sophistic exercises. They regarded the scholastics' insistence on the primacy of logic in the curriculum and on the practice of disputation as damaging to students' intellectual development. Many humanists criticised dialectic as a process which served no proper function for students studying logic and one which was based upon an obsession with discussing syllogisms which had no correct or incorrect answers. This method of disputation ran counter to Aristotle's comment that

the right way to start is not to ask one's opponent to say that something is or is not so... but rather to ask him to say something that has meaning both for himself and for someone else. For this he must do if he is to say anything at all. Otherwise he could not engage in discussion either with himself or with anyone else.<sup>8</sup>

Most humanists did not believe that scholastic education, based as it was on a logical process which was a trading of verbal sophistries, encouraged students to think or enquire about the unknown or about specific problems. Philosophers like Vives did not consider that scholasticism enabled students to cope with the realities of life, a failing which was becoming increasingly evident as European society changed in the type of skills demanded of certain areas of the workforce. Scholastic methods were not educating students in



necessary abilities. Vives wrote from first-hand experience of scholastic pedagogy that students trained in this way were

quite unsuited to conduct business, to... administer public or private affairs, or deal with popular opinion; they are of no more use in affairs of this kind than men of straw [for] they have not applied themselves to the arts from which all these things can be learned, and which govern human life and thought, such as moral philosophy, which equips and embellishes the character; history, which is the mother of knowledge and experience, that is, of practical wisdom; oratory, which both teaches and tempers life and common sense; political science and economics, by which are established the condition and government of civil and domestic affairs.<sup>9</sup>

This effectively summarises the general humanist 'core' curriculum and the functions and outcomes of education as humanists saw it. Partly in answer to an education system which many had come to regard as obsolete and partly in response to changes in urban society (notably to the growing demand for educated people with the skills to fill a widening range of professions, especially in the legal field) humanist philosophy developed. The essential aspects of this philosophy will now be discussed.

## **Renaissance humanism and education**

The continuous, pervasive influence of (Petrarch's) writings, his discovery of manuscripts, his talk to other scholars, and to a whole younger generation made the way clear for the new outlook, at once Christian and classical, which came to be called Humanism.<sup>10</sup>

It is Francesco Petrarca (1304-74) who is usually credited with providing the essentials of the character of what would become the humanist movement. Having said that, it would be incorrect to state that humanism had a specific beginning because it was a development of ideas over time. Humanist philosophy would become more complex and more cohesive in its ideology and aims (though this is not to imply that its aims were ever fully realised), and was to encapsulate concepts and reactions which Petrarca did not envisage. What he gave to humanism was a reverence for classical texts, some of which he rediscovered (such as Cicero's *Pro archia* in 1333), engendering the widespread consolidation of the influence of Cicero from whose *De republica* was taken the ideal of the *artes humanitatis* (liberal/humane arts) so important to humanist education. Perhaps Cicero "more than any other writer" influenced "the early humanists by the infusion of ethical ingredients into politics."<sup>11</sup> With his "single-minded energy"<sup>12</sup> Petrarca inspired many contemporaries as well as the 'humanists' who would follow. His thoughts were often characterised by "the loss of religious hegemony and the beginning of the search for a more constructive wordliness"<sup>13</sup>, a characteristic which was to be advanced by humanism in general (although later humanists such as Erasmus would attempt to reinstate what they took to be the church's lost control).

Humanists would come to use classical authorities in the "struggle with what they judged to be the barbarities and irrelevancies of scholastic theology"<sup>14</sup>. In their attack on scholasticism they used not just 'pagan' classical authors (who stressed the functional importance of rhetoric and eloquence) but the Church Fathers (relying most commonly on Jerome, Augustine, Basil and Gregory of Nazanius). They believed that the Church Fathers

had not cluttered their theology and moral teachings with philosophical theories and inelegant language which distracted the Christian's attention from the plain message of Scripture. Rather they had offered a rhetorical presentation of doctrine meant to move the believer to accept those ideals. The Fathers presented a rhetorical framework rather than an Aristotelian-metaphysical one. To the humanist theologians the Fathers' language was a beautiful idiom free of philosophical neologisms and useless speculations.<sup>15</sup>



Partly, Petrarca's insistence on the value of classical wisdom derived from his reaction against medieval ideas of natural philosophy. He was concerned that university curricula were not catering adequately for the sciences, indeed that 'scientific' study could not advance because under the scholastic system such study had become moribund. Concern for education in general would become a typical component of humanist philosophy.

At first, concern with the *trivium* subjects (grammar, logic and rhetoric), rather than those of the *quadrivium*, was at the forefront of humanist reform. In the Middle Ages, grammar dominated the *trivium*, but humanists would regard it as subordinate to rhetoric. As education began to respond to social changes, rhetoric ascended in favour and rhetorical skills came to be in demand. However, this response was slow and education remained long entrenched in scholastic methodology and philosophy. Furthermore, education could only respond to humanism once there was a recognisable and coherent humanist philosophy accepted by an intellectual elite who could be of influence in the dissemination of humanist ideas and who would create a demand for humanist education. The importance of Petrarca and of other early humanists (for example, Salutati, Niccoli, da Verona, Bracciolini and Vergerio) was not that they suddenly produced something called 'humanism' in a complete, identifiable form. They did not; humanism evolved and gathered momentum, amassing elements from individual authors and responding to employment demands partly created by urban development. Crucially, early humanists spread ideas to men who would take up positions of influence in teaching, the law, the civil service, the church. These men would in turn often elaborate those ideas and further popularise them. This gradual amassing of ideas eventually formed the philosophy of humanism.



## **Entering the "humanist terrain": humanism as philosophy**

In entering the "humanist terrain"<sup>16</sup> it should be remembered that humanists following Petrarca "employed various ancient sources, and reached different conclusions"<sup>17</sup>. However, certain aspects of their thought were definitively 'humanist' and these will be outlined below. Humanists also "saw their own roles in remarkably similar ways. For them, as for ancient intellectuals, philosophy was not the property of a professional élite but of an educated lay class"<sup>18</sup>. In practice, this educated lay class did tend to form an intellectual, if not financial, elite. Early humanists often professed the need for education as a means to the gaining of wisdom for all men, but in actuality this was never really considered to be a practical aim (for 'all men' read 'all men of social standing'). The emphasis should perhaps be on the fact that it was an education aimed at laymen rather than at prospective ecclesiastics. Moreover, in examining the rise of humanist philosophy, it may be stated that there is

every justification for advancing the thesis that what is commonly called renaissance humanism was an epiphenomenon, a concomitant feature and integral part of the overall ecclesiological, philosophical, governmental and political thinking that pervaded the age. The impact which renaissance humanism made upon society at large then becomes intelligible, because only historically conditioned movements can achieve such deep and profound influence.<sup>19</sup>

Humanism first burgeoned in Italy most probably because Italy had a great tradition of ecclesiastical and legal studies and urban governmental infrastructures, all of which demanded civil servants, notaries, lawyers and churchmen with requisite skills in literacy and/or rhetoric. There were also literary collections in lay and secular institutions, including major collections of classical works, which provided for and responded to demands for access to classical authors. There was, too, a patriotic impulse in the development of

humanism in Italy. Early Renaissance scholars sometimes felt that by rejecting scholastic philosophy and Gothic art they were reviving Italian culture, which had faded since the fall of the Roman Empire. Law was especially important to the development of Italian humanism and with changes in rhetorical practice in education, practice in lawcourts was affected in turn. In time, "[a]ll those who became Roman advocates had passed through the hands of the rhetor and been exposed to his graded exercises"<sup>20</sup>. What Roman law,

its study, and its application in the public field did was to set in motion the process of secularization on the governmental level. It was this secularization of governmental foundations and, therefore, of powers, which eventually conditioned the numerous other features related to the so-called humanist renaissance: their emergence and development was contingent upon the secularization of public government.<sup>21</sup>

It was Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406), a secretary in the Florentine republic and a noted humanist writer, who was instrumental in encouraging the demand for appointing humanists to civic posts which continued in Florence after his death. It was a practice which became increasingly prevalent in other urban centres. In this, not only did the "prestige and emoluments of office make a humanist career seem a lucrative one", but "even more attractive was the fact that humanists were placed in positions to advise the powerful and wealthy to undertake major scholarly, educational, architectural, and artistic programs"<sup>22</sup>. Claims for such 'civic' humanism will be examined in greater depth later in this chapter.

## Humanist ideals: eloquence and virtue

Typical features of humanist philosophy were, then, aspects such as the study of classical texts (with a view to gaining wisdom from them), emphasis on the individual as an active citizen and the belief that personal virtue could be learned through education based upon study of the humanities. The term 'humanist' was first used to describe a professional teacher of the *studia humanitatis* <sup>23</sup>, focussing on rhetorical proficiency. As the Renaissance progressed, many who adhered to humanist trends were no longer professional teachers. As we have seen, scholasticism had an important role defined for disputation and dialectic and it might seem that the humanist centrality of rhetoric and eloquence was simply a continuance of this. But humanists distinguished between eloquence ( a virtue which could be learned and utilised in public service) and scholastic sophistry.

The model for eloquent speech was found not in scholastic literature but in classical authors such as Cicero and Quintilian from whom humanists developed the concept of an education capable of producing a citizen. Quintilian, whose work was of considerable influence upon humanists, believed that correct training could mould citizens and fit them "to the demands of both private and public business"<sup>24</sup>. Such a citizen could "guide a state by his counsel, ground it in law, and correct it by his judicial decisions"<sup>25</sup>. The classical ideal of the 'active' citizen was adopted by most humanists who assumed that man's nature was inherently corrupt but redeemable, able to be shaped by an educative process. It was in the rediscovery of classical works that a prime impulse was given to the humanist ideal of the virtuous man able to use rhetoric wisely for the common good. In particular, Cicero's writings



formed a window through which Italian humanists looked into antiquity. In them they found the value-system of late Greek ethics, the potentialities of Greek philosophy for the study of history and law, an exalted view of art, a reverence for antiquity and the idea of the intellectual as a sage whose wisdom could guide his fellow citizens.<sup>26</sup>

In the *De oratore*, which was brought to Florence in its newly discovered complete form by Niccolo Niccoli <sup>27</sup>, Cicero described the orator's role:

[It] is the part of the orator, when advising on affairs of extreme importance, to unfold his opinion as a man having authority; his duty too is to arouse a listless nation, and to curb its unbridled impetuosity. By one and the same power of eloquence the deceitful among mankind are brought to destruction, and the righteous to deliverance. Who more passionately than the orator can encourage to virtuous conduct, or more zealously than he reclaim from vicious courses?<sup>28</sup>

If the orator could potentially hold such power it was imperative that he be virtuous and use that power for the benefit of the state and its people.

In both classical and humanist philosophy eloquence was equated with power and goodness, and this amounted to the effective laicization of the religious concept of virtuous conduct through Christian belief. Eloquence was regarded by humanists as an art which had to be taught. Art could therefore triumph over nature. None of which is to say that oration always had the desired power to affect the listener; frequently humanist oratory could be a

stultifying and imitative stringing together of expected cliches, [or] it could also become an elegant, imaginative, and serious argument. The compelling motive behind its use was the humanists' belief in the importance of moving, swaying, and entertaining as a part of persuasive instruction, in the necessity of lending immediacy, color, concrete force to their appeals.<sup>29</sup>

Petrarca emphasised the persuasive force of rhetoric stating that orators must first seek wisdom and virtue, although he was aware of people's moral limitations. Petrarca himself

thought that he behaved differently when engaged in moral philosophy than when involved in everyday life. The problem was to put the tenets of moral philosophy into practice and thereby effect the sort of changes to behaviour which will now be discussed.

### **Humanist philosophy and human nature**

Petrarca's concern with the nature of man encapsulates a critical aspect of humanist thought which would be broadened by later humanist authors. As has been mentioned, humanists saw in classical works the power to produce 'good' citizens. Petrarca's belief that knowledge was a useful, if not a fundamental, civilizing influence in the shaping of man's nature was shared by most, possibly all, humanists. Knowledge was only regarded as beneficial if study moulded the character of the students towards virtuous and dignified behaviour. Thus the *studia humanitatis* placed the nature of the individual at its heart. In a sense the humanists sought humanity through knowledge. Scholastic education was not thought to produce useful knowledge and students could not as a result gain wisdom. In ridiculing a scholastic opponent Petrarca had this to say on the knowledge being imparted:

[H]e has much to say about animals, birds and fishes: how many hairs there are in a lion's main; how many tail feathers there are; with how many arms the squid binds a shipwrecked sailor, that elephants copulate from behind and grow for two years in the womb... that the phoenix is consumed by aromatic fire and is reborn after burning... All these things or the greater part of it is wrong... And even if they were true, they would not contribute anything to the blessed life. What is the use... of knowing the nature of beasts, birds, fishes and serpents, and not knowing, or spurning the nature of man, to what end we are born, and from where and whither we pilgrimage?<sup>30</sup>



Thus Petrarca rejected what he saw as educational irrelevance while reinforcing the central aspect of the nature of man in the process of educational transformation.

The notion of the centrality of the individual was widened to emphasise the unique place of man in the universe; man was viewed as the focal point of the world, a concept which would develop into the idea that nature existed for the benefit of man. Humanists regarded man as a social being and this led to a concentration on humanity as part of the social organization. Humanism could be said, therefore, to have encouraged the "enquiry into the reborn citizen who was an integral member of the natural state" and what is seen in this is "renaissance humanism in the literal meaning of the term: it is the rebirth of humanity"<sup>31</sup>. Bound in with this concept is the belief in human dignity. In his *Oratio de hominis dignitate* (1486), Pico della Mirandola made human dignity his focus, believing that man could choose to become better. With this in mind della Mirandola wrote: "nothing in the world can be found that is more worthy of admiration than man"<sup>32</sup>. The means to this improvement was to be learning of a different type to scholasticism: humanist learning which would evolve from humanist philosophy, in itself a curious mixture of the pagan and the classical.

### **The effect of the Christian/pagan synthesis**

Intellectual accomplishment was linked to the concept of *humanitas* initially under Stoic influence and later as a fundamental aspect of humanist philosophy. Man had a divine attribute in reason and by using his reason he could achieve understanding. To Cicero, *humanitas* denoted the "pursuit of wisdom by which the rational soul would know itself and discover its fellowship with God"<sup>33</sup>. This purpose suited humanists perfectly, because



they were mainly Christians and 'fellowship' with God was an impeccable goal. Classical learning could thus provide wisdom which was not contradictory to Christian teaching. This was a stance which the Church Fathers had not taken because, for them, attempts to reconcile the pagan and the Christian were highly problematic.

The synthesis of pagan and Christian concepts became increasingly important to humanists during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. They tried to fuse humanist philosophy, based upon classical theology, philosophy and literature, with Christian belief. However,

never for a moment did it occur to the humanists that they were wrenching texts out of context or distorting them, that they were reconciling what we now consider to be irreconcilable. They were convinced... that unity was there, that all the ancient theologians and philosophers had said the same. The revelations granted to Orpheus, Pythagoras, Plato, Moses, Christ... were essentially the same, even if they were formulated in different ways.<sup>34</sup>

Christianity thus became moulded within neo-Platonism and this is generally referred to as Christian humanism (where the latter can be delineated). This synthesis built upon Petrarca's earlier emphasis upon the continuity between pagan and Christian thought in his *De ignorantia* in which he writes of Cicero as "a visionary who, while speaking of the nature of the Gods in *De natura deorum*, intuited, before the birth of Christ, the existence of one God"<sup>35</sup>. Petrarca's thought, while it in no way denies Christian ethics or beliefs, is a partial response to the lessening of religious hegemony in a situation where the institutional church was widely regarded as dissolute.

With their study of classical authors, humanists developed a more analytical method of reading texts and a more critical overview of history. They became more aware of sophisticated historical processes involving psychological motivation and human interaction reviving, to an extent, a style of "analytical, political narrative"<sup>36</sup> which had been utilised by

classical historians such as Tacitus and Polybius. At its most advanced, renaissance humanism would concede that socio-political lessons could be learned from history and these lessons applied to the modern era. This view was promoted by Niccolo Machiavelli who wrote:

[W]hoever considers the past and the present will readily observe that all cities and all peoples are and ever have been animated by the same desires and the same passions; so that it is easy, by diligent study of the past, to foresee what is likely to happen in the future in any republic, and to apply those remedies that were used by the ancients, or... to devise new ones from the similarity of events.<sup>37</sup>

Machiavelli's opinion was tempered by his understanding that "we never know the whole truth about the past"<sup>38</sup> though he held to a cyclical theory of history in which "monarchy becomes tyranny; aristocracy degenerates into oligarchy; and the popular government lapses readily into licentiousness..."<sup>39</sup> Some renaissance authors, like Machiavelli, became skilled analysts of contemporary society and compared what they learned in their classical research to the world as they saw it.

If improved ability in philology was displayed by some humanists, it is also fair to say that several major classical works popular at that time are now considered to be forgeries. This list includes the writings of 'Hermes Trismegistus', the *Centiloquium* attributed to Ptolemy, and the *De spirita et anima* attributed to Augustine. But this does not negate the fact that many humanists developed skills in textual exegesis and philology which enabled forged texts to be discovered. (Valla's discreditation of the *Donation of Constantine* is perhaps the most famous.) Humanists' "methods and their historical and philological understanding of classical antiquity had become increasingly firm and professional; in many instances their standards approached those of modern scholarship"<sup>40</sup>. Importantly,



... the literary and philosophical studies of the humanists led them to important insights concerning the historical character of humanist thought and culture... [In] the depth, sharpness and range of their views of human nature and its societal, political and religious ramifications, the humanists clearly laid the foundations for early modern discussions of man...<sup>41</sup>

But it has to be remembered that the humanists' views came from a certain social and political context, from a specific sector of renaissance culture and their views of the nature of man reflected both Christian concepts and cultural elitism.

Furthermore, humanists brought their own moral values to textual readings, sometimes condemning the (reported) behaviour of authors. This can be seen in Zanobi Acciaiuoli's acceptance of Theodoret's moral criticisms of Plato in his translated text. Acciaiuoli's stated purpose was

to counter the errors of Hellenism. Through the *Curatio* of Theodoret [Zanobi] warned his contemporaries against Plato's community of wives and his foolish notions about the transmigration of souls and showed that Socrates, whom all proclaimed "the best of the Greek philosophers", was an irascible and libidinous old man who went to the gymnasium to look at handsome boys, got drunk with Aristophanes and Alcibiades, had two wives at once and frequented prostitutes as well.<sup>42</sup>

Whatever the truth about Socrates' personal life and behaviour, Zanobi's intent is to cast doubt upon Socrates' ability and influence as a philosopher by linking assertions about his morality to claims about his philosophical standing. The implicit question is: "How can a man whom Christians judge to be a moral dissolute also be held in intellectual esteem?" Thus, many humanists, though they stressed man's free will to become morally better through knowledge, tied this concept irrevocably to Christian *mores*. Man could choose his moral behaviour but within strictly defined parameters of which choices were 'correct'.

Despite these reservations it must be said that philology was a skill which humanists



refined, using exegesis to enhance even a revered text like the Bible. Lorenzo Valla argued the importance of reading the testaments in the same way as any other historical source, of treating them philologically in order to produce a clear, precise Latin version of them. This epitomises one aspect of friction which became evident: the "humanist claims to biblical exegesis" did not "go unquestioned by the professional scholastic theologians"<sup>43</sup>. Scholastics argued that humanists could only bring "literary credentials, which constitute no guarantee of expertise"<sup>44</sup> to biblical study. The humanists countered with the argument that it was precisely their "literary credentials" which could give them the necessary talent for textual analysis which would render the Bible more compelling to renaissance readers once translated into Latin by humanist scholars.

An extremely important aspect, then, of the rediscovery and reading of a wide range of classical works and of the moves to create a pagan/Christian synthesis was the way in which humanists studied texts. This applied particularly to the appropriation of religious and classical textual analysis by secular scholars from theologians. Formerly,

[the] contents or substance of ancient writings were of little concern to those who profited from reading them or who wrote with their help. Now this same literature began to be read, seen and interpreted from a much wider angle and in an extensive comprehensive and material way. Lessons of substance were drawn from it and the main object of consulting the ancient works was no longer of a mere ancillary or auxiliary or didactic kind, but lay in relating what they revealed about the *vita activa*...<sup>45</sup>

Classical wisdom was looked upon as being of use in daily life as well as being morally edifying, which was a significant development in the way in which classical knowledge was regarded. This, together with the fact that many humanists (especially in the Florentine Republic) worked in government or in public service, has led to the highlighting of what has been called 'civic' humanism as delineated in the work of men such as Salutati and Bruni.

## The question of civic humanism

Because humanism was initially expressed most forcefully in Florence, it has been asked - most famously by Eugenio Garin - whether there was a connection between the growth of humanism and the Florentine political scene. Garin thinks that there undoubtedly was, that humanism was a "glorification of civic life"<sup>46</sup>. This idea was also forcefully expressed by Hans Baron who stated that 'civic' humanism was only possible in a republic such as Florence. Humanists in Florence

were identified with the wealthy ruling families, shared their interests, and developed a positive evaluation of social activity. Such a development was only possible in a republic; humanists who patronized the courts of despots were contemptuous of the business enterprises of the Florentine burgher and extolled the life of leisure. Thus civic humanism cannot be separated from Florence's republican political tradition... <sup>47</sup>

Baron goes so far as to maintain that civic humanism could not have developed anywhere else - at least, anywhere that was not politically republican. Now, there are several suppositions at work here, not least that there was such a thing as 'civic' humanism and that if civic humanism had not evolved western Europe would not have developed political and cultural pluralism. Arguably, the civic element to humanism was not as distinct as Baron suggests and it may be that political pluralism would have developed without a humanist movement.

Baron seems to regard 'civic' humanists as an embodiment of political pluralism rather than as people involved in government as a job, people who may not have had any specific civic or political aim to their professional interests. Nor need such people have had a coherent humanist outlook to their professional *raison d'etre*. Baron thus argues for particular



qualities of civic humanism which may not take enough account of self-interest, qualities which he sees as a crucial part of Florentine polity and which produced a "pattern of conduct and thought which was not to remain limited to Florentine humanism"<sup>48</sup>. According to Baron, there came to exist

a kind of Humanism which endeavoured to educate a man as a member of his society and state; a Humanism which refused to follow the medieval precedent of looking upon the Rome of the emperors as the divinely guided preparation for a Christian 'Holy Empire' and the center of all interest in the ancient world; a Humanism which sought to learn from antiquity by looking upon it not melancholically as a golden age never again to be realized, but as an exemplary parallel to the present... <sup>49</sup>

Certainly this is what is embodied in the philosophical writings of many humanists, but it cannot be taken as read that all - even most - Florentine politicians or political servants either genuinely accepted or put into practice these qualities. Baron appears to merge philosophy with practice and humanism with political pluralism, which is in turn conflated with cultural achievement.

Civic humanism may not have been a distinct movement, although humanist thought often developed civic aspects where the classical ideal was fused with civic elements. While espousing the *studia humanitatis* as a means to produce men of integrity suitable for civil service, many humanists remained aloof from social realities and detached from political actualities. Indeed, a "purely scholarly attitude that seeks to avoid identification with civic life - exemplified chiefly in marriage and service to the state - was a strong tendency among *literati*..." <sup>50</sup> In discussing Baron's thesis, Albert Rabil Jnr. asserts that the emergence of civic humanism "short-circuited" this tendency in Florence. If any body of writers or philosophers were exclusively 'civic' humanists both in theory and practice then this could well have been the case. But, in general, humanists probably adopted a more broadly based philosophy, with civic aspects.



But, as Albert Rabil Jnr. points out, Baron's argument has to be seen in the a particular light. His acceptance of the positive nature of renaissance culture and Florentine republicanism as a precursor to political pluralism

began to emerge in the 1920's, when he first used the phrase "civic humanism", and... he documented its presence during the 1930's while he was fleeing Hitler's Germany first for Italy and subsequently for the United States. It is not surprising that the way in which he finally formulated his thesis has an intrinsic relation to the rise of tyranny before his eyes and its opposition by political democracies. Doubtless the attempt to demonstrate that political democracy and cultural pluralism were the hallmarks of the humanism that marks the real birth of the Renaissance and that this humanism was not, as earlier interpreters had believed, indifferent to politics or more intimately related to tyrannical than to republican politics, was an important motivation. The most problematic aspects of Baron's thesis rest on it.<sup>51</sup>

The main problem is that there has been a line of thought extrapolated from Baron's thesis (notably by Paul Oskar Kristeller) which not only accepts civic humanism as part of humanist philosophy but which identifies it with 'despotic' humanism (whatever that may be). Kristeller writes that while it is mistaken to identify renaissance humanism exclusively with Florentine civic humanism, there was "a great deal of 'despotic humanism' even in fifteenth-century Italy"<sup>52</sup>. But as with Baron's argument, this explanation invents a term ('despotic humanism') which implies an identifiable current of thought/practice. Charles Trinkaus comments pertinently that the "well-known fact that humanists with similar moral philosophies" served both despots and republicans "with equal praise for the ruling power has given rise to the facetious suggestion that there was a "despotic humanism".<sup>53</sup>

Humanists no doubt had a variety of reasons for working for their employers. Many possibly took work where it was available to them and where opportunities arose, others possibly for reasons of self-advancement or for socio-political furtherance. However, to work for despotic governing powers need not imply acceptance of despotism; humanists

who did so may have agreed with the tenor of despotic policies, or they may have been indifferent to them, or disagreed but kept silent. Furthermore, concepts of what qualities were considered despotic would have been different during the Renaissance than during the twentieth century when there is widespread belief in the existence and possibility of democracy. This belief has somewhat polarised thought on what is democratic and what dictatorial. Perhaps many humanists saw despotic government as defining the parameters within which they had to work. In a way this diverts from the main issue. The entire question of civic and despotic humanism

has been too narrowly conceived, and... it is in the humanists' affirmation of an activist, constructivist, industrious view of man's nature, within a societal rather than a political nexus, that their significance may be discovered. The true significance of the Renaissance and of the humanist movement... lies more in what Burckhardt and Michelet called "The Discovery of the World of Man" than in a poorly founded, premature vision of political democracy.<sup>54</sup>

In as much as there may be some humanists whose writing has a predominately 'civic' tone to it, they have some claim to be the "first historicists in the western tradition"<sup>55</sup>. This argument really extends to those who, like Machiavelli, were seminal thinkers in civics, politics and history. Such writers did establish a change in orientation, for when

[humanists] began to write, words like, stability, immobility, monarchy, authority, eternity, hierarchy, and universality dominated political writing; in their own works and subsequently... these [they]... replaced by republicanism, secularism, progress, patriotism, equality, liberty and utopia. Only the terms reason, virtue, and experience survived from the earlier tradition of political.<sup>56</sup>

This then, rather than whether 'civic' humanism existed as a separate strand of humanist thought, is one enduring legacy of humanism in western culture.



## Humanist curricula and educational provision

Schooling was not taken for granted, it did not involve uniform... or a special code of behaviour... no convention, but only circumstance, divided the carefree years from the responsible years.<sup>57</sup>

Before the Renaissance, organised educational provision was mostly confined to monastic schools. Education was closely linked to religious institutions which were centres of learning in the early Middle Ages. In some countries, most markedly Italy, even church schools (monastic or chapter schools) went into decline between 1100 and 1300<sup>58</sup>. Although some survived until the mid-sixteenth century (Verona and Venice) and individual clergy carried on educating children in rudimentary Latin grammar, they had little effect upon education in general during the Renaissance.

As Italy gives the paradigm of the growth of renaissance humanist education it is noteworthy that the impetus to increased school provision here came with both urban growth and the demand for relevant skills required in secular professions. There was also a growth in the mercantile class which, though small, did create demand for business abilities like numeracy (which led to the evolution of Abbaco schools, separate from grammar schools, which taught the practical maths called Abbaco ). In addition, with the development of urban communities people of the same occupation grouped together and this led to the introduction of the gild system in the craft and mercantile industries. Gilds responded to the need for a standard of entry to professions and they regulated the training conditions of apprentices. Gradually, secular education would become institutionalised, especially once the impact of humanism affected concepts of pedagogy and curricular provision. Until then,



lay education tended to be provided either by private tutors or by guilds, to which those not involved in training for a specific profession began to look for education.

Societal changes, then, prompted many people to seek education for their children outwith religious institutions. Increasingly - and again Italy is the paradigm - town communes decided to pay for the provision of small local schools and individual teachers. Therefore it was often necessity

rather than a greater commitment to education, [which] drove the smaller towns to support communal schools. The leading citizens of small communes lacked personal wealth to hire household tutors or as a group to support an independent master... Hence, the council of a small town used communal revenues to hire a master, who supplemented his salary with student fees. By contrast, the much wealthier merchants, nobles, and professionals of major urban centres who ruled subject lands and commercial empires had ample incomes to support other independent masters.<sup>59</sup>

In Italy some universities (for example, Bologna) supported communal teachers in schools under university auspices.

Independent schools also existed, centred upon particular teachers (for instance, Plazon's Venetian Academy). Two of the more influential early humanists, Guarino Guarini and Vittorino da Feltre, were teachers in independent schools. Teachers did not require a degree in order to practice and men would often assist an established teacher in order to learn how to teach. Levels of teaching ability tended to be low: "[at] the bottom of the profession, reading and writing teachers needed only a modicum of skill in order to teach small children basic skills"<sup>60</sup>. Although teachers could achieve a relatively comfortable standard of living many lived in poverty; the low status of the work was often reflected in poor wages. While it is perhaps exaggerated, Erasmus' description gives some indication of teachers, a group of men "the most miserable" who grow

old in penury and filth in their schools - schools did I say? Prisons, dungeons I should have said - among their boys deafened by the din, poisoned by the foetid atmosphere, but, thanks to their folly, perfectly self satisfied so long as they can bawl and shout to their terrified pupils and... flog them, and so indulge in all kinds of ways their cruel dispositions.<sup>61</sup>

After gaining basic literacy, the next stage of a child's education would be learning Latin grammar and usually, where there was no recourse to a private tutor, they would be sent to a Latin teacher at what was known as a 'grammar' school. Increasingly in Italy during the early Renaissance, teachers instructed young children not just in grammar but professed to provide an education in "*i fondamenti dell'umanita*". Practically, this was simply the fundamentals of grammar and literature, but such teachers were consciously appealing to a growing awareness of the *studia humanitatis* as a move from the 'old' style of scholastic education. However, apart from what kind of educational provision was available, it was social class which determined the quality and type of education a child would receive and to what level of proficiency that education would be taught. Almost all

sons of nobles and wealthy merchants, and sons of professionals such as lawyers, physicians, notaries, high civil servants, university, and pre-university teachers, attended school, usually a Latin school. Many boys from the next rank of society, master craftsmen and major shopkeepers, also attended school.<sup>62</sup>

Girls from wealthy backgrounds might be given an extremely curtailed version of a boy's education, but for the most part they were expected to learn only rudimentary literacy and domestic skills such as spinning and needlework.

## Changes in curricular provision

As has been explained, the most important changes in philosophical outlook which occurred during the Renaissance were the emphases upon classical wisdom (including the imitation of classical style) and the gaining of rhetorical skill. Humanist philosophy had a significant impact on the ethos of education and on pedagogy; certain definitive aspects were required if an education was to be called 'humanist'. Crucially, it must be based upon the (critical) reading of classical texts and the study of the liberal arts. Essential also was a belief in the reforming capacity of education upon the individual, as we have seen, a conviction that (as Colluccio Salutati wrote) "all forms of human knowledge should only be treated as a means to a higher goal"<sup>63</sup>. In other words, the goal was the gaining of wisdom and virtue.

The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were marked by an intense development of interest in classical studies and by the institutionalization of classical works in the schooling system. (This institutionalization would form the core of modern European secondary school curricula.) Initially, however, humanist influence would be felt in the schools of leading teachers, prestigious schools, universities, or via private tutors. Humanist education was an elitist provision and it has to be said that in terms of its reforming capacity it was of doubtful efficacy. It may not even have succeeded in imparting functional skills at a high level except to the more able pupils. Schooling still tended to be regarded, by the majority of people, as a narrowly defined vocational process, with children commonly leaving elementary education as soon as they achieved the minimum level of literacy required by a guild, or as soon as they were old enough to join the family business.

Most schooling in the fourteenth century followed a medieval curriculum. Pre-university education in the quattrocento tended to rely upon prescribed texts, for example the more



simple classical works such as the *Ars minor* (ascribed to Donatus) and stories by Aesop. Children would then advance to more complicated texts by Vergil, Ovid and Lucan. Many of these texts were not presented in the original but in forms specifically used for the teaching of grammar. Students were usually taught the art of writing letters ( *ars dictaminis* ) following Cicero's *De inventione*. Humanists, of course, decried such elements in the medieval curriculum and in their efforts to "win elite public opinion to their cause" many wrote "pedagogical treatises that advertised the rosy promise of the new studies"<sup>64</sup>. The earliest Italian humanist treatise on education was the *De ingenuis moribus et liberalibus studiis adulescentiae* by Pier Paolo Vergerio (c1368-1444) which was disseminated in Italy and northern Europe. Vergerio promoted liberal education as creating men prepared for civic life and work, and it is in this limited sense that the term 'civic' humanism may be meaningful. He wrote that for those with

noble minds and those who must involve themselves in public affairs (*in publicis rebus*) and the community,... it is useful to study history and moral philosophy... From moral philosophy we learn what it is appropriate to do, while from history we extract the examples to follow... To these two disciplines... comes next a third, eloquence... With eloquence, instead, one learns to speak gracefully, with gravity, in order to win over the hearts of the multitude.<sup>65</sup>

Vergerio here delineates the essence of a purposeful humanist education, while elsewhere in his treatise he stresses the *trivium* and *quadrivium* subjects. Renaissance pedagogy was partly about communicating an ideal about a privileged communal life, not about dealing with or altering the realities of living for the majority.

One noticeable shift from scholastic education was evident in the attitudes of humanists towards language; words came to be regarded as signifying reality, rather than - as the medieval concept defined them - *being* what they denoted. It was therefore important to humanists that the content of a text was stressed as well as the form. Leonardo Bruni

emphasised the teaching of *res* rather than *verba*, and this, if anything, became the humanist cliché.

However the methodology of education continued to rely upon rote learning, both in schools and universities and teaching methods would seem, to a modern observer, tedious beyond belief. Humanists did recognise that memorization and repetition was not really enough and that study should be graded in difficulty and presented in a structured way. Once reading and writing had been learned from a *magister ludi*, a child would be sent to a grammarian who, in studying a poem, would discuss the text line by line, explaining

the author's biography, the historical and mythological references found in the work, together with the metric, the etymology of the vocabulary, and the various figures used by the poet. He taught the student to search for truth hidden beneath a veil of imagery. Close study of the text incidentally revealed discrepancies in different copies and easily encouraged the grammarian to engage in textual criticism.<sup>66</sup>

Students would learn to write short prose passages, but this was more the province of the rhetor who undertook the next stage of the pupils' tutelage.

Rhetoric was deemed to include the writing and delivery of speeches and the ability to produce fine written style across literary genres. In time, a pupil or university student would be expected to imitate the styles of the best classical authors which was regarded as having the purpose of imparting stylistic flair and (to a limited extent) enabling students to develop their own ideas of content within set frameworks. But mostly pupils were not expected to show independent thought or style. Essays or poems were formalised and rules given to guide expositions on any subject. Guarino's advice to his pupils was as follows:

Remember when you praise the countryside or denounce the city to take the reasons for the praise or blame from our four 'places'. That is, to show that utility, pleasure, virtue and excellence belong



to the country. Contrariwise, damage, wretchedness, defects and flaws belong to the city. I recall that I set those rules out in a couplet.<sup>67</sup>

The exposition of commentaries on classical texts was a popular method of teaching and these commentaries tended to explain absolutely everything about a text. Even with the influence of humanism, teaching was still characterised by poor textual awareness, by "misinformation... elicited from the text by aid of unjustified inferences"<sup>68</sup>. Many teachers were, therefore,

forced to waste time and pages on the donkey-work of listing synonyms - which is all that thousands of humanists' short glosses amount to. Worst of all, in a period of intense literary competition, the commentary made it impossible for its author to shine. For the most noticeable aspect of all the humanists' commentaries is their similarity to one another. Especially in their printed form... the commentaries are nearly indistinguishable. Waves of notes printed in minute type break on all sides of a small island of text set in large roman.<sup>69</sup>

Humanist education did give students, particularly in universities, more scope for critical thinking than had scholasticism. Humanists made the study of some subjects, notably history, more analytical and removed the medieval concentration on grammar from the curriculum. They "made valiant efforts to... reduce the study of rules to a minimum...: the rules for both correctness and elegance, that is, grammar and rhetoric, could best be learned by direct exposure to the good... texts, after only a modicum of introductory, schematic paradigms."<sup>70</sup>

By and large, humanism attempted to introduce an education which would be more meaningful and useful than scholastic learning had been, especially in the universities where there was often a tension felt by some students between "the psychological and moral contrast between the humanistic optimism about the dignity of man on the one hand and, on the other, the medieval pessimism about human nature, which affected most medieval



institutions including schools and universities."<sup>71</sup> This is perhaps to trade in stereotypes of what exactly constituted humanist and medieval philosophy, but as a general comment it is valid. It could not have been entirely comfortable for older students to be constrained to study a curriculum the elements of which were becoming explicitly termed outmoded, or to be largely denied access during a course to newer philosophical methods and texts. This was particularly true at the University of Paris where (in an effort to enforce correct behaviour and study habits, plus adherence to traditional curricular values) "reporting, even informing on colleagues and schoolmates was institutionally encouraged as the best way to ensure cooperation"<sup>72</sup>.

There were some humanists who were perceptive teachers and who did "clarify and crystallise their notion of the foundation core of humanistic studies"<sup>73</sup>. By the sixteenth century some humanist teachers (notably Vives) were reorienting the early humanist pedagogical concentration towards education as a generally applicable process rather than simply stressing individual ability. Until this gave rise to a structured curriculum allowing graded progress through its core subjects, teaching would remain most effective only for the highly intellectual student.

Specifically pedagogical texts became more prolific as the Renaissance developed, although educational ideas were likely to have been largely negated or ignored in pedantry of practice. It may be said that instead of "producing the free, honourable, and eloquent citizen, Latin humanistic schools produced docile, obedient, upper-class servants of the state"<sup>74</sup>. It is difficult not to emphasise the drudgery and functionalism of renaissance education, but at the time play and enjoyment were not regarded as being important components in a child's educational life. By modern educational standards renaissance education could not be termed 'stimulating' or encouraging to individual creativity. Yet education then, as now, serves those who hold power in society and responds to economic and social needs. Renaissance

teachers attempted social engineering to be sure, in that they tried to teach moral values (both personal and social) to retain the *status quo* of a reasonably stable urban infrastructure (whether despotic or republican). Fundamentally, renaissance education was founded on

the optimistic presupposition that the world was susceptible to understanding and control. Through education the mind can be trained to understand, the will can be persuaded to choose good. With a few notable exceptions, Renaissance men believed that through learning people could improve themselves and their world. It may have been a Utopian belief, but all education is based on belief in a civilized, rational universe.<sup>75</sup>

## Conclusion

Humanism as a philosophical movement became a dominant feature of European culture for the social and intellectual elite. Humanist philosophy reoriented educational thought and practice from scholastic grammar and dialectic to an emphasis on eloquence, knowledge of Latin and Greek, and learning as a means to gaining wisdom. There was seen to be a new rationale behind the teaching of the liberal arts, the content of which had not necessarily been agreed in medieval times. The term *artes liberales*, first attributed to Cicero, came to encapsulate for humanists both the concept of classical study for its own sake (as a means to gain access to classical wisdom) and the idea of education as being devoted to a continual refinement of human personality.

Humanist philosophy was, obviously, an artificial construct but one which "tolerated many truths"<sup>76</sup>. It attempted to juxtapose classical pagan insights with those from Christianity in

order to gain new insight into both and into the nature and existence of man. Because humanists regarded education as central to the process of enhancing moral growth and of transforming human nature, their philosophy and pedagogy (such as that developed by Erasmus and Vives from early humanist concepts) are inseparable. Humanists were not simply rhetoricians dealing in words devoid of real meaning but replete with tortuous artistry. They have sometimes been maligned as merely being involved in the preparation of propaganda which could serve the interests of those who controlled the political power bases of Italian city states. Some, certainly did just that. However, the humanist movement and its effect upon education and culture cannot entirely be reduced to such cynical functionalism.

Luis Vives was a humanist educator who was influenced by Christian humanism. He also underwent a scholastic education at the University of Paris, against which he rebelled. The effects of both scholasticism and humanism are seen in his works: he was the product of northern European humanism and the development of this will be the subject of Chapter 3. Central to the discussion will be the contribution of northern humanism's foremost exponent, Desiderius Erasmus.



### Chapter 3: Erasmus and the Creation of Biblical Humanism in Northern Europe

The emergence of 'Biblical humanism' at the turn of the [fifteenth] century was a most astonishing phenomenon. The platform was laid here for an alternative culture: there are few more surprising and dramatic events in cultural history than this breakthrough to a fresh, contextual approach to the Scriptures. John Colet... with his historical, personal approach; Jacob Wimpfeling (1450-1528) drawing on the classics; Jacques Lefevre, combining careful scholarship with a mystical and devotional sensitivity; the Hebraist and Cabbalist Reuchlin (1455-1522), and many others, all paved the way for the reform programmes of Erasmus, Luther and the Radicals - for their extraordinary singleminded concentration on the Bible.<sup>1</sup>

The above-named humanists were all northern Europeans and they were part of a cultural and educational development which arose as a result of the Italian Renaissance. The central figure of what became known as 'northern humanism' was Desiderius Erasmus and any delineation of the humanist movement in northern Europe must deal extensively with his work and with the concept of Christian humanism which is so closely related to him. Before doing so, however, some explanation of the spread of Italian humanism will be attempted. Erasmus, like many humanists, spent time in Italy specifically to undertake humanist studies and to meet contemporary exponents. But the mechanisms by which Italian humanism spread are more complex than this example suggests; it was disseminated in more ways than by students and intellectuals visiting the centres of learning in Italy, although this was

perhaps the most direct means by which the transmission of cultural and intellectual concepts was effected.

As has been outlined in Chapter 1, Luis Vives' work was produced in the context of northern European humanism. Before discussing his individual contribution to renaissance education the current chapter will discuss the intellectual developments which took place in the north as a direct result of the Italian Renaissance. Vives never visited Italy and his intellectual growth therefore depended on the influence of those who brought Italian humanism to the north, particularly Erasmus. After the growth of the humanist phenomenon is described, this chapter will indicate some of the Erasmian thought with which Vives was familiar.

### **The dispersal of Italian humanism**

During the Renaissance there was a vast amount of travel amongst students and (professional) humanists. Universities tended to attract students and teachers from most European countries and while many Italian universities were moving their curricula away from scholasticism, universities in northern Europe (notably Paris) remained entrenched. Nevertheless, universities which were perceived to be centres of excellence attracted students regardless of whether scholasticism or humanism held sway. Even if a university did not have a humanist orientation, it was still a gathering place for students who could discuss humanist ideas. Italian universities were often looked to as epitomizing the new learning and if students could not attend one to study for a degree then they tended to aspire to visit Italy, perhaps to visit particular universities. Some students completed undergraduate

work in a northern university then studied for part or all of their doctorate in Italy (as was the case with Erasmus who received his degree of Doctor of Theology at Turin). This reveals one aspect of the importance of patronage to the facilitation of the spread of Italian humanism; initially, patronage fostered an intellectual atmosphere which encouraged Italian humanism to expand and thereafter money from patrons frequently enabled European humanists to study abroad.

Concurrently, many Italian humanists travelled across Europe, often because they were invited to teach in, or to visit, a university faculty. The scope of countries visited during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries gives an indication of how widely humanist ideas were carried by men of significant intellectual repute. Enea Silvio Piccolomini, Francesco Barbaro, Pico della Mirandola, Baldassare Castiglione, Girolamo Aleandro, amongst others, visited various countries outside Italy<sup>2</sup>. Countries visited included Spain, France, the Netherlands, England and Scotland. The dissemination of Italian humanism was at its most intense from 1450-1500. During these years other important factors in the impulse to travel are recognizable: the humanists' search for manuscripts of classical texts, for instance. Professional humanists also travelled in church service, or in service to a royal court on diplomatic missions. Moreover, royal courts attracted humanist intellectuals to work in non-diplomatic capacities. The fact that Rome was the site of the papacy was fortuitous as many who travelled to the Vatican on church business had the opportunity to visit the country which was the nucleus of renaissance culture.

Humanism was further aided in its circulation by the availability of the printed word and books were crucial in the process of dissemination: printing made for the greater dispersal of humanist ideas, especially to the lay populace of Europe. During the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, humanist books were increasingly to be found in private and public collections and in university libraries. Generative in this spread of texts were the printing



houses with printers such as Aldus Manutius, Bomberg and Froben becoming prosperous. The promulgation of humanism was also aided by the use of books in schools, while correspondence was another vital means of transmission. Many humanists wrote copiously to one another and epistolary discussions often involved leading renaissance figures. Correspondence between lesser-known humanists and those whom they admired (for example, Vives' letters to Erasmus) provided another channel for broadcasting ideas. Letters were a means towards the creation and maintenance of the humanist network in Europe: of maintaining contact, of airing beliefs and new ideas, of discussing the contentious and of issuing invitations to travel and teach abroad.

The key point is that there was a receptive audience for Italian humanist thought and for renaissance culture in whatever form it was embodied. Humanism was encouraged to spread by this very receptiveness; humanists abroad, if they had met with widespread hostility to their ideas, would have been little able to promote the acceptance of the new thinking. Renaissance culture was embraced particularly successfully in the Low Countries, France and Germany. In the Low Countries the most famous figure of the age was, as has been said, Erasmus but he had an important predecessor in the north in Rudolph Agricola. Agricola studied in Italy and his work encouraged enthusiasm for humanism in northern Europe. Not that the Low Countries were devoid of a cultural identity of their own; for instance they had produced artists of significance (such as Van Eyck, Bosch, Breugel and, latterly, Holbein) while Cambrai, Liège and Antwerp were famous as centres for music.

There was, then, an existing cultural sphere which readily accepted renaissance trends, including humanism. Initially, the intellectual circle which adopted humanist philosophy was focussed around Agricola who would become influential not just in the Low Countries but in the German states. Agricola was an important writer and teacher (of Greek and Hebrew at Heidelberg) whom Trithemius described as being "extremely learned on every

subject"<sup>3</sup>. He was one of the earliest northern humanists to become known and accredited in Italy for his work. He studied there for varying periods between 1468 and 1479 and "brought back to the north with him a contagious enthusiasm for Latin and Greek studies"<sup>4</sup>. Agricola was not only responsible for promoting Greek and Hebrew studies, but for refining a dialectical method for teaching rhetoric which was widely adopted in the north. What Agricola devised was "an ingenious set of readily transmitted routines for classifying the accumulation of matter for debating or declaiming."<sup>5</sup> This was popular because humanist pedagogy still lacked rigour in its methods of implementation.

Such was the standing of Agricola as the leading figure of the northern Renaissance in the late fifteenth century that Erasmus would attempt to convince his own readership that there had been some "inspirational contact"<sup>6</sup> between himself and Agricola. There may have been a meeting between them when Agricola visited the monastery at Steyn where the young Erasmus had taken orders. However, this is not certain, though Erasmus, writing retrospectively, sets up a narrative which includes such a meeting<sup>7</sup>. Indeed his version of events implies that the meeting was fateful: the first great northern humanist meeting the as yet unknown Erasmus who would take on Agricola's mantle.

In fact, Agricola taught Alexander Hegius who was to be the headteacher of the school at Deventer which Erasmus attended as a boy. Hegius began his tenure at Deventer in 1483 - Erasmus left the following year, therefore any influence upon him by Hegius cannot have been extensive. By citing a direct link with Agricola, Erasmus is inventing and advertising what Lisa Jardine calls an "intellectual pedigree"<sup>8</sup>. This pedigree was further enhanced in retrospect through his many letters in which he sometimes displays an arrogance about his fame. He admits to sounding "presumptuous" when he writes: "wherever I have lived... I have won the approval of those men who were most approved, the praise of those most praised."<sup>9</sup> He continues: "[t]here is not a single realm, neither Spain, nor Italy, nor

Germany, nor France, nor England, nor Scotland, which does not invite me to be its guest"<sup>10</sup>. Strangely, with regard to his description of the Agricola meeting, once Erasmus' reputation was more secure in his own mind, he became vehement in his denial that Agricola influenced him at all. In his polemic *Spongia* (1523) he states: "[d]id I not praise Rudolph Agricola and Alexander Hegius fulsomely, to whom I owed absolutely nothing?"<sup>11</sup>

The growth of humanism in the Low Countries was further assured by the establishment of the *Collegium Trilingue* at Louvain in 1517. The foundation of the *Collegium* again demonstrates the importance of patronage. Just before he died, Jerome de Busleyden

bequeathed much of his wealth, together with a fine collection of classical manuscripts which he brought together at his... residence at Mechlin, for establishing in Louvain a college with adequate provision for both professors and students of the great languages and literatures of antiquity...<sup>12</sup>

This college became effective in the promotion of humanism in the north, particularly through those who, once they had graduated, became teachers and writers. Moreover, scholars of repute like Vives came to teach at Louvain.

The Low Countries were not the only area to receive humanist methods and philosophy. The French Renaissance accelerated following 1480, encouraging intellectuals such as Lefèvre, Budé and Rabelais to take on board the new learning. In Paris there were notable printing presses: those of Josse Bade and Jean Petit, Chretien Wechel and (at the Sorbonne) Guillaum Fichet. It was Budé and Lefèvre who were the foremost intellectuals. Budé (who died in 1540) dominated French humanism; he was the author of an important treatise *De philologia* and was instrumental in using exegesis in jurisprudential study<sup>13</sup>. Before him, it had been Gaguin (originally Flemish) and Lefevre who were the most influential Parisian humanists in promoting opposition to scholasticism. Lefèvre D'Étaples had studied in



Florence and lectured at the University of Paris. In his work can be seen one trend which developed in French humanism: the cohesion between scholarship and societal reform. Furthermore, Lefèvre evolved a doctrine of justification of faith which anticipated one of the main tenets of Lutheran theology. Lefèvre differed from the main line of thought as regards human will maintaining, as would Luther, that personal will was bound to divine dispensation. In contrast, current humanist theological concepts accorded the will the capacity to act towards the salvation of the individual. Finally, there is another interesting factor in French humanism which should be mentioned. Italian humanism was not always adopted uncritically and in France there was, amongst the humanist movement, a somewhat "hostile reaction to certain forms of art, thought and style emanating from Italy which were sometimes seen as constituting... a paganising phenomenon."<sup>14</sup>

### **The Renaissance in the German states**

As has been mentioned, the work of Rudolph Agricola was prominent in the German Renaissance, as was that of Johannes Trithemius (Abbot of Sponheim Cloister, which became famous for its humanist learning). Others of importance were similarly enthusiastic about humanism: Conrad Celtis, Jacob Wimpfeling, Johannes von Dalberg, Johann Reuchlin, Philipp Melanchthon. The renaissance of learning in Germany affected culture in the wider sense. Again artists were influenced by the Italianate; Durer and Cranach achieved recognition during this time. In terms of learning, humanism was dispersed through the German principalities in part as a result of the opportunities afforded for monks to study in monastery libraries, as well as through universities and work done at ecclesiastic and secular courts. Once more, patronage was crucial and the court of the Holy Roman Emperors, in

particular Maximilian I, was influential in giving funding to humanist scholars. Maximilian was a patron of both arts and learning (establishing a chair of rhetoric and poetry at Vienna University<sup>15</sup>). But many electors in the principalities which constituted the 'German' states were patrons. Elector Frederick ("the Wise") was one such; he would eventually give protection to Martin Luther after the latter's excommunication following the 'inquest' at the Diet of Worms.

A humanist curriculum was gradually introduced into universities in the German states: Heidelberg, Vienna, Basel, Wittenberg, for instance. However, the new curricular content tended to coexist with scholastic methods and texts. Many German universities became popularly adjudged as being especially meritorious in the field of humanist studies and they played a major role in the intellectual life of sixteenth century Germany. At Erfurt, to give one example, intellectuals grouped around Mutianus Rufus who would influence Ulrich von Hutten. Von Hutten was to support Luther's ideas and together they were a prime example of the leadership of the Reformation who came from the Augustinian/humanist tradition.

Generally, then, in the German states, humanists "established a really firm hold on the schools and universities. Nowhere else did men trained as humanist teachers occupy so many important posts..."<sup>16</sup>. However important any of the northern humanists hitherto mentioned were to the acceptance and development of humanism outside Italy, one man has become associated with northern humanism more than any other: Erasmus (born *circa* 1467), whose work and attitudes will be discussed. Vives was well acquainted with Erasmus' work and it was of considerable influence on his early ideas. Moreover, Erasmian thought was crucial to the development of Christian humanism, and it is from this tradition that Vives' theories evolved. However, preliminary to examining these aspects, some details of Erasmus' life will be offered to place the subsequent analysis in context.

## Paradigm of the Christian humanist

Perhaps Erasmus' greatest contribution to reform was [the] advocacy of a *pietas litterata*, an educated innocence, a faith centred on a teaching Christ. It has been argued that the roots of this go right back to the Italian Renaissance's emphasis on the *imago Dei*, the inherent dignity of the human as the image of the divine.<sup>17</sup>

Without doubt Erasmus developed his own concept of a humanist learning which fused classical humanism with Christianity in a way which centralised (far more than had Italian humanism) the place of Christian theology and belief in a classical matrix. This 'Christian humanism' became one of the foremost aspects of Erasmus' reputation, a reputation which made him the dominant literary figure during the first two decades of the sixteenth century. The Christianising of humanism had its most ardent exponent in him and much of his work concentrated on theology and upon Biblical commentary. Catholic reform (in Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany and England) would owe a "massive debt to humanism: and not least because the synthesis [between Christianity and humanism] had been so generally and attractively incorporated in the person of Erasmus"<sup>18</sup>

Erasmus was to be of tremendous influence on humanism. He was a complex, not to say flawed, character, but it is undeniable that his work was extremely popular with the 'educated' public. He edited classical material and had it published so that texts were available for others to use. His commentaries on these works provided what was considered to be an authoritative interpretive voice. His own work displayed an ideal example of the humanist combination of Christianity and Platonism. Erasmus is *the* Christian humanist and in his work combines "a largely Neo-Platonic ontology, anthropology, epistemology and a largely Stoic ethic with fundamentals of rhetoric drawn primarily from Cicero, Quintilian,



and Valla."<sup>19</sup> A crucial element in this was Erasmus' enthusiasm for exegesis as a means of interpreting the Bible and this aspect will be dealt with in the overall appraisal of his work which follows later in this chapter. Even today, Erasmus is fascinating; the contradictions and intricacies of his personality and intellectual outlook can be seen not only in his work but in the *ca.* 3000 letters which are extant. He assiduously preserved both letters he wrote and those which were written to him and published them during his lifetime. These epistolary collections were printed in several editions and were edited by Erasmus to present a favourable image of himself. Often he "cleared up some points which had been unfairly construed, expunged some passages by which the too tender and irritable minds of some people had been offended, and softened others."<sup>20</sup>

Erasmus certainly achieved great heights despite inauspicious beginnings. As regards his education, after his early years in Gouda, Erasmus went to the chapter school of St. Lebwin in Deventer, where many of the teachers were from the Brethren of the Common Life<sup>21</sup>. Erasmus had little good to say of them: he stated that the Brethren were poorly educated and incompetent pedagogues who punished children to "break their spirit" and "depress them" in order to make boys "fit for the monastic life"<sup>22</sup>. Erasmus stressed the paucity of decent educational provision at Deventer, but this does not sit comfortably with his later claims that on completion of his schooling he had taken courses in logic, metaphysics and morals, whilst he had begun to learn Greek<sup>23</sup>. He would make similar complaints about the teachers at 's-Hertogenbosch, the school which he attended after leaving Deventer. However, the standard could not have been as dismal as he claimed for, although he was not an outstanding scholar at this stage, he was asked to paraphrase Valla's *Elegantiae* <sup>24</sup>.

Erasmus next decided to follow his brother into orders; he became an Augustinian canon at a monastery at Steyn. Though he would later deny his contentment with the monastic life, he does not seem to have been unduly happy in his early years at Steyn. He was ordained as a

monk in 1492, but left the monastery to work as a secretary to the Bishop of Cambrai (until 1495). Steyn had afforded Erasmus the opportunity to further his studies; it had a good library which gave him access to a wide range of manuscripts and texts, no matter how full of errors he would later claim them to be.

While in the monastery, Erasmus' studies built upon the skills he had learnt at school. By the time he had joined the Steyn brotherhood he had acquired an excellent grasp of Latin. In 1489 he wrote about the authors who were his inspiration:

(I)n poetry... Vergil, Horace, Ovid, Juvenal, Statius, Martial, Claudian, Persius, Lucan, Tibullus, and Propertius; in prose, Cicero, Quintilian, Sallust, Terence. Then, for the observing of elegances, there is no one in whom I have so much confidence as Lorenzo Valla, who is unrivalled both in the sharpness of his intelligence and the capacity of his memory. Whatever had not been committed to writing by those I have named, I confess I dare not bring into use.<sup>25</sup>

Erasmus particularly admired Valla and regarded him as the most important writer on Latin style (something for which Erasmus would himself be renowned). The range of authors cited by Erasmus shows that he had recourse to a fair selection of material whether the reading of that selection was done clandestinely or openly at the monastery. Further, his literary proficiency demonstrates that the Deventer teaching methods transmitted, at least in his case, the essentials of Latin grammar and style.

During his time at Steyn, Erasmus was also influenced by the religious spirit iterated in the *Devotio Moderna* and by reading such works as the *Imitation of Christ*. At this time in his life, a change in orientation begins in Erasmus' writing away from wordly subjects towards a more explicit linking of classical study with Christianity. This change progressed and culminated in the explication of his concept of theological science first expressed in complete form in his *Enchiridion militis christiani* (1501).

## Leaving Steyn: the development of a Christian humanist

Erasmus left the monastery at Steyn to undertake the position of secretary to the Bishop of Cambrai. After the Bishop's ambitions to be a cardinal had failed, Erasmus sought his employer's permission to attend the University of Paris to study theology. Permission was granted and, at the age of twenty-eight, Erasmus went to the College of Montaigu (which, as we have seen, Vives would also attend). Erasmus was, however, made ill by the harsh rule by which the living quarters at Montaigu were governed. He wrote that when he attended the college it

was then ruled by Jean Standonck, a man whose intentions were beyond reproach but whom you would have found entirely lacking in judgment. Because he remembered his own youth, which had been spent in bitter poverty, he took special account of impoverished students... But this he tried to do by means of bedding so hard, diet so coarse and scanty, sleepless nights and labors so burdensome, that within a year he had succeeded in killing many very capable, gifted, promising students; and others, some of whom I knew, he reduced to blindness, nervous breakdowns, or leprosy. Not a single student, in fact, was out of danger.<sup>26</sup>

Erasmus studied theology with enthusiasm despite the strictures of the regime and gained a Bachelor of Theology in 1498<sup>27</sup>. During his studies, he never really subscribed to the scholasticism which was to be found at the core of theological lectures and essential texts. As has been mentioned, Vives also reacted against the scholasticism at Paris. Some professors at the university were sympathetic to humanism, most notably Robert Gaguin.

In 1496, Erasmus returned to Holland for six months in order to recover from illness. On his return to Paris he would no longer reside at Montaigu. Despite having some income



from the Bishop of Cambrai he was forced to tutor in order to support himself. It was as a result of the invitation of one of his pupils, William Blount (the Earl of Mountjoy), that Erasmus visited England. Here, his theological ideas would be given impetus by John Colet and in England he would also meet Thomas More, who would be the closest that Erasmus would have to a friend throughout his life. Erasmus would meet many illustrious men on this first visit to England: Grocyn, Linacre and John Skelton (who tutored the future Henry VIII). But it was to be Colet and More who were to have the most impact on Erasmus. Although it is generally argued that Colet had some influence on Erasmus' development towards a clearer synthesis between humanism and religious thought, analysis of the relationship is speculative as little evidence seems to exist which might clarify things.

There is, though, a series of letters extant, written between Colet and Erasmus concerning their debate on the causes of Christ's torment at Gethsemane. Using different exegetical methods they reach different conclusions. Here, then, can be recognised the developing skill of Biblical exegesis which Erasmus would later use extensively in his Biblical annotations and in his translation of the New Testament. The debate between Colet and Erasmus was published under the title *Disputatiuncula de taedio, pavore, tristitia Jesu* (A little dispute on the weariness, terror, and sadness of Jesus). It arose from the longstanding problem surrounding the interpretation of the events at Gethsemane. The gospels present Christ as going through an agony of fear. Christ states (Gospel according to St. Mark, 14, v34): "My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death" and prays (v36), "Father all things *are* possible unto thee; take away this cup from me..."<sup>28</sup>. The critical point is that Christ is portrayed as having an emotional reaction (fear, sorrow, sadness) about events which, according to medieval and renaissance theological argument, he was agreed to have foreknowledge. In this contradiction lay the argument which was of importance to Colet and Erasmus: either Christ foreknew the events surrounding his death and resurrection (in which case an emotional response was pointless), or the existence of an emotional reaction

meant that Christ did not know with certainty what was to happen to him and therefore asked God to change the course of events. The problem which Colet and Erasmus saw in this argument was that agreeing with the latter view went against theological tradition which accepted that God foreknew all events, as did Christ. On the one hand Christ was made man, but he was still God's son and, as such, God made flesh. Surely therefore, foreknowledge would render emotion obsolete? Erasmus and Colet debated this because they saw a problematic question arising from it: if it were conceded that the emotional side in Christ triumphed, might it not be argued that he had no foreknowledge of events and that he was only a man?

Erasmus' answer is to take Christ's suffering as a 'necessary example' given deliberately by God to mankind. Erasmus does not deny foreknowledge of imminent death on Christ's part but insists that He could still have had a 'human' response. However, Erasmus' answer still does not evade the logical problem outlined above. Colet, meanwhile, argues that the spiritual side of Christ would have been uppermost, where Christ suffers "not in his human but in his divine personage, feeling not a passionate, affective remorse rooted in the recognition and fear of death", but rather a "divine sadness resulting from foresight of his betrayal by sinful men"<sup>29</sup>. Colet attempts to resolve the paradox; Erasmus insists upon it in the sort of argument which came to typify his conception of Christianity - that is, his stressing of anthropomorphism (Christ as the ideal of humanity to which all men must strive), even where that interpretation had to rest upon apparent logical contradiction.

## Erasmus in Italy

While in England, Erasmus decided to learn Greek and to this end, when he returned to Paris in 1500, he began to study. He wished to use the language in Biblical exegesis, a method of interpretation with which he became particularly enthused after his discovery (in 1504) of Valla's *Notes on the New Testament* at the Abbey au Parc, Louvain<sup>30</sup> Erasmus came to believe that accuracy of interpretation of the New Testament should be founded upon analyses of the Greek texts, not upon the Vulgate. He wrote:

I would prefer to see the original with my own eyes rather than through someone else's, and further, the ancient exegetes, granted that they have said a great deal, left much for later interpreters to explain. Is it not true that in order to understand their interpretations, at least an average knowledge of languages is required? And finally, when you come upon old texts in various languages that are corrupt... what will you do?<sup>31</sup>

In order that he might further his knowledge of Greek, but also to study for a doctorate in theology, Erasmus went to Italy. Here was Erasmus, travelling to the major centre of humanism, visiting Italy's most illustrious cities, yet he gave no impression in his subsequent descriptions of his travels that he was at all interested in Italian culture (with regard to art, architecture, civic and social life). Furthermore, while in Florence, Erasmus made few acquaintances, an episode which reveals his somewhat aloof nature. Instead,

he translated more Lucian, and grumbled about his lot. It was a principle with him to refuse to learn or even to recognise vernacular languages. Thus he found himself cut off from intercourse in a society proud of its Tuscan speech. "You speak to a deaf man," he said to Rucellai, who pressed his Italian upon him, and in Italian as in English, he remained dumb to the end.<sup>32</sup>

Erasmus would appear to have been something of a cultural elitist (but based upon a limited



concept of 'culture' - the intellectual, literary world of letters); many of his attitudes, particularly concerning the vernacular, tend to be quite insular.

It was in an effort to better his Greek that Erasmus wrote to the Venetian printer Aldus Manutius who ran a "New Academy" in his residence. Admission to this 'academy' was conditional upon being able to speak Greek, or upon being willing to learn it. While staying with Aldus, Erasmus undertook editorial work<sup>33</sup> and completed a new, much expanded version of his *Adagia* (first published in 1500) which the Aldine press published in 1508.

Erasmus' trip to Italy began with him as an unknown and ended with the beginnings of his fame assured. Thereafter, he would make return journeys to England, spend four years in Louvain and would (from 1522 on) spend much time in Basel. The publication of certain works, in addition to the *Adagia*, secured his reputation and popularity: the *Encomium Moriae* (*Praise of Folly*, 1511), the *Enchiridion militis christiani* (1503), *De ratione studii* (1511), the translation of the New Testament (1516) and the *De copia* (1512). His most popular work apart from the *Praise of Folly* was probably the *Colloquies* (1518ff).

Erasmus' educational works will be referred to in more detail in Chapter 5 while his attitude to women as portrayed in the *Praise of Folly* will be discussed in Chapter 4 (which deals with Vives' educational programme for women). The remainder of this chapter will examine Erasmus' work and letters as they highlight certain aspects of his thought and character. Underpinning his ecclesiastical and social satires (most notably the *Encomium*) is a striking political naivety, while his work on Biblical exegesis reveals a bias against the Jewish people rather than, as Erasmus himself would have it, an argument against acceptance of Mosaic law.

## Erasmus: a reappraisal

To the ancient and traditional social criticism and satire Erasmus imparted a high literary polish, and that is about all. His partial abandonment of the hierarchical framework on which that criticism had been hung, though probably not altogether conscious, is interesting; but it leaves his own efforts incoherent and invertebrate, lacking in the structural form which that framework provided for the writings of his predecessors. *The Praise of Folly*, *The Complaint of Peace*, and the long satirical adages are inadequate as social criticism because they point to the sickness of early sixteenth century Christendom but scarcely ever penetrate inward to discover the roots of the disease. Therefore their prescriptions, in the rare instances when anything so specific is suggested, are mere analgesics... [not] remedies.<sup>34</sup>

There can be no doubt whatsoever that Erasmus achieved huge popularity and acclaim for his Christian humanism, not just in retrospect but during his lifetime. Erasmus stated that he was not "in the least moved by the glitter of fame"<sup>35</sup> but it is in this same letter that he writes, as we have seen, that he has "won the approval of those men who were most approved, the praise of those most praised."<sup>36</sup> Certainly his work was popular, perhaps due to delight in his polished literary style. Whatever the explanation, those who read his books during his lifetime obviously applauded them and learned from their content, though this does not negate the argument that there are fundamental problems associated with Erasmus' work, aspects of which were criticised while he was alive: for example, the quality of the translation in his first edition of the New Testament, for which Erasmus blamed his junior collaborator Johann Reuchlin, and the quality of his arguments and his unwillingness to express them outright (for instance during the Lutheran affair). He tended to pour scorn on his critics, even upon those who had been unconditional admirers, but who perhaps, like

Vives, developed their own views and ventured to present another philosophical stance from that which Erasmus adopted.

Despite his undoubted appeal to renaissance readers, there are aspects of Erasmus' work which invite reappraisal. At its most extreme such reappraisal leads to assertions which have a degree of truth but which do not take enough cognizance of the renaissance context in which Erasmus wrote (the different aesthetic standards from those favoured today, or the different expectations of what would be termed 'entertaining'). Such an assertion is made by G.R. Elton who writes that Erasmus' reputation rests upon "the sententious and unreadable *Adagia*, a collection of common sayings with commentaries of topical interest, or the flat and tedious piety of his ubiquitous *Enchiridion*..."<sup>37</sup>. Erasmus' continuing fame also rests upon the vast amount of extant letters which are often anything but "sententious and unreadable". Some of the aspects to be reappraised perhaps depend upon the quality of Erasmus' intellectual endeavours, as well as upon the highly moralistic vision of Christian faith which he had and which suffused his work. In his analyses of society and Christian belief,

[t]he spirit of Erasmus was... of the type which moves freely only amidst ideas capable of easy verification and clear statement; mostly of a concrete order, of direct human interest, of definite applicability to life and action... [We] must describe him as conspicuously deficient in all that concerns philosophical speculation, and mental analysis that passes below the surface of thought or morals.<sup>38</sup>

Erasmus was thoroughly competent in terms of Christian doctrine: his annotations of the Gospels show this. But his philosophical analysis - of Christianity, of politics, of church corruption - was imbued not with complexity but with a plodding "self-evident working morality"<sup>39</sup>. What he took from classical sources was that which he could adapt to his definition of a concrete, applicable code of morals, based upon Christian teaching. Arguably, Erasmus' spiritual analyses were "never very profound"<sup>40</sup> and while his satires



were certainly witty and at times tinged with personal anger or contempt, they tended not to show critical understanding of the socio-political context of the times, as shall now be illustrated.

### **Erasmus and political realities**

In the turbulent early sixteenth century, Erasmus was faced with the problem of reconciling the state's requirements for war with Christian teaching. Whatever the rights and wrongs (*qua* morality) of the many instances of war which arose during the Renaissance, fighting was an actuality which was not going to end. One conflagration might cease, but another was sure to follow, borne of the perceived needs of rulers for defence or acquisition of territories. Many humanists like Erasmus and Vives wrote on the inherent problems and sorrows involved in warfare. Humanists might demand peace but it was unlikely that their demands could amount to anything other than rhetoric. Erasmus did not like the overt nationalism which often accompanied bellicosity. He preferred to conceive of many peoples living in a state of Christian homogeneity, which may be one reason for his espousal of Latin as a common language (though it does not explain his scorn for the vernacular). However, his concept of social hierarchy and of politics was simplisitic, particularly his awareness of the political context which had encouraged warfare in response to the political fragmentation of Europe during Medieval and Renaissance times. Consolidation of territory was crucial. National boundaries shifted, territories were won, lost and regained and peoples began to seek national identities. Yet nowhere in his work does Erasmus give any real insights into the situations which actually led to declarations of war.

Erasmus' conception of society was clearly defined, but was an idealistic delineation which bore only superficial similarities to reality. His hierarchical notion of national and local socio-economic structures is seen in works such as the *Institutio principis Christiani* (the *Education of a Christian Prince*) and the *Querela pacis* (the *Complaint of Peace*). The Christian prince stood at the head of the nation, placed there by divine right, ready always to follow the will of God in protecting his subjects. The prince was to be intellectually, morally and ethically superior to the common 'mass' whose best interests he would have ever in mind. In his descriptions of social structure Erasmus often writes with contempt for ordinary people. He regards them as almost bestial and certainly more prone to troublesome behaviour - indeed, as being "unruly by nature"<sup>41</sup> - than were the 'learned' and the wealthy. In the *Institutio*, for example, Erasmus states that a prince must be protected from the outset "against the poison of what the common people think"<sup>42</sup>. He must avoid the "degrading opinions and interests of the common folk"<sup>43</sup>. Similarly, in the *Querela pacis*, Erasmus writes that the "common people" are "swayed by their passions like a stormy sea"<sup>44</sup>.

In coping with his naturally unruly commoners, Erasmus' prince "does not need the artificial constraints of custom, parliamentary bodies, or written constitutions" because "his powers of self-examination and his understanding of the true meaning of Christ's teachings will unerringly point the way towards the well-being of his flock."<sup>45</sup> This idealism concerning the nature of man (in terms of man's ability to control and be controlled) was obviously not borne out in reality. Of course, the idealism was partly due to the rhetorical mode Erasmus used: he meant to promote a scheme in his *Institutio* which would, theoretically, produce the ideal prince. But he did believe, as did many humanists, that this ideal was achievable, that somehow princes were naturally 'better' than others. Evil was what corrupted them, as it did everyone, but they were better equipped than most to ward it off and act for the good. And because of their position as the heads of nations the benefits accruing from their rejection of evil ways were far greater than the saving of their individual souls. Their subjects could

benefit from a peaceful realm and learn from the prince's example as a good man. Thus, at the core of Erasmus' view of human nature was the Christian message of repentance of sin and renunciation of evil. It was a moralistic concept, if an unrealistic one and it was typical of Christian humanists, including Vives.

However, war militates against the following of Christian aspirations to perform only good. Erasmus saw discord as an unavoidable factor in society due to man's flawed nature and to the presence of evil in the world. Although the inevitable outcome of discord was war, Erasmus believed that the problem could be solved by the actions of the Christian prince who could, by his very example, end dissension. This view is in sharp contrast to another sixteenth century writer's analysis: Niccolo Machiavelli understood far more about the complexities of statecraft when he wrote that a prince "who wants to maintain his rule is often forced not to be good"<sup>46</sup>. He may have to adopt cunning, deception and guile to overcome threats from 'enemies'. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli also analysed the requirements of certain types of power: the newly-won principality required a different set of governing behaviours and policies than did the constitutional principality, or that governed by an hereditary monarchy. Perhaps some would consider Machiavelli's standpoint cynical, but it was at least founded on analysis of contemporary political actualities and on recognition of the potential need for expediency. Machiavelli's prince, like Erasmus', must not inspire hatred, but Machiavelli counsels that it is better for a ruler to be feared than loved if he cannot be both.<sup>47</sup>

For Erasmus, given an hereditary monarchy, the "main hope of getting a good prince hangs on his education"<sup>48</sup>. The process of education must stress the moral and Christian aspects of learning and the prince had to be taught by men of "integrity, purity, and dignity"<sup>49</sup>. Erasmus delineates the characters of good and bad rulers by stating: "A tyrant governs by fear, deceit, and evil cunning; a king through wisdom, integrity, and goodwill."<sup>50</sup> Under



benevolent leadership a kingdom will be peaceful and stable. Erasmus remarks: "Let it be the prince's constant principle to harm nobody, to be of help to everybody... and either to tolerate such faults as there are or to put them right according to what is expedient for the common good."<sup>51</sup> Erasmus feels that if a prince is benevolent and compassionate the people will automatically grant him love, respect and loyalty. Similarly, if the prince acts with mercy towards 'miscreants' they will "turn over a new leaf"<sup>52</sup>. If the prince's entourage are all compassionate and courteous, then subjects will respect the government as a whole. This is not merely optimistic but politically naive. Erasmus does not place war amidst the complex relations of statecraft and national identity because he regards the prince as the personification of the state and gives a simplistic account of any governing body's relations with its subjects.

The central question of whether a Christian might wage war and remain a Christian was not a new one. There was ample precedent in existing literature which Erasmus read and to which he referred, especially St. Augustine who developed an argument in favour of the 'just' war. Erasmus often admitted to his abhorrence of war and in the *Institutio* writes that the "good prince will never start a war... "<sup>53</sup>. War and Christianity are also explained as incompatible in the *Querelapacis*: "Remove peace and the whole community of Christian life is destroyed."<sup>54</sup> It is, therefore, obvious to Erasmus that the Christian prince will on no account go to war and will endeavour to find peaceful alternatives to settle disputes.

However, the above quotation ("Let it be the Prince's constant principle...") betrays the fact that Erasmus was not as wholehearted a pacifist as he is generally presented as being. In the case of uprisings amongst his own people Erasmus concedes that a prince may "put them right according to what is expedient for the common good". Erasmus does not explain what he means by this but the implication is that force may be the most expedient method if all else fails. A prince may "stifle... uprising with the least possible bloodshed."<sup>55</sup> The onus is

thus placed squarely upon the people to 'behave' so that bloodshed will be avoided. But employing euphemisms for force (such as "stifle") does not make Erasmus a pacifist. Furthermore, it is all very well to state that a prince should induce his people to "observe the law by rewards, rather than be coerced by punishment"<sup>56</sup>, but Erasmus gives no concrete analysis of how a political system and its institutions can best achieve this. The veneer of humane instruction covering Erasmus' remark is stripped by the comment which immediately follows it in the *Institutio*: that servile, "bestial" men ought to be "tamed by chains and the lash"<sup>57</sup>.

Moreover, Erasmus might assert that the good prince "will never start a war" but he adds, "unless, after everything else has been tried, it cannot by any means be avoided."<sup>58</sup> This strategy, Erasmus argues, would mean that there would "hardly ever" be war and that even where a prince must fight it should be accomplished "at the lowest cost in Christian blood"<sup>59</sup>. So, while Erasmus writes that a prince should consider whether "any war can really be called just"<sup>60</sup> he implies that in certain circumstances warfare can be justified without imperilling the Christian soul. Erasmus does not explore what such circumstances might be, other than to say that they arise when all else fails. This, as José A. Fernandez points out<sup>61</sup>, is "hopelessly inadequate". Erasmus' ideas on war add up to a "balance-sheet... [which] is not a brilliant one"<sup>62</sup>. To Erasmus, the

just war could be nothing but a myth because all the doctrinal assumptions behind it, as harsh as empirical evidence clearly demonstrated, were invalidated by the reality of man's behaviour. But it is not enough to point out the obvious evil and the failure of the current remedy. A new formula must be found that will put an end to the endless and bloody anarchy so antithetical to reason and Christian ethics.<sup>63</sup>

Erasmus does not seek a remedy, asserting that warfare would only disappear when Christian man - regardless of social status - truly realises his Christianity and behaves

according to Christ's messages of peace. This concept is found in Vives' thoughts on war and although his analyses are still overly optimistic they are more complex than Erasmus'. Nevertheless, even here the weakness of the Christian humanist response to opposing war is seen. Vives' opposition to war is

to be understood with reference to man's nature and the reforming impulse that it shall receive once it follows the road pointed out by Christ. God has made it possible for man to return to his own true state. He has given fallen man the means, in the form of His son's teachings, to recover the concord that yields a safe return to a pure and nature-ordained social state. Let man first know himself and thus indeed his own limitations, the frailty of his own self. The seeds of all discord lie in his overbearing pride.<sup>64</sup>

This is still inadequate, not to say ethnocentric in its reliance on the concept that the western Christian religious ethic is superior to all others. But in appealing to such a concept, Erasmus may have been typical of a prevalent trend amongst Christian intellectuals in Renaissance Europe.

In Erasmus' *Complaint of Peace Spurned and Rejected by the Whole World* (*Querela pacis undique gentium ejectae profligataeque*), he seems to accept that a just war can exist. In this rather confusing statement he suggests: "Hardly any peace is so unjust that it is not preferable to a war, however just that may be."<sup>65</sup> He pours scorn on the popes and churchmen who wage war or who sanction war and upon Christian nations which fight each other. "What anomaly is this," Erasmus asks<sup>66</sup>, "when the cross fights the cross and Christ makes war on Christ!"

Erasmus argued in *Querela pacis* that while war is not always 'right', it is often unavoidable. "Clashes between Christians" were to be avoided by channelling man's warlike urges into conflict with "the Turks"<sup>67</sup>. This was an argument he repeated in the epistle to John Rinck, *Ultissima consultatio de bello Turcis inferendo*, in which he writes



that to offer no resistance to the Turkish 'menace' is to deliver "Christendom and Christianity into the hands of their bestial enemies"<sup>68</sup>. He continues in this epistle: "there are those who judge that the right to wage war is absolutely prohibited by Christians; *to my understanding this is too absurd to deserve refutation.*"<sup>69</sup> His previous thoughts on this subject have been misunderstood with the result that some "have calumniously (*sic*) attributed [pacifist ideas] to me because perchance I exceed myself in praise of peace..."<sup>70</sup> But, as has been demonstrated, his thoughts in defence of the 'just' war are quite plain.

Thus it seems that, while Erasmus may genuinely have detested the effects of war, he was not truly a pacifist. In this context his attitudes to the Turks gives a clue to his attitudes to other non-Christian peoples, particularly the Jews. Or, as he puts it: those same Turks "and all the real barbarian riff-raff [who] actually demand recognition for their religion..."<sup>71</sup>. It shall not be argued that in these attitudes Erasmus was unique, nor that he was especially virulent in his tone. His age abounded with beliefs which are now considered antisemitic. Even Vives, a second generation *converso*, wrote polemically against Judaism. Erasmus was simply the leading figure of the northern Renaissance to espouse such attitudes, as will now be shown.

### **Erasmus and his concept of "the whole cesspool of Jewry"<sup>72</sup>**

Many of Erasmus' comments about the Jews and Judaism are scattered throughout his work, particularly in his Biblical commentaries. In his colloquies he writes that God was displeased with the Jews because they "neglect what God desires" and that the Jews are full of "envy, pride, rapine, hate, and fraud, not to mention other vices..."<sup>73</sup>. While in the

*Encomium Moriae*, 'Folly' betrays Erasmus' bias when she states that the Jews are "by nature the most obstinate of men"<sup>74</sup>. The *Querela pacis* highlights the fighting of the "last ten years" when 'Peace' gives voice to Erasmus' view that "the cruelty of the fighting exceeds that of the Jews, of the heathen, and of wild beasts"<sup>75</sup>.

It might be argued that the accusation of antisemitism is a false one because Erasmus was, in his attitudes, merely a reflection of his times. It might also be argued that the concept of antisemitism would not have been recognised at the time. As has been described in Chapter 1, a country like Spain carried out intermittent policies of institutionalised persecution and ultimately complete expulsion or enforced conversion of Jews. Conversion, of course, did not entirely remove persecution. Ironically, the Rabbinic response to conversion (that the *converso* remained Jewish, lost to Judaism only after many generations) was paralleled by the Inquisition's response. That is, that a *converso* was still Jewish no matter how far removed from the last practising Jewish ancestor.

It can be seen, then, that in the policy adopted by the Inquisition and perhaps in the conceptions held by many people throughout Europe, there were elements of racial argument based on heredity. The fact that Jesus was Jewish was sidestepped in renaissance theology while all other *conversos* were trapped in the Inquisition's accusatory biological determinism. This reflects the change which 'antisemitism' had undergone by the sixteenth century. The concept had

transcended traditional anti-Judaism towards a growing identification of Jewishness as a biological fate and infection, both physiologically and spiritually, to be cut out of society rather than incorporated into it. This form of antisemitism may have had medieval roots but it also lay in the foundation for modern racial hatred of Jews which would also demand elimination of both perverted Jewish blood as well as retrograde Jewish ideas.<sup>76</sup>

Erasmus is usually considered to be a tolerant author and it must be conceded that he often argued explicitly for toleration. His works show little overt antisemitism, excepting perhaps his commentaries on the New Testament. Few humanists, if any, made a case for the absolute toleration of Judaism, or for unbiased treatment of Jews as the equals of Christians. Hebrew became championed during the Renaissance as being imperative for Biblical exegesis notably by Reuchlin (whom Erasmus consulted for his first translation of the New Testament). Reuchlin was of Jewish descent, but as a Christian was committed to the conversion of Jews. This typifies the views of Christians at the time. Even one of the more tolerant humanist exponents like Reuchlin did not advocate the co-existence of Jews with Christians or accept the right of the Jewish people to accept Judaism as a religion veridical for themselves.

In his Biblical commentaries, Erasmus equates Judaism (founded on the "Law of Moses") with all that is material, as opposed to Christianity which is, he claims, based on the spiritual. He accepts that "the ancient worship and ritual of the Jews are indeed the will of God", but "not the kind will, the benevolent will, the whole will. God's will made concessions to the stupidity of the Jews."<sup>77</sup> Erasmus goes on to say that if Judaism is not silenced then the message of the Gospels will not triumph; the Jewish faith, a faith of "carnal rituals"<sup>78</sup>, will militate against the voice of grace which is heard in the New Testament. (This does not demonstrate much faith in the proclamatory effect of Christianity, or in God's redeeming powers, if they can be silenced by the mere existence of any significant ideological opponent.) Furthermore, in Erasmus' thought, Jews reveal their continuing "stupidity" by adhering to the tenets which God originally gave them - unsubtle strictures, which might regulate the Jews' 'stupid' behaviour, strictures dependent upon punishment to quell their "unruly" natures. Somehow in Erasmus' theological constructs, though he never clarifies this aspect, once Christ began to teach, the intellectual capacity of 'Christians' came to the fore. The Christians' Jewish heritage does not concern him.



Erasmus becomes vitriolic on the subject of Mosaic Law, but his comments reflect the view of the Jewish faith generally held by the European Christian intelligentsia during the Renaissance. He termed Judaism a "superstition", a "perverted" faith, a "primitive" muddled "prejudice"<sup>79</sup>. His statements on Mosaic Law brought criticism from the theologians of Paris - not in defence of Judaism but in order to uphold church dogma. The theologians termed Erasmus' attacks heretical, "blaspheming the perhaps superannuated but nevertheless divine law"<sup>80</sup>. In the face of this eminent opposition Erasmus backed down. He replied that he had not actually meant criticism of Mosaic Law itself but of Jewish worship "and not even the whole worship, but only ritual sacrifice"<sup>81</sup>. Yet in a letter to Servatius Roger, Erasmus speaks of "Jewish scruples"<sup>82</sup> and of "cold Judaic rites"<sup>83</sup>. In 1523, when writing to Jean de Carondelet, he comments on the "disbelieving Jews" and their "stubborn rejection of the grace of the gospel"<sup>84</sup>. In the same year, this time in a letter to Johann von Botzheim, he writes that he could "love even a Jew, provided... he did not vomit blasphemies against Christ in my hearing."<sup>85</sup> There is ample evidence, therefore, that Erasmus did not always limit himself to 'criticism' of "ritual sacrifice" when referring to Judaism and that he personalised his distaste for Jewish belief.

But in 1517 when Erasmus had been 'slandered' by someone he considered to be a lesser man (Johann Pfefferkorn) his anger was limitless. In his tirades against Pfefferkorn he resorted to antisemitic statements at one stage calling Pfefferkorn a "Jewish scab"<sup>86</sup>. A debate between Pfefferkorn and Reuchlin had become heated. It concerned Reuchlin's publication of *De arte Cabalistica* and Erasmus had continually stressed his neutrality in the affair until Pfefferkorn called him a "runaway monk". Erasmus responded by defending Reuchlin's right to publish work on the Cabbalah, but this defence carried little conviction since when Reuchlin needed support to defend his reputation as a Hebrew scholar, Erasmus would not pass judgement on who was right in the argument, Reuchlin or Pfefferkorn. What Erasmus did was defend his own reputation against Pfefferkorn by means of

antisemitic attacks. In 1517 Erasmus wrote to Gerardus Listrius that Pfefferkorn was a "damned Jew and now a most damnable Christian... It was indeed worth his while to be dipped in the font: as a Jew in disguise he could throw peace among Christians into confusion."<sup>87</sup> In a letter to Johannes Caesarius (1517) Erasmus repeats almost *verbatim* a comment made in a letter to Jacopo Banisio (also 1517) that if Pfefferkorn "could be opened up, you would find in his bosom not one Jew but a thousand"<sup>88</sup>. To Banisio he stated that he wished Pfefferkorn were "an entire Jew - better still if the removal of his foreskin had been followed by the loss of his tongue and both hands... "<sup>89</sup>. On November 15th 1517, Erasmus was particularly virulent in his remark to Reuchlin that Pfefferkorn "[t]his half-Jew" had "done more harm to Christendom than the whole cesspool of Jewry... "<sup>90</sup>. These remarks reveal that Erasmus was not as full of Christian tolerance or rational argument against Mosaic Law as he would have the Paris theologians believe.

In his commentaries on the New Testament, Erasmus would often misrepresent passages of Scripture, either in order to stress the moral message or to stress the inferiority of Judaism. One example will suffice, although there are numerous examples from which to choose: Erasmus treatment of Matthew 12:39, which should read:

But [Christ] answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas... <sup>91</sup>

Erasmus paraphrases this as follows:

A base and perverted people, boasting that their father is God... although they more resemble those who foresook God to worship the Golden Calf, who rose up against Moses... Their father is Beelzebub, and full of his spirit, they rebel against the Spirit of God! This people shall have no heavenly sign; they are not worthy of it, for they devote themselves utterly to the earth, but there shall come a sign to them from the earth... but if even then they choose not to convert, then they shall perish.<sup>92</sup>

Now, this does not bear much resemblance to the original verse which quite simply relates that Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees who asked him for a sign, that although a sign is not necessary to belief, there has already been one referring to the resurrection of the Messiah: Jonah's sojourn in the belly of the whale. In the paraphrase Erasmus sets out what he saw as Biblical evidence against Judaism, but this does not make the "textual violence" <sup>93</sup> or the antisemitism defensible.

Erasmus regarded the Jews as part of a contemporary threat against Christianity. He feared that Hebrew studies might encourage a Judaic 'revival'. Yet his views on Judaism and the Jews are often contradictory. On the one hand he can display a patronizing belief that the Jews were part of God's plan (with respect to Judas' betrayal of Jesus) and can therefore be partly absolved of the guilt of 'murdering' Christ; on the other hand he shows a distinct tendency to vilify those of (supposed) Jewish descent when it suits him to do so (for instance, Pfefferkorn, Aleandro, Zuñiga). He also rewrote the Biblical message in his paraphrases in order to lend an anti-Jewish slant to the Scripture. This is not to say that Erasmus was a calculating antisemite; he was a product of his age and represented dominant social and religious/ideological concepts which would today be called antisemitic. He was, as Arthur A. Cohen remarks <sup>94</sup>, as "bloody-minded, obtuse, and unyielding as his age". Moreover he followed a tradition amongst Christian writers (for example St. Augustine) for deriding the Jews and their religion.

In his bilious comments on Judaism, Erasmus was no different in many ways from other authors who could be termed antisemitic. This might not excuse him, however. He may not have participated in overtly antisemitic acts against Jews but he promulgated formulaic antisemitism, utilised the word 'Jew' as an insult and probably would not have defended the rights of Jews should he ever have been called upon to do so at risk to his own security or reputation. And in his repeated attacks on Pfefferkorn his language shows him to have a real



element of contempt for the Jews. This all emphasises

the clear and irrefutable cowardice of Erasmus - genial, charming, energetic, passionate, always on the attack when he is not on the defense, but never, ever, courageous - not courageous towards his erstwhile friend [Thomas More] whom he virtually deserts during More's last terrifying years, not courageous towards Luther whom he initially supports and then repudiates, nor courageous to many and generally minor critics and friends to whom Erasmus may have once been generous but whom he chooses at other times to attack or to leave to other wolves.<sup>95</sup>

Erasmus' sustained contemptuousness towards Jews in his work and in his letters was couched in the language of an "exquisite humanist"<sup>96</sup> but ultimately he represents "one more European-Christian who imagines that his hatred of Jews, Jewish faith and practice, Jewish history and institutions, will be forgiven because God no longer cares for the Jews nor hears their prayers."<sup>97</sup> Although Arthur A. Cohen's words are harsh, they contain more than a grain of truth.

This revisionism of Erasmus' work does not remove a central reality: Erasmus was a monolithic figure in the late Renaissance. He was a successful populariser of ideas currently in vogue amongst the intelligentsia and he could display a wit which appealed to many of his readers. Although the focus of this study will now shift to the work of Vives, Erasmus' thought will be offered, where relevant, in comparison with that of Vives, whose early work was influenced by the older man. With Erasmus, Vives was to be one of the foremost contributors in Northern Europe in the field of education and psychology. It remains, therefore, to analyse Vives' thought as evinced in the following texts: the *De institutione feominae Christianae*, *De tradendis disciplinis* and *De anima et vita*. Each of these deals with the aspects of Vives' work which are of most interest to this study: the education and upbringing of women, education in general and the study of the soul. These areas will be treated of in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 respectively.

## Chapter 4: Vives' *Instruction of a Christian Woman* - the Renaissance idea of femininity

The great achievements of art and intellect that constitute the Renaissance did not prevent that age from dissolving into the fear of the unknown and persisting in the violent enforcement of orthodoxy. Indeed, it is in the Renaissance that intolerance reached its height in inquisitorial proceedings... and that fear reached its nadir in the witchcraft terror, most of whose victims were women. If no other indicator were considered at all, the brutalization of the female sex by the inquisitorial church would declare that the Renaissance was no renaissance for women.<sup>1</sup>

Against a background which was "no renaissance" for women, few renaissance authors showed much interest in the education of girls. Luis Vives, however, did delineate his concept of the education a girl should have in his works *De institutione foeminae Christianae* (*The Instruction of a Christian Woman*) and *De ratione studii puerilis* (*The Plan of Studies for Girls*). Both were published in 1523. Additionally, he writes of *The Learning of Women* in Chapter 3 of his *De officio mariti* (*The Office and Duties of a Husband*, 1528). In these texts Vives sets out the type of education, upbringing and curricular studies which a young woman should follow. As shall be seen later in this chapter the *Instruction of a Christian Woman* (hereafter referred to as the *Instruction*) offers girls a limited version of the education offered to their male peers, set amidst a general and extremely thorough scheme of training in conduct, manners and mores founded upon Christian tenets.

Underlying Vives' educational prescriptions for women were several assumptions about

femininity and 'the female' which reflected societal prejudices, stereotypes and ideals. The principal was that women needed little, if any, education and that where they were given some formal teaching it was to be restrictive, geared to the domestic existence which (socially elite) women would normally lead. Renaissance writers generally saw no requirement for the formal education of women: spinning, sewing and household management were all that girls needed to know, though basic literature might be advocated. While humanist authors such as Erasmus and Vives promoted a broad-based education for boys, they still regarded the basis of a girl's education as domestic and character-forming. Girls were to be taught nothing which might compromise their modesty or purity of thought. Vives' ideal woman was, for the most part, the renaissance ideal: chaste, modest and obedient to men.

Nonetheless, Vives' *Instruction* is less misogynistic than the attitudes held by most humanist authors. Perhaps he should be criticised for being misogynistic at all or for failing to advocate the equality of women with men. But this would be anachronistic. With the possible exception of Agrippa of Nettesheim<sup>2</sup> male humanist writers did not accept arguments for sexual equality. They followed a long historical tradition of regarding women as 'naturally' inferior to men. This tradition was assured as part of everyday reality and was enshrined in the Bible, championed by the Church Fathers and, as such, had religious, political and social force behind it. To state that Vives, or Erasmus, or any male author who worked during the sixteenth century should have spoken for sexual parity is to argue that they should have done something completely against their society's standards.

That said, the weight of religious, social and sexual tradition was extremely powerful. It is that tradition which will be explored first in order to go some way towards explaining why it was that writers like Vives, who were otherwise at the forefront of educational development during the Renaissance, found it impossible to think in any other way than that which we



would now term misogynistic. Furthermore, it will give insight into the motivation behind programmes for the education of women and demonstrate that some women of patrician families (such as Isotta Nogarola whose case will be discussed) consciously broke the mould by studying a humanistic curriculum to a level which rivalled the best educated of their male counterparts. That they usually did so at social and emotional cost underlines how significant was their achievement. Their example also highlights how curtailed the typical education proposed for girls was in comparison to the range of subjects which might have been studied.

### **Medieval and renaissance images of women**

Misogyny had always been a strong current in Western civilization, and in the Renaissance the misogynist theme, far from diminishing, flourished with the intensity that otherwise characterized the age.<sup>3</sup>

During the Renaissance concepts of female identity were linked with sexuality. Women were categorised, overtly or implicitly, in the roles of virgins, mothers or whores and often those roles defined their social and familial identities. Women were expected to conform to the ideals of virginity and motherhood, but might easily be condemned as whores where their behaviour fell short of men's expectations or where they fell victim to the sexual advances of men. Women were lauded when they conformed to the model of chastity, praised when they became 'chaste' mothers, but despised and feared where they were perceived to have displayed overt sexuality.

The renaissance "denunciation of women" was, as R. Howard Bloch states,

something of a cultural constant. Reaching back to the Old Testament and to ancient Greece and extending through classical Hellenic, Judaic, and Roman traditions all the way to the [Renaissance]... , it dominates ecclesiastical writing, letters, sermons, theological tracts, and discussions and compilations of canon law; scientific works, as part of biological, gynecological, and medical knowledge; folklore and philosophy.<sup>4</sup>

The idea that women are physically and mentally inferior to men was normative during the Renaissance. Men looked for confirmation of this 'truth' to the Old Testament, the Church Fathers and - in terms of gathering proof of female physiological weakness - to the Hippocratic corpus and to Galen. Belief in the inherent superiority of the male was pervasive in classical times, particularly in Greece. This belief did not go unchallenged, for example by female writers such as Sappho, Praxilla and Corinna. Although women writers comprised a small minority when compared to their male peers, their existence testified to the fact that in the classical world "there were clever and sophisticated women who formulated independent views..."<sup>5</sup>. However, there are no "prominent" philosophical or mathematical works by women extant from the classical period<sup>6</sup> although there were some female authorities on medical practice<sup>7</sup>. Thus, in classical scientific development, the role of women is virtually non-existent. Women were largely excluded from intellectual and practical subjects outside the arts. As in medieval and renaissance times, this situation arose because the prevailing cultural power base lay in men's control.

Male biologists, most notably Aristotle, marshalled current knowledge to 'demonstrate' the passive, weak physiology and intellect of women. Aristotle's view of women reflected biases attendant in Greek society. In his work he asserts that the female sex is a "natural deformity" of the male<sup>8</sup>. His theory of female weakness begins with his description of conception: women do not contribute 'seed' to reproduction (as do men) but an 'unconcocted' residue (the menses) which nourishes the male seed. Women are therefore regarded as having no active part in conception, but as lending nourishment and the

inanimate matter to produce the foetus. Conversely, the male produces semen which Aristotle argues provides the efficient cause and form - the life force - to the foetus. Some pre-Socratic writers such as Anaxagoras and Empedocles did advance the theory that women also provide 'seed' for conception. However, Aristotle rejects this. The Hippocratic corpus advances the argument for the existence of both male and female 'sperm'. If the 'stronger' sperm are overwhelmed during conception by "the larger quantity of the weaker sperm" a female foetus results; where the weaker sperm are overwhelmed, males result<sup>9</sup>. So although the Hippocratic author of "On the Seed" accords some active generative capacity to women the concept that females arise from 'weaker' sperm still furnishes the idea that women are physiologically of weaker 'stock'.

Aristotle's analysis of the difference between the sexes broadens from women's role in conception and pregnancy to promulgate a series of judgements on the females of all animal species. He regards female animals as less courageous, less "spirited", "softer, more mischievous,... more impulsive, and more considerate in rearing the young" than are males<sup>10</sup>. The disparity between male power and (male-defined) female inadequacy is more marked in humans. According to Aristotle, man has the "most perfected nature". Thus

woman is more compassionate than man, more tearful, and again more envious and more querulous, more given to railing and striking out. The female is more dispirited than the male, more despondent, more shameless and lying; more given to deceit, more retentive in memory, more wakeful, more shrinking, and in general more difficult to raise to action than the male, and she needs less nourishment. The male is... more ready to help and more courageous than the female...<sup>11</sup>.

Little of this, if any, seems based on systematic observation. Yet many of Aristotle's contentions about the biological, physiological and psychological differences between the sexes were accepted uncritically during the Medieval and Renaissance periods.



This acceptance was partly due to the dissemination of some of Aristotle's biological assertions in Galen's work. Galen disagreed with Aristotle about many aspects of anatomy and physiology but followed his view of women being less perfect than men. Galen thought that women, being "colder" and "moister" than men, produce "imperfect" seed during conception. With Aristotle, he was perhaps the foremost influence on medieval and renaissance authors with regard to medicine, psychology and biology who tended to accept Aristotelian and Galenic concepts of 'the female' with few revisions. Such authors' views were reinforced by appeals to biblical authorities. Writers often cited St. Paul in defence of their misogynistic statements. Moreover, they held to the position delineated in the first epistle of Peter (3:7):

Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your husbands: that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives;

While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear.

Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on apparel;

But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.<sup>12</sup>

Peter's first epistle supports the concept of women as the weaker sex; he writes of men as having a protective duty towards their wives and daughters, insofar as the women obey religio-societal rules of conduct: silence, chastity and virtue. Men owe 'their' women no courtesy or respect as human beings. The sole respect given to them is that which they earn by being models of biblical femininity and/or motherhood. Humanists, like medieval authors, followed this attitude, regarding a woman as an ideal wife only if she were humble, plain, unornamented, quietly devotional and obedient.

In Peter's first epistle (3:7), he states that husbands should give "honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel... ". This became a common renaissance term for women and from the "weaker vessel" analogy was extrapolated the argument that women had weaker intellectual powers than men. This argument was much perpetuated by scholastic and humanist writers, although in renaissance neo-Platonism female beauty was at least regarded as one 'saving grace' in that "the beauty of the female body is said to reflect the beauty of the soul, making beauty no longer an *occasio peccati* but rather a step on the ladder to divine love."<sup>13</sup> This is of little comfort to those women who do not conform to whatever male image of female 'beauty' is currently fashionable, nor does it do much to enhance the belief that women are more than faces and bodies to be appraised against stereotypes of attractiveness. Furthermore, the image of the beautiful body mirroring the beautiful soul (and thus being somehow closer to God by dint of its beauty) was not to be found in the more conservative brands of humanist and scholastic writing. Female beauty tended to be associated with temptation and with male lust rather than with ascension to divine love. Women were usually regarded by men as sources of sexual enticement, even of solicitation.

Just as the classical world had its myth of Pandora, the Christian world had its myth of Eve. Pandora was created by Zeus to wreak revenge on Prometheus because Prometheus gave men fire. Pandora, and so womankind in general, was seen as the source of 'evil', illness and toil. Similarly, medieval and renaissance writers, following the biblical creation story, saw women as the source of widespread evil in the world and, in the sense that Eve was regarded as being the cause of the expulsion from Eden, the source of toil. In addition, because Genesis has as one part of the creation myth the description of Eve being formed from Adam's rib, most scholastic and humanist authors claimed that woman was a 'lesser' piece of work than was man. Eve was an afterthought not made in God's image but made from Adam to be his companion and to be subservient to him. Few authors repudiated this, arguing that it was based on textual evidence. One who did give a different reading was

Martin Luther who declares, in his commentary on Genesis (1:27), that "woman is in no way a botched male, but rather those who accuse her of being such 'are themselves monsters... ' for decrying a creature made by God" with no less care than " 'he might have devoted to his most noble work'." <sup>14</sup>

Generations of men shaped the biblical text to fit their misogynist bias. There are actually two passages in Genesis relating Eve's creation: verses 1:27 and 2:7. It is in 2:7 that is found the story of Adam's rib being used to fashion Eve, called "woman" because she was "taken out of man" (2:23). She is created not because God wished to create her for his purpose(s), but merely to assuage Adam's loneliness. However, Genesis 1:27 states: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." <sup>15</sup> "Man" would seem to be spoken of here as a species/category, not as a term of gender. By this reading, the male and female of the species are being created at the same time and with the same status.

Scholastic (and humanist) writers did not tend to follow this interpretation, choosing instead the version which posits woman as an inferior afterthought, dependent for her existence upon Adam. This has important repercussions for, "in the misogynistic thinking of the Middle Ages there can be no distinction between the theological and the sexual. Woman is a limit case of man, and as in Platonic thought, she remains bound by the material, by flesh and lust." <sup>16</sup> Women's sexuality was firmly linked to Eve and to her temptation by the serpent. Eve's hubris and the subsequent fall from Eden became indivisible from the concept of woman's uncontrollable sexuality. Eve's disobedience to the injunction against eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge, her weakness in the face of temptation, her 'corruption' of Adam, all became centred on her sexual 'otherness'. Men regarded women as having the power to corrupt them, but at times this was little more than a convenient excuse either for their licentiousness or for fear of their own sexuality.



Of course, if Eve was subordinate to Adam as the rib story implies, it followed that all women were subordinate to men and shared Eve's guilt. They were guilty by association of gender. Resting on this interpretation, and on other biblical and scholastic authors, the humanist view did not abandon the idea of woman as being the source of the fall and of the dissemination of sin in the world. They might abandon other elements of scholastic theology, sophistry and pedagogy, but the scholastic concept of women was almost wholly adopted because it appealed to biblical and church authority for its credibility and professed veridicality. To reject completely this image would be to invite charges of heresy and to contradict some of the most important male minds in the Christian tradition. Some of these minds and the anti-feminine propaganda which they produced (no doubt in good conscience) will now be discussed.

### **Religious and secular man's concept of femininity**

Hence, how often do we, from beholding a woman, suffer a thousand evils; returning home, and entertaining an inordinate desire, and experiencing anguish for many days; yet nevertheless we are not made discreet, but when we have scarcely cured one wound we again fall into the same mischief, and are caught by the same means; and for the sake of the brief pleasure of a glance, we sustain a kind of lengthened and continual torment... <sup>17</sup>

So wrote John Chrysostom in an apt summary of the common reaction to women from the Church Fathers. Such a reaction was to prevail among 'devout' men for centuries. Chrysostom promotes the enduring myth that the male sexual urge is uncontrollable. Men, he says, spend long, tortuous days fighting the lust caused by the mere sight of a woman.

The painful 'wound' is no sooner cured than the affliction strikes again; each time the devout man leaves the safety of his home or cloister he sees a woman who inflames his desire once more. Men have to wage an unceasing battle against lust and so against sin. Rational man only gives way to sexual appetite because women tempt him. This concept of rational man *versus* sensual woman, accepted by Chrysostom, was to be regarded as truth during the Medieval and Renaissance eras.

For writers like John Chrysostom and Tertullian, women were thought to place men's souls in danger. This danger was not considered to arise from a man's lascivious stares at a woman. Rather, women are attractive to men and are a 'temptation' because of their beauty and/or sexuality. The Old and New Testaments contained all the female stereotypes (virgin, obedient wife, mother, prostitute) required to maintain the idea of women either as temptresses or as property. Following St. Paul, the Church Fathers compounded these biblical images by referring to women's sexuality and its corrupting powers. Tertullian called woman the "devil's gateway", the source of original sin and thus the cause of Christ's death. The Church Fathers were inordinately preoccupied with women's virginity - in many passages it is harped on to the exclusion of mention of male virginity. These writers did not deal with the reality of women's mind's, emotions or needs; they dealt in paradigms, particularly those which were biblical and which pertained to female sexual and marital status. These paradigms play

a very important part in the formulation of theological ideas about women. [This formulation] is closely connected with the malediction of Eve, as the wife's subordination emanates from her sin; it is also in itself a divine instruction with which man may not tamper. As such, it *remains an immovable object in the way of change, while religion maintains its authority.* <sup>18</sup>

The opposite of the female temptress is seen in the glorification of the virgin, which was to be of growing importance as the influence of Christianity spread, affecting secular customs

and laws, particularly those relating to property and marriage. It is argued, most notably by Michel Foucault, that what can be discerned is a "domestication" of misogyny which

[w]ithin this context... [would] appear to stem from the reduction of a once broader and freer model of sexuality to one of a "normality" defined by nature, a "heterosexuality of reproduction", and an increased burden placed upon the couple as an institution. Misogyny seen as domestic annoyance - complaint against petty jealousies, envy of neighbours, nagging, bragging, argument and contradiction, risks of birth, noises of the nursery, and disappointments of children - supports such a claim.<sup>19</sup>

In medieval and renaissance literature the middle road between the virgin-whore dichotomy became the figure of the nagging wife. Men were caught in domesticity, railed at by a scolding spouse whose main purpose, apart from heaping misery on her husband, was to bear children who often caused trouble for their fathers. But the 'domestic annoyance' scenario, while partly validated by popular mythologizing, neglects the reality that some men and women did love each other and that not all reactions to marriage fitted the misogynistic frame of reference. Many men did grieve for a wife or mistress who died and men, as well as women, did grieve for their dead children. However, economic necessity or social convention may often have taken the upper hand in marital and financial affairs. Emotions might therefore have had to be suppressed in the face of attendant actualities. But what is at issue is not the realities concerning individual relationships; rather, the issue is one of how women were stereotyped within normative popularist images of relationships. In medieval and renaissance literature, in both vernacular and Latin, women were generally portrayed as garrulous, empty-headed, vain, deceitful and morally corrupt because of their rapacious sexuality.

That women possessed all these faults is attested to by Erasmus in his *Praise of Folly*, a work which was extremely popular during the late Renaissance, as has been stated in the preceding chapter. Apart from the tacit misogyny in the personification of folly as a woman,



Erasmus writes that it was Folly who suggested to Nature that man should have a woman as a companion:

admittedly a stupid and foolish sort of creature but amusing and pleasant company all the same, and she could share his life, and season and sweeten his harsh nature by her folly. For Plato's apparent doubt whether to place woman in the category of rational animal or brute beast is intended to point out the remarkable folly of her sex. If ever a woman wanted to be thought wise she only succeeded in being doubly foolish... The defect is multiplied when anyone tries to lay on a veneer of virtue and deflect a character from its natural bent. As the Greek puts it, an ape is always an ape even if clad in purple; and a woman is always a woman, that is, a fool, whatever mask she wears.<sup>20</sup>

Even allowing for the satirical and humorous intent of Erasmus' words the characterisation of the innate stupidity of women is harsh. It is to be wondered how many women laughed at his descriptions of their sex because they genuinely found them amusing and how many laughed because it was expected. Erasmus reflects assumptions about female intelligence and personality which were widespread during the Renaissance. He presents a picture of men tolerating women's idiocy: "No one will deny the truth of this who considers the nonsense a man talks with a woman and the silly things he does whenever he wants to enjoy the pleasure she gives."<sup>21</sup> In other words, men have to endure certain conventional pleasantries before gaining a woman's consent to the intercourse in which he is really interested. Indeed, it might be asked, given male distaste for anything other than women's bodies, why would men consent to marry the creatures? Erasmus has the answer: it is Folly which makes marriages and Folly which keeps couples together.

Why, not many marriages would ever be made if the bridegroom made prudent enquiries about the tricks that little virgin who now seems so chaste and innocent was up to before the wedding. And once entered on, even fewer marriages would last unless most of a wife's goings-on escaped notice through the indifference or stupidity of her husband... [Folly] sees... that peace reigns in the home and their relationship continues. A husband is laughed at, called a cuckold... when he kisses away

the tears of his unfaithful wife, but how much happier it is for him to be thus deceived than to wear himself out with unremitting jealousy.<sup>22</sup>

So, women are promiscuous and will lie about their virginity to trap a man into a marriage he would not otherwise countenance. Men, on the other hand, are either beyond reproach sexually, or are expected to indulge in sexual intercourse as often as they require. Erasmus makes no mention in this passage of the man with whom the wife has supposedly been unfaithful.

But, his eye firmly on the male audience of the *Praise of Folly*, Erasmus reserves the cruelest invective for elderly women. Young women who are beautiful are accused of whorish behaviour and of using their beauty to trap men. Like many male authors, Erasmus will allow women no escape from the prison of their physical appearance, even once they are no longer considered to be sexually attractive. Folly states that it is "fun"

to see the old women who... look like corpses that seem to have risen from the dead. They still go around saying "Life is good", still on heat,... and hiring some young Phaon by paying out large sums of money. They're forever smearing their faces with make-up, always looking in the mirror, and taking tweezers to their pubic hairs, exposing their sagging breasts and trying to raise failing desire with their quavery whining voices, while they drink, dance among the girls, and scribble their little love-letters. All this raises a general laugh.<sup>23</sup>

Apparently, then, older women who still feel sexual need are as distasteful to the Erasmian male as is a bitch on heat.

Yet Erasmus' work reflects a tradition which was legitimated by the church as much as by secular institutions, and this is a tradition into which Vives' (educational) thought concerning women also falls. With the rise of European Christianity, women in the West became "entrapped by the logic of a cultural ideal" (that is, their culpability for the fall from

grace) which, once internalised, made them "always... in a state of weakness, lack, guilt, inadequacy, vulnerability."<sup>24</sup> With Marian ideology this representation of women was reinforced: the only way to reduce the state of female sinfulness by any significant margin was for a woman to remain a virgin, shut away from men's eyes. By citing Mary as the immaculate standard of femininity, Christianity attempted the impossible: the validation of the concept that childbirth could be entirely divorced from sexual intercourse and thus from sin. In practice a compromise obviously had to be reached if all souls were not to be damned. Women sinned when they allowed their husbands to have sex with them, but provided intercourse was curtailed and absolutely linked not to pleasure but to the production of children, sinfulness could be lessened. Alternatively, a woman could enter orders, confine herself to a 'cell' in the family home, or, once widowed, could refuse to remarry. (These options will be considered in the next section of this chapter.)

The Church Fathers, who were of enormous influence on medieval and renaissance authors, argued that chastity was a mental as well as a physical state. They considered that the thought of desiring someone was as sinful as the act of coition itself. Origen states that "one can commit adultery only in the heart"<sup>25</sup>, but the Fathers did not seem concerned with the logical outcome of this argument: that if the thought is as bad as deed, what is to prevent anyone from committing the 'punishable' act believing themselves to be condemned anyway? Cyprian further confuses the situation by blurring the distinction between desiring someone and being desired. To him, a virgin can, by her presence, incite desire in a man, but cannot thereafter remain a virgin. He states, addressing all virgins:

if you... enkindle the fire of hope, so that, without perhaps losing your own soul, you nevertheless ruin others... who behold you, you cannot be excused on the ground that your mind is chaste and pure... and you can no longer be numbered among maidens and virgins of Christ...<sup>26</sup>



If a woman neither wants nor encourages the lustful attentions of a man - indeed, she may not even be aware of his existence, or that he is staring at her - she is still deemed to have fallen and to be sexually culpable. In Cyprian's scheme, women cannot ever be said to be virginal. The term ceases to be a physical description of a woman who has never had penetrative sexual intercourse and becomes a description of a state of mind - and not of the woman's mind, but the minds of men who desire her. A woman's virginity is therefore not her own possession; it belongs to any man she passes in the street, or who sees her in church or in her parent's home. Cyprian effectively exonerates men from the sin of their lust while any female virgin, any woman whatever her age, is guilty because she exists. Such logic gave rise to Tertullian's argument that virginal women were to be shut away because "every public exposure of an honourable virgin is [to her] a suffering of rape"<sup>27</sup>. And it may be asked what was St. Jerome thinking of when he took misogyny so far as to suggest denying female virgins the right to see their own bodies? Jerome writes that he "wholly" disapproves of "baths for a [female] virgin of full age"<sup>28</sup>.

In a patriarchal society it was seen to be imperative that a young bride was a virgin so that no questions about the first son's legitimacy could lead to counter-claims to inheritance. But the Church Fathers were not promoting views which could be said to have inheritance or financial rights as their chief concern. There was something more insidious and damaging at work and that was a belief in the saving of men's souls at the expense of women's while preserving the prevailing socio-sexual *status quo*. The Fathers held up women's virginity to scrutiny and claimed it as a virtually impossible state to maintain, while terming male virginity *celibacy* in a conquest of male sexuality which was tied to religious ethics. It is unsurprising that with such biblical and church authority, medieval and renaissance male authors regarded misogyny as not just normative but desirable. It can be imagined just what an effect was created upon men when a woman was unwilling to accept a male-defined feminine role: a woman, for example, who did not accept illiteracy and ignorance as all she

was fit for, who decided to learn even if she had to renounce the world in order to do so. The case of 'learned women' will now be examined before looking at the work of men who believed that there was some justification for educating them.

### **Resistance through intellect: medieval and renaissance women of learning**

Stupid men, fond of abusing  
All women, without any shame,  
Not seeing you're the ones to blame  
For the very faults that you're accusing.

You strive to conquer her resistance,  
Then with solemn treachery  
Attribute to her lechery  
What was only done through your persistence.

No female reputation's sure:  
The most cautious woman in the town  
Is an ingrate if she turns you down;  
If she gives in... she's a whore.<sup>29</sup>

Few learned women had the audacity to channel their anger as directly as did the Mexican nun Juana de la Cruz in this *recondillas*. To be sure, most women were concerned simply with living and working and if they were angered by men's attitudes there was probably little they could do. For a tiny minority of women their anger could be expressed through their writing. For this they had first to gain some education and few men regarded this as necessary for females.

Women were, on the whole, dispossessed and denied much means of intellectual and social advancement. By the Renaissance, there were some women who did have recognizable

power (what Stanley Chojnaki calls, in the context of early renaissance Venice, "patrician women"<sup>30</sup>). In many cases widows had some control over their husband's estate if the eldest son was not old enough to administer affairs. Women were certainly of some economic and social importance to patrician society, usually it must be said in terms of what they brought to a marriage, by which a woman's family, or the family into which she married, could have their economic or social status enhanced. The only financial expectation a woman could have in her own right was the provision of a dowry if her family had the means to furnish one. If, once widowed, a woman remarried, her husband's family could return her dowry to her. Any children of the marriage stayed in their deceased father's house. Moreover, married women had restricted legal rights attendant with their being under the guardianship of their husbands. In the Middle Ages, in many European countries, the law

generally held that a married woman could not draw up a contract, take a loan, or take any person to court on civil matters without the consent of her husband, not only because the husband managed joint property, but also because of her very status as a woman. As Beaumanoir wrote... "The dumb, the deaf, the insane and the female cannot draw up a contract, neither alone or through a representative, since they are subservient to the authority of others."<sup>31</sup>

Women had no legal rights to share in the government of society: they could not hold public office or play any part in court and municipal institutions. Of course, this situation was underwritten by church and secular authorities' views of women as being of feeble intelligence and poor judgement. Little had changed by the time of the Renaissance.

As has been mentioned, widowhood could give a measure of release from male dominance or financial control. One other means of escape, perhaps from a father's constraints or from unwanted marriage, was the convent. This is not to argue that no woman took orders for reasons of religious vocation, though many women did regard conventual life as a type of freedom from the limits imposed upon them by men. It also offered, if they chose, the



freedom to learn. During the Renaissance, nuns "made up a great fraction of educated women, and cloistered women were disproportionately literate: it was a commonplace of advice books that young girls should not be taught to read or write unless they were destined to be nuns."<sup>32</sup> However, this situation brought its own difficulties as there was much suspicion surrounding women who decided to enter holy orders. 'Holy' women, particularly mystics, might be granted respect for their devotions but in wider society the situation remained such that girls were usually expected to marry and leave the paternal home for a husband's house rather than for a convent. Thus, where a woman did not choose solitude within conventual rules, she had little recourse to remaining free from male interference in how she chose to live her life. Any woman who was alone

was suspect. An unmarried woman was considered incapable of living alone or in the absence of masculine protection without falling into sin. Even if she were a recluse and lived a holy life, even if she retired to a room on the upper floor of the paternal house, she placed the family honor in jeopardy by the mere fact of her celibacy.<sup>33</sup>

In any case, holy orders afforded a solution only for women of high social standing whose fathers could afford to pay the dowry expected by the convent (although many convents did accept illegitimate or disabled girls without dowries).

Particularly regarded with awe were those women who had mystic visions, for example St. Clare of Assisi, St. Catherine (Benincasa), Angela of Foligno, Umiliana de' Cerchi. These women gained standing in the eyes of the church and of society by dint of their visions and their 'outstanding' holiness, despite the fact that their behavior was often regarded by their families as bizarre (before the girls' entry into their orders). It is by no coincidence that all of the above named - indeed many of the female saints of the Medieval and Renaissance periods - were either anorexic or bulimic. It is not without foundation to suggest that controlling their appetites was a means of attempting to reclaim their identities, their selves,

from male strictures which rendered them powerless. Certainly there were male religious ascetics who fasted, but female ascetics' behaviour was usually more extreme, perhaps even pathological: it can be termed anorexia or bulimia because of its symptomology and due to the permanent, wilful self-imposed state of starvation which could result in death. Starvation may also have induced altered mental conditions, the holy visions which most female saints recounted. They also, by starving themselves, adhered to the Christian social and religious goal of purity<sup>34</sup>. These women purged themselves of the little food they ate, they fasted, they denied their physical appetite. And appetite, whether 'gluttony' or sexual need, was sinful. Importantly, for women who had these visions, church representatives often believed them; men actually listened to them and accepted their religious authority once they were convinced that the nuns' apparitions were 'true'. Mysticism was arguably the only sphere of influence on which women had a significant effect during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The reality of women's lack of impact on the religious and intellectual world is heightened by the knowledge that during the Renaissance no more than a few hundred women were regarded as holy and respected as such. In comparison, some 60,000 were burned as witches. Male authority preferred to regard women with fear and suspicion, to destroy them rather than to grant them respect. In fact,

[c]ondemned witches outnumbered recognized saints and near-saints by something like a hundred to one. If the Renaissance was an age of uniquely feminine sanctity, it was much more so an age of exceptional brutality to women. So bright burn the fires that consumed the witches of Europe that they cast special light on the condition of Renaissance women.<sup>35</sup>

Whether cloistered women engaged purely in devotional activity, or whether they used the opportunities afforded for education and study, conventual enclosure allowed a woman to refuse her "destiny" as a "functionary of man and his culture" and to experience some autonomy of self "in the context of an institution recognised as valid by the society" in which they had been brought up<sup>36</sup>. Women could, moreover, impose solitude upon

themselves within their family homes and one example of a woman who did so - Isotta Nogarola - will now be appraised. It will be seen that such self-imposed exile within the home did not, in Isotta's case, liberate her entirely from domination and disparagement by men.

### **Isotta Nogarola: the case against the "sweet symbol of domestic virtue"**

[Apart from] the honeyed words of a few humanist admirers [learned women] encountered the massed opposition of the male intellectual community, which seemed to find a little learning in a woman proper and too much masculizing and abhorrent. These women's anxieties, frustration, and dissatisfaction with the structure of opportunity available to women intrude on their works - conspicuously, in the cases of Nogarola and [Laura] Cereta. They set a high standard for female academic achievement that was only in rare cases equalled before the modern era.<sup>37</sup>

Few renaissance women became celebrated for their learning. Amongst those who did were, apart from Isotta Nogarola, Laura Cereta, Cassandra Fedele, Alessandra Scala and Olympia Morata. Margaret King has written<sup>38</sup> that while twelve female humanists can be named and twenty more could be identified, only three were famous during their lifetimes. Some women from privileged families were encouraged to learn, generally by their fathers who usually tutored them: many girls who received some education, however attenuated, did not attend schools, but, in the homes of the wealthy, the tendency was also for boys to be tutored privately. For the most part, girls were not considered to require an extended



education, either from a private tutor or from a school. Women who became educated beyond minimum literacy were often believed to have placed themselves against the male ideal of women as being, in Pompeo Molmente's words, "sweet symbols of domestic virtue"<sup>39</sup>.

Women belonging to financially privileged families might be taught basic literacy skills but they were normally expected to be primarily concerned with the household, its tasks and management; they were the overseers of its efficient running. They might also contribute craft-based competencies such as spinning, weaving and needlework. Thus, much of the material of cultural and educational transmission which was contained in books was inaccessible to women because they could not read, or had insufficient reading abilities to understand texts (for instance, having knowledge of vernacular but not of Latin). Furthermore, they may have been members of a social class which did not give them freedom from manual work and trade and, as such, could have had little time for reading for pleasure or education. Additionally, women had little or no access to books in private collections, or in monastery or university libraries. Indeed, university education was not available to women who were disbarred from applying to a university supposing they had the requisite elementary education to allow them to do so. Any basic education a girl received from whatever source - father, tutor, school - had questionable applicable value with the result that girls and young women had limited incentives to learn whereas boys could be encouraged to study for entry to a guild or university. Despite all this, some women became skilled tradespeople: goldsmiths, spinners, weavers, wig makers, dyers, milliners, amongst others listed by Boileau<sup>40</sup>. Others went into service or became courtesans or prostitutes. Some courtesans became relatively well-educated and financially successful: two famous female renaissance poets, Gaspara Stampa and Veronica Franco, were courtesans. Meanwhile, prostitutes were widely thought of as a 'necessary evil', saving 'honest' women from the unbridled lust of men. But women who became educated to a level comparable to a

university graduate were scarce and their motivations for learning were probably personal rather than social or material. Perhaps they wished to learn because they enjoyed learning and the knowledge they accrued in the process; perhaps it gave them a sense of identity, rebelling against male expectations of their gender, refusing to compromise their wish to learn by giving in to their family's intention that they should marry and bear children.

The woman who became (well) educated was more often than not treated with suspicion, derision, or both. A sixteenth-century Italian doctor wrote, typifying male opinion, that it was "a miracle if a woman wishing to overcome her sex and in giving herself to learning and languages, does not stain her soul with vice and filthy abominations."<sup>41</sup> If a woman chose to learn rather than be satisfied with the rudimentary education granted her by male opinion, she challenged male control over her and ultimately this challenge could be construed as extending to the father who may have educated her. If she could think for herself she had no need of a man telling her what to do or what opinions it would be fitting for her to hold. She might be less likely to obey a man's instructions or agree with his assertions. On the whole, the explicit assumption amongst those who considered women's education at all, was that it placed female chastity, virtue and spirituality in danger if that education exceeded limited boundaries. If, like Isotta Nogarola, a woman demonstrated her intelligence by becoming educated, men were apt to state that she was some sort of third sex, having vanquished her femininity and become unwomanly. Men stereotyped the perfect woman as being beautiful, decorous, devout and silently stupid. Alongside this stereotyping, they infantilised and overtly attempted to control women.

Isotta Nogarola was one of Margaret King's three famous renaissance (humanist) women. The other Nogarola daughters, Angela and Ginevra were also highly educated, but Isotta was the one who was most recognised for her intellectual achievement. The sisters were tutored by Martino Rizzoni who had been a pupil of Guarino<sup>42</sup>. Isotta concentrated on her

studies, decided against marriage, and in 1441, when she was twenty-three, opted for what amounted to internal exile within her own home in Verona. She remained self-confined in what Matteo Bosso called her "book-lined cell"<sup>43</sup>, a term which has obvious religious overtones. Isotta remained a virgin, something which was praised by contemporaries such as Paolo Maffei. She seemed to accept the 'need', the societal expectation of her, to remain chaste and to be seen to be spiritually as well as sexually above reproach as an antidote to what might be levelled against her as a learned woman. Isotta chose not to join holy orders but to create her own cloister in the family house. In fact, her avowed chastity did not save her from slander (as shall be explained), though she continued her 'retreat' even to the extent of renouncing secular humanism in favour of the study of sacred works.

But Isotta was at best patronised (by male humanists), at worst maligned (by Niccolò Barbo). In terms of the former, the respected humanist author Lauro Quirini wrote to Isotta at the request of her brother. Leonardo Nogarola asked Quirini for guidance for his sister regarding a plan of advanced humanist studies. Accordingly, Quirini advises Isotta to study Aristotle, Boethius, Cicero and Thomas Aquinas. He tells her to concentrate on the subject areas of moral and natural philosophy, mathematics and metaphysics. However, he states that her greatest triumph, that for which she deserves "the highest praises", is that in becoming learned she has "overcome" her "own nature"<sup>44</sup>. Furthermore, in his letter, Quirini refers to Isotta as "venerable virgin"<sup>45</sup>. This is limiting in that it reinforces the common stereotype, but at least Quirini does advise a rigorous course of study for Isotta.

In contrast, Niccolò Barbo's vicious attack on Isotta went far beyond the application of stereotypes. In 1438 he produced an anonymous pamphlet accusing her of promiscuity and incest. He writes that

before [Isotta] had made her body generally available for promiscuous intercourse, she had first permitted, and indeed



even earnestly desired that the seal of her virginity be broken by none other than her brother, so that by this tie she might be more tightly bound to him. Alas for God... when she, who sets herself no limit to this filthy lust, dares to engage so deeply in the finest literary studies.<sup>46</sup>

Barbo portrays Isotta as both an affront to society and to God. In this libel, her sexuality is lied about and said to be depraved in an effort to attack her because her intellectual ability and reputation as a learned woman was accepted. To her accuser, Isotta offends God by her supposed wantonness and sin, but the real offence is against the man, Barbo, because Isotta dares to be an intelligent woman. Actually, it would seem that Isotta's chastity was in no doubt. That it mattered at all attests to the difficulties experienced by educated women in the face of men who felt threatened by both their intelligence and their sexuality.

Isotta retired from the world in order to spend her life as she wished. The pursuit of her studies had become increasingly difficult due to pressures outwith her home and the greater the acclaim for her learning, the more the detractors circled. Guarino praised her to Jacopo Foscari but would not answer the letters she wrote directly to him. To have a personal reply from Guarino would have meant a great deal to Isotta. In writing to him she asks Guarino not to hold against her the 'fact' that, in writing, she has "transgressed those rules of silence especially imposed on women"<sup>47</sup>. She would write to him again when he failed to reply to her original letter, stating: "'You have treated me wretchedly, and have shown as little consideration for me as if I had never been born'... Even if I am most deserving of this outrage, it is unworthy of you to inflict it. What have I done to be thus despised by you, revered Guarino?"<sup>48</sup>

Guarino did eventually reply, but in his letter he resorts to stereotypes: he stresses to Isotta the need for "feminine" emotions to counter the masculinizing effects of study. He tells her: "your conscience itself and your memory of good deeds should make you joyful, gay,

radiant, magnanimous, and constant... so that you may laugh at whatever may occur... "49. Guarino appears to be an example of the many men who, in Isotta's words, consider "learning in women a poison and a public pest."<sup>50</sup>

Turning to Isotta's work, perhaps the most enduring example is the disputation between herself and Ludovico Foscarini (the series of letters collectively titled *Of the Equal or Unequal Sin of Adam and Eve*). In the philosophic dispute, Isotta argues the unfairness of blaming Eve for the Fall to the exclusion of any regard for Adam's part in the drama. Ludovico argues, however, that Eve's sin was greater as it was she who was tempted to eat the apple from the tree of knowledge. He reasons that this was the fitting conclusion to reach, given the evidence: God gave Eve a harsher punishment than he gave Adam; Eve, in eating the apple, believed she was more like God; Eve was the cause of Adam's sin. In his submissions concerning Eve's guilt, Foscarini tends to rest his case on plain assertion: Eve is inconstant (being a woman) and inconstancy is a sin. Eve had to take the blame for Adam's sin because she causes it. Eve, being female, is naturally inferior to Adam, so her action in defiance of God "more greatly departed from the mean"<sup>51</sup> and is therefore more sinful than Adam's defiance. Ludovico's argument is pedantic and mostly unoriginal, nor does it show particular logical rigour. For example, concerning Eve's inferiority, if her inferiority is natural (that is, tied to and arising from her gender,) it is God-given and derived from his purpose: he made her that way. Given this, Eve cannot help being inferior and Ludovico is holding her accountable for God's intent. Nogarola grasps this point and uses it in defence of Eve<sup>52</sup>. She supports her contentions with textual evidence from Genesis reasoning, with some quality, that although Eve was misguided in eating the forbidden fruit she did not break God's commandment: Adam did, because it was he who was explicitly ordered not to do so. Isotta writes that God "esteemed the man more highly than the woman"<sup>53</sup> and accordingly directed his demand for obedience at Adam. Genesis 2:17 explicitly states that God, having put "the man" in the garden of Eden, told Adam he could

"freely eat" of every tree except "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil... : for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."<sup>54</sup> At this stage, Eve had not been created. She will hear of God's directive to Adam from the serpent who assures her that should she eat from this tree she will not die (Genesis 3:4,5) for "God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."<sup>55</sup> The metaphorical aspects of the creation myth are not a factor in the Nogarola-Foscarini debate, but this notwithstanding, it can be seen that Ludovico shapes the meaning of the text to suit his purposes, something which Isotta avoids.

Isotta also uses Ludovico's arguments of feminine inconstancy and lack of intellect against him. Nogarola argues that if Eve was unintelligent then she could not really defend herself against the serpent's sophistry; Adam, being more intelligent, could. Being weak, Eve was inclined to indulge in pleasure and so eats the fruit (though Genesis 3:6 states that Eve saw that this fruit was necessary to "make one wise"). If this is so, then it is the reason why she disobeyed God, not because she desired to be God-like. Isotta emphasises that Genesis does not actually say that Eve believed herself to be more like God than did Adam. But Isotta clinches the argument by remarking that either Adam had free will (in which case he could have chosen not to eat the forbidden fruit and thus Eve could not be held responsible for Adam's disobedience), or he did not (in which case it was part of God's plan that Adam ate the fruit and therefore he did not sin at all). Ludovico concedes this, though he concedes nothing else save that he grants that Isotta has a "brilliant mind"<sup>56</sup>.

Isotta's example demonstrates what renaissance women could achieve in terms of education. It also shows the price they could pay and highlights the rarity of that achievement. Isotta was praised less for her learning and for the quality of her intellect (as evidenced in the Foscarini debate) than for her status as a *chaste* learned woman. Isotta Nogarola stands as a paradigm of humanist learning, regardless of gender, but the attacks on her sexual



reputation attest that certain men were unwilling to tolerate the existence of an educated woman if her abilities proved equal to their own.

The discussion in this chapter so far - of Isotta, of learned women and of prevailing male opinions about them - has been offered to indicate the attitudes which governed society at the time Vives wrote his educational works for women. It has to be granted that his courses of study and prescriptions for feminine conduct contain much which, by modern standards, is detrimental to claims for female equality. Vives relies upon the normative socio-religious exemplar of the chaste, deferential woman whose place is in her father's/husband's home. However, in its consideration of Vives' work and in its comparison of this work with the suggestions made by other humanists for the education of women, the remainder of this chapter will argue that Vives was less misogynistic than many of his precursors or contemporaries. But it shall also be argued that his course of education for women was still restrictive and in no way matched the type of study which someone like Isotta Nogarola appropriated for herself.

### **The education of a 'Christian' woman**

[Vives'] restrictions on women's writing are, once again, a function of [his] purpose in providing them with any instruction at all. When asked what women should study he replied: "I have tolde you. The study of wysedome: the whiche dothe enstruct their maners... and teacheth them the waye of good and holy lyfe. As for eloquence I have no great care, nor a woman nedeth it nat: but she nedeth goodnes and wysedom."<sup>57</sup>

In her essay *Some Sad Sentence: Vives' "Instruction of a Christian Woman"*<sup>58</sup>, Valerie Wayne writes critically of Vives' educational prescriptions for women. She states that the

education for which he argued was "restrictive" in comparison with programmes of education offered to young men and that it emphasises stereotypical feminine virtues above any intellectual abilities which a woman might possess<sup>59</sup>. Vives adheres to the traditional concept of femininity; like many humanists who advocated eloquence as a central aspect of a man's education, Vives' woman was to be silent, devout and virtuous. Her learning was to instruct her in wisdom and Christian duty and it was to inculcate in her those graces most highly prized by her male peers.

Vives wrote the *Instruction* in 1523, dedicating it to Catherine of Aragon. It was the first of his significant educational works and in its preface he mentions the neglect of women's 'instruction' by male writers. Xenophon and Aristotle give "rules of housekeeping"<sup>60</sup>, while Cyprian, Jerome, Ambrose and Augustine "have entreated of Maids and Widows, but in such wise, that they appear rather to exhort than to counsel them unto some kind of living" while they neglect "to instruct and teach them"<sup>61</sup>. Vives complains that the Church Fathers confine themselves to speaking in praise of (women's) chastity and his complaints in general might lead us to expect that he will spend less time in the *Instruction* on telling women how to live virtuously and more time on the education of their minds. However, in the preface he sets his tone broadly in line with current thought: a woman "hath no charge to see to, but her honesty and chastity."<sup>62</sup> He proceeds to castigate those (men) who "go about to perish that one treasure of women"<sup>63</sup>, that is, her virginity. In so doing Vives regards men not just as the despoilers of women but as their protectors: women are helpless and men must safeguard all women by seeing to it that they (the men) do nothing sexually to compromise female honour.

Why, then, 'instruct' women at all except in ways to protect their chastity? Firstly, it should be remembered that humanist education had as one of its aims the formation of character: a

man should be virtuous at the end of his studies. It was perceived to be even more important that a woman should be virtuous as her virtue was the protector of her virginity and reputation. Vives regarded education as having a significant role in intervention to enhance female morality and, following this, female sexual purity. It might be thought that his educational programme was no better in terms of its seeking to control women and confine them to male-defined domestic and sexual functionalism than those courses of learning delineated for women by other humanists. Given what has been written so far in this chapter about the trenchant and retributive misogyny which permeated medieval and renaissance society, it may be contended that Vives could not be expected to adopt a 'feminist' approach to the education of women, that he would argue for their education only with respect to what he (as part of renaissance culture) would have defined as social norms: Christian morality, male superiority and female subordination in domestic and sexual matters. It is unsurprising that his discussion of female education should present us with the model of renaissance woman as specified by the socio-economic and cultural patriciate to which he belonged: voiceless, subjugated, weak and largely without productive economic or political power. Vives saw what power a woman has as being over her children and her servants.

And yet, although he spends an inordinate amount of time in the *Instruction* outlining ideals of female conduct, Vives does give details about what subjects girls and women should be taught. The *Instruction* was not intended simply as an outline of studies; it was meant as a comprehensive guide to child-rearing and emphasises moral training as an integral part of the process. Within this overall scheme Vives accords women the capacity for intellect rather than accepting them as being innately ineducable. For him, a girl could be taught a course of studies similar in many respects to that which a boy might follow, provided her upbringing inculcated morality and Christian ethics while reinforcing what was expected of her given her gender. Some humanists, for instance Leonardo Bruni and Lodovico Dolce,



afford women an education comprising the reading of a limited selection of classical authors. However, the range of studies they advocate is very restricted. Dolce concludes, perhaps for rhetorical purposes, that women are as intelligent as men, but he presents an account of women as being, in effect, incapable of learning. In his *Dialogo della institution delle donne*, Dolce writes that "fear and shame" are the "foundation and the base of the whole structure of [female] virtue"<sup>64</sup>. Women might have intellects because they are human beings, but their feeble natures render this intellect as good as useless. Thus, "Dolce's woman has virtue or value only as the property of man. She must know nothing that would allow her to acquire a human character [of her own]."<sup>65</sup>

By contrast, Vives' woman will be allowed to acquire knowledge - albeit knowledge which is given to her for her assimilation by a man who permits her to read those authors who will enlighten her and reduce her ignorance, but not at the expense of her modesty and decency. Before formal education begins, Vives expects the child's mother to bring her up and he has a great deal to say on the importance of the girl's relationship with, and nurturing by, her mother. Just as he is typical of a variety of renaissance attitudes which restrict women's intellectual and sexual individuality, Vives also tends to write about women - particularly about their roles as mothers - in a romanticised way. He begins the *Instruction* by citing Quintilian in support of the contention that education starts at birth, and advocates that the mother breast feed her baby, writing that this is a stage which is vital to bonding. By breast feeding, "the love shall be more between the mother and the daughter.. And the mother may more truly reckon her daughter as her own... whom she hath nourished..."<sup>66</sup> In this image of motherhood, part common sense, part idealism, is the concept that the child is gaining more than nourishment and love at the breast. Vives declares that the baby gains the "conditions and dispositions"<sup>67</sup> of its mother or nurse-maid, and that whatever is learned at this early stage, "in rude and ignorant age", it will "ever labour to counterfeit and follow"<sup>68</sup>. The mother's influence is to continue once the child is in infancy. Once weaned, Vives

advises, "let all [the girl's] play... be with maids of her own age, and within the presence rather of her mother... that may rule and measure the plays and pastimes of her mind, and set them to honesty and virtue."<sup>69</sup> The importance of play, directed by the mother, is stressed. The child is to be encouraged to have fun but the pastimes must be regulated to insure against negative influences. Once more, honesty and virtue are at the core of the directive and are central to the desired outcomes of the early training. At an age when the infant "cannot yet discern good from bad, they should be taught no evil"<sup>70</sup>. Obviously, concepts of 'bad' and 'evil' are normative and for a Christian renaissance woman or man evil was a prevailing reality which imperilled the soul, a threat to even the youngest child. Moral training was one means by which evil might be countered. That Vives should emphasise this for girls, as he did for boys, is not unusual.

However, Vives goes further. He states that "all mankind" is to be kept away from her [the infant]" and that she is not to "learn to delight among men"<sup>71</sup>. It is not clear from the English translation of the *Instruction* whether "men" is used to denote people in general (that is, the recommendation that the child have contact only with her family), or whether it denotes men specifically. Certainly the warning that the young girl should not "learn to delight" in the company of men implies that she may delight in the company of women. Vives uses the term "learn" and gives the impression that, if left to herself, the girl will naturally incline towards male companionship with the consequence of possible sexual attraction. He embroiders his theme by reinforcing common renaissance images of what constitutes a 'modest' woman, counselling:

Let the maid learn none uncleanly words, or wanton, or uncomely gesture and moving of the body, no not so much as when she is yet ignorant what she doth, and innocent; for she shall do the same, when she is grown bigger and of more discretion, and it chanceth unto many, that what thing soever they have been accustomed in before, they do the same afterward at unawares and unadvisedly.<sup>72</sup>

Vives is here dealing explicitly with socialization. The child must learn what society expects of it in terms of its behaviour, along with what is acceptable and unacceptable to adults. The girl must be taught how to fit in with male specifications of femininity.

Vives assumes that while childhood is a time of innocence, it is potentially a time of corruption of the child (by adults either overtly or due to absence of direction). Such corruption has devastating results for children who will have learnt the 'evil' ways of adults before they can discriminate between good and bad. The onus is therefore upon adults to protect children from the bad and teach them right from wrong. Vives accepts a concept of maturation which regards it as being difficult to reject attitudes and behaviours learned indiscriminately when young. He emphasises the control and training of a young child for her own good, for her protection, adopting a philosophical paternalism which he does not question. And he assents to the inculcation of the child into prevailing socio-religious mores, thus placing huge importance on a girl's chastity and upon restriction of her personal freedom, even upon freedom of physical movement as has been seen from his advice that a girl should learn no "uncomely gesture and moving of the body". But who decides what is "uncomely"? Just as a girl's thoughts were supposed to be imprisoned by the silence imposed as 'seemly' upon her, so her movements were to be restrained. In effect, each girl, each woman, was to be her own jailer and the onus is upon her to ensure that men do not find her provocative. Thus the Church Fathers' thoughts about women's culpability for provoking desire in men is still of influence upon a 'moderate' misogynist such as Vives. There is a tension in the *Instruction* which defines women as being corrupted by men, but which specifies that women must conform to notions of 'comeliness' coupled with sexual restraint, indeed sexual negation.

Vives next turns his attention in the *Instruction* to learning. He "appoint[s] no time to begin" leaving this to the "discretion of the fathers and mothers"<sup>73</sup> but states that once the girl is "of



age able to learn anything" she is to "begin with that, which pertaineth unto the ornament of her soul, and the keeping and ordering of an house"<sup>74</sup>. Undoubtedly the principal social roles assigned to women, at least to those in the more affluent social strata, are maternal and domestic. As we have seen, the over-riding reason for formal marriage arrangement was the "production, preservation, and transmission of property"<sup>75</sup> and the attempt to safeguard the legitimacy of children as part of the lineage of inheritance. Vives therefore accepts that women have importance above all else as mothers and as the facilitators of a well-run household, though he does attend to the needs of girls to be formally educated to some extent.

In contrast, an example of the low expectations in respect of the education of women is found in a passage from Leon Battista Alberti's *I libri della Famiglia*. The passage indicates the levels of literacy amongst the Alberti women. *I libri della Famiglia* describes most aspects of the daily life of the Alberti family in fifteenth-century Italy, allowing for possible exaggeration and artistic licence. In Book 3, *Economicus*, Giannozzo and Lionardo discourse upon the status of women and their place in the household. Giannozzo reminisces about the training he gave his young wife immediately after their marriage. He took her round her new home and slowly and simply explained her duties. He remarks that he told her he wanted none of his "household treasures" or "precious things" to be hidden from her, excepting this proviso:

Only my books and records and those of my ancestors did I determine to keep well sealed... *These my wife not only could not read, she could not even lay hands on them...* I also ordered her, if she ever came across writing of mine, to give it over to my keeping at once. To take away any taste she might have for looking at my notes or prying into my private affairs, I often used to express my disapproval of bold and forward females who try to hard to know about things outside the house...<sup>76</sup>

Alberti does not explain how it might be that a woman who could not read would gain

information from her husband's written effects.

The Alberti woman, furthermore, is not just to be denied access to books, but to verbal expression and to learning by asking "a lot of questions". As Giannozzo puts it, women who ask questions gain the reputation of being "irresponsible featherbrain[s]" and, besides, everyone knows that talking too much "has ever been the habit and sign of a silly fool"<sup>77</sup> especially when the chatterer is female. When his wife is "too quick to answer" a question asked of her by Giannozzo during her initial training, he reprimands her and is pleased when she responds by lowering her eyes. He takes this as a sign that she "would, in time, become more... careful of her words, more mature, more deliberate. After a little while, with humble and modest slowness, she lifted up her eyes to me and without speaking, smiled."<sup>78</sup> Alberti presents us with the image of a young woman who is being house-trained, much as a dog would be. She will be praised when she does as she is told and humiliated into subjugation when she displeases her handler. She is to undergo her humiliations with good temper and realise that she deserves to be 'put down' in this manner for her disobedience.

By contrast, Vives accords women intellectual status beyond such a rudimentary training programme. He admits that a girl should be taught domestic skills but he states: "let her both learn her book, and beside that, to handle wool and flax, which are two crafts yet left of that old innocent world, both profitable and keepers of temperance, which thing specially a woman ought to have in price."<sup>79</sup> Obviously Vives links spinning and weaving to the idyll of (wo)man before the fall, a common evocation in renaissance thought, as is the argument that women should be (emotionally) temperate. He underlines the importance of girls learning to read because reading is a discipline which will help them to order and control their "somewhat unstable"<sup>80</sup> thoughts. However, he advocates that a girl should also "learn cookery" so that

she may learn to dress meat for her father and mother, and brethren, while she is a maid: and for her husband and children, when she is a wife... : when she doth not lay all the labour upon the servants, but herself prepare such things as shall be more pleasant unto her father, mother, brethren and husband, and children... Not let no body loathe the name of the kitchen: namely being a thing very necessary, without the which neither sick folks can amend nor whole folks live.<sup>81</sup>

Vives sees the domestic role as being part of family life rather than as solely being carried out by women in deference to men. Again, it is perhaps unfair to criticise him unduly for his suggestions when in the late twentieth century the burden of domestic work is still disproportionately carried out by women. Vives' advice on the education of girls gives them a positive capacity in the family, albeit in a manner which patronises them when it praises their domestic skills. This aspect of the *Instruction* does not compare unfavourably with Alberti's narrow and dehumanising concept of how women should be treated or with, for instance, the education described by Erasmus in his *Institutioni matrimonii Christiani* in which he writes that a woman is "not only her husband's political subordinate but also his natural inferior."<sup>82</sup>

Erasmus asserts that a woman must adjust to the temperament of her husband and tolerate mistreatment advising: "Remember to suffer patiently a misfortune that you brought upon yourself. If it is not your fault, tolerate it nonetheless, for this pleases the Lord for reasons that are hidden from you."<sup>83</sup> In much the same way as the Alberti women have to suffer their husbands' chastisement Erasmus' code of conduct for women warns them to put up with their husbands' training of them and with his punishment for real or imagined errors. Erasmus goes further: if the woman disobeys her husband she displeases God (who apparently wishes women to be chastised by their husbands). His suggestions concerning a girl's education allow for her to be taught Greek and Latin letters or, where she is destined for manual work, she may be taught the vernacular. He does not state who the teacher is to be or what proficiency a girl should display in her studies. In matters of faith and morals a



woman is to be educated by her husband. Constance Jordan comments that what is "extraordinary" about Erasmus' educational programme for girls is

the assumption that underlies it. Despite his... claims concerning the spiritual equality of women, Erasmus sees that their intelligence is inherently defective. In fact, he likens the product of a woman's mind, if not shaped by masculine instruction, to the menses. Only if her thought are "fertilized" by the wit of her husband can she bring forth sound and well-formed "children": "for just as in generation a woman does not produce anything perfect without intercourse with a healthy man... so also if a husband does not take care to cultivate his wife's spirit."<sup>84</sup>

Vives does not take such a damning view. He recognises that while a girl's, or for that matter a boy's, aptitude for learning may not be great, "they that be dull are not to be discouraged"<sup>85</sup>. He does acknowledge that "learned women be suspected of many: as who saith, the subtlety of learning should be a nourishment for the maliciousness of their nature."<sup>86</sup>

Vives perceives education as having a beneficial effect on a person's character, whether male or female, and his programme of studies is founded on the humanist archetype of living 'well'. For both boys and girls this will entail being kept from licentious literature and from immoral habits. Education can teach the "precepts of virtue"<sup>87</sup> which will permit the individual, in good conscience, to turn from wickedness. Thus, Vives gives the ancient world as an example of the benefits of learning where "we shall find no learned woman that ever was ill, where I could bring forth an hundred good"<sup>88</sup>. He cites Cassandra, Paula (the wife of Seneca), Argentaria Polla ("wife unto the poet Lucan, which after her husband's death, corrected his books, and it is said that she helped him with the making.. "<sup>89</sup>) and mentions St. Jerome's praise of holy women (Laeta, Marcella, Fabiola <sup>90</sup>). From his own time Vives cites Thomas More's daughters and the "four daughters of Queen Isabel"<sup>91</sup> He concludes that "the study of learning is such a thing that it occupieth one's mind wholly and

lifteth it up into the knowledge of goodly matters"<sup>92</sup>. Women should study "wisdom, which doth instruct their manners, and inform their living" although they do not require, in his opinion, to study eloquence, for they "needeth it not"<sup>93</sup>. That it not to say that all eloquence displayed by a woman is a bad thing; Vives states that Cornelia and Hortensia were praised by Quintilian for their eloquence. But this is a classical model and is sufficiently removed from reality to enable Vives to compliment female eloquence without condoning or encouraging it in contemporary women.

Where possible, Vives wishes a girl to be taught by a "well learned woman" but if none can be found then a man of impeccable character should be found<sup>94</sup>. When teaching begins, the girl is to be given books which "may teach good manners" and

when she shall learn to write, let not her example be void verses, nor wanton or trifling songs, but some sad [serious] sentences prudent and chaste, taken out of holy Scripture, or the sayings of philosophers, which by often writing she may fasten better in her memory.<sup>95</sup>

The young woman is to then learn philosophy which can "inform, and teach, and amend the conditions"<sup>96</sup>. Primarily, the outcome of a girl's education is to be the formation of her virtuousness, but Vives writes: "in learning, as I [ap]point none end to the man, no more do I the woman [s education]: saving it is meet that the man have knowledge of many... things, that both profit himself and the commonwealth."<sup>97</sup> However, it is all very well for him to accord women the possibility of continuous learning, but women's learning has little purpose for renaissance society and Vives knows this. He therefore states that a woman should "learn for herself alone"<sup>98</sup> and for her children's benefit.

Vives goes on to detail what books a girl might read. He begins by cautioning against romances and bawdry, including the vernacular translations of the "unsavoury conceits of

Pogius and Aeneas Silvius... [and] the hundred fables of Boccaccio, which books but idle men wrote unlearned, and set all upon filth and viciousness"<sup>99</sup>. Elsewhere, in *De officio mariti*, he states that lewd excerpts from books, especially romances, "do hurt both man and woman"<sup>100</sup>. He continues:

woman, even as man, is a reasonable creature and hath a flexible wit both to good and evil... And although there be some evil and lewd women, yet that doth no more prove the malice of their nature than of men, and therefore the more ridiculous and foolish they are that have invied [inveighed] against the whole [sex]...<sup>101</sup>

Vives, then, argues against misogyny which damns all females while calling for a measure of fairness in attitudes towards women.

The *Instruction* advises a young woman to read classical authors, including: Anacreon, Homer, Hesiod, Cicero, Seneca and Plato. She should also study the Gospels, the Acts, the Epistles, the Old Testament, and the following Church Fathers: St. Jerome, Cyprian, Augustine, Ambrose, Hilary and Gregory<sup>102</sup>. In *De ratione studii puerilis*, Vives recommends that girls read authors who "cultivate right language and living"<sup>103</sup> which, as has been shown in Chapter 2, was a central purpose of all humanist education and philosophy. The *Deratione* mentions Cicero and Seneca but adds the works of Plutarch, Prudentius, Lucan, Sidonius, and advocates the reading of Erasmus' *Institution of a Christian Prince*, *Enchiridion* and *Paraphrases*, together with More's *Utopia*<sup>104</sup>. The historians Justinus, Florus and Valerius Maximus should also be consulted. All these authors are to be read once proficiency in reading and language has been acquired.

The *Instruction* deals with all aspects of a girl's upbringing, treating of education in the context of a child's wider development. The *De ratione* concentrates on education alone. Vives first outlines how language should be taught, beginning with pronunciation. The child



must thoroughly learn "the sounds of the letters" and be able to "articulate elementary sounds and syllables"<sup>105</sup>. She will be taught to distinguish vowels from consonants and will learn both Latin and Greek alphabets, progressing through ordered curricular stages. Next she will be taught to read in a similarly systematic method, forming letters initially "not so much with a view to elegant as to swift writing, so that she may write down... anything the tutor may dictate."<sup>106</sup> Moreover, the pupil must "exercise her memory daily"<sup>107</sup>. Vives was a firm believer in the benefits of "sharpening" the "wit" by memorizing interesting passages. Rules of grammar should be thoroughly learned, as should unfamiliar words to increase the child's vocabulary. Latin ought to be taught in a conversational way and the tutor should write dialogues for the girl, concentrating on the familiar at first. This was a method favoured by Vives for teaching Latin, believing it to follow the way in which children learn their mother tongue.

Yet, like many humanists, Vives could not remove himself from a paradox: he portrays knowledge as being beneficial for men and women but the Bible has Eve gaining knowledge by being deceived into going against the command of God. This paradox might explain many humanists' unwillingness to advocate women's education. It is to Vives' credit that he asks in *De officio* "shall a woman... be excluded from the knowledge of all that is good, and the more ignorant she is be counted better?"<sup>108</sup> He argues that it is better for *everyone* to have knowledge and that "children should be brought up among those that be best learned and have best experience"<sup>109</sup>. Furthermore, in the *Office and Duties of a Husband*, he writes that women who are "learned are most desirous of honesty, nor can I remember that ever I saw any woman of learning or of knowledge, dishonest"<sup>110</sup>. Vives thus advocates the education of women even if he does so by asserting that ignorance is the facilitator of deceit and dishonesty.

Vives is quite clear in his educational thought that (paraphrasing Socrates) "the woman's wit

is no less apt to all things than the man's is"<sup>111</sup>. But he asserts that, if left to herself, she lacks the "counsel and strength" to make full use of her intellect. These attributes have to be lent to her by the man who undertakes to educate her. Vives does accentuate (in *De officio*) the place of philosophy in a woman's education, but "logic,... the rule of governance of the commonwealth, and the art mathematical"<sup>112</sup> wives are to leave to their husbands. He did not envision women as taking their learning into the world, expecting their actual horizons to be hardly further than the thresholds of their homes. He does not confine women entirely to their houses but he regards the world as a dangerous place, both physically and emotionally, for them. In Chapter XIV (*Of Loving*) in the *Instruction*, he speaks of love as being deceiving and harmful, for there "is no deed so ungracious, so cruel, so outrageous or strange that we will not do to obey love"<sup>113</sup>. As this affliction strikes men as well as women, learning does not seem to be sufficient protection from it. Vives contends that women have to be defended against men who will lie to them in order to exploit them. He warns that a man will say

he shall die for thee, ...and that he dieth even straightaway.  
Believest thou that? A fool; let him show thee how many have  
died for love, among so many thousands as have been lovers.  
Love doth pain sometimes, but it never slayeth.<sup>114</sup>

Particularly in his early writing, Vives has in mind a concept of women as foolish and innocent, duped by their own passions as much as by the men who would have them consent to sex. This stereotype has a hint of reality - people are sometimes fooled into believing they are loved - but then, as now, it infantilises women.

To some extent Vives did allow women to extend their mental horizons. As Valerie Wayne comments, the "rigid life" which Vives defines for women "was not the worst alternative for them: it was one of the best available."<sup>115</sup> Conversely, Constance Jordan argues that the *Instruction* is "draconian"<sup>116</sup>, which it might seem to a modern reader. But is it really any

more draconian than the ideal of a woman's life as described by Erasmus, da Feltre, Barbaro, or any of the other humanists whom Jordan criticises? Taking those of Vives' works which deal specifically with women's education it is arguable that he was more disposed than most renaissance men to the proposal that women might be "learned". Moreover, a significant element in Jordan's critique of Vives' apparently restrictive educational programmes centres upon his denial of women's capacity to govern a state. Vives certainly denies women a public governmental role, but he actually had great respect for Catherine of Aragon (as was discussed in Chapter 1). During the Renaissance few women, apart from the aristocracy, had any public role in society; fewer still had a part in politics or statesmanship. Jordan does not seem to be aware of Vives' attitudes towards Catherine as a "learned" woman.

Further to this, Jordan cites Elyot's *Defence of Good Women*<sup>117</sup>, written in 1532, as a refutation of Vives' *Instruction* in that Elyot "argues the feminist point that a woman is *capable of governing*"<sup>118</sup>. However, Jordan here uses the term 'feminist' in an anachronistic manner: Elyot could not argue a feminist point of view because, as used in this instance, the term is a twentieth century imposition of ideas which accord (or seem to accord) with concepts compatible with twentieth century feminism. Elyot's work is undedicated but it was probably intended for Queen Catherine. Securing patronage, or flattering a dedicatee, would therefore be a more likely explanation of Elyot's arguments for female rulership. His acceptance of female leadership was effected through his praise of Zenobia which was a frequent humanist *topos* when discussing 'strong' women. It was used by Vives in the *Instruction*<sup>119</sup> to show admiration of educated women, whereas Elyot has Zenobia as one of the characters appearing towards the end of the *Defence*<sup>120</sup>. It is very likely that Elyot's educational work, the *Boke Named the Gouvenour*, was influenced by Vives, but Jordan does not mention this, and prefers Elyot's defence of a mythical female ruler to Vives' actual defence of Catherine during her contestation of divorce.



There is no denying that Vives did not regard women as having absolute parity with men, nor that he ascribed to women narrow, domestic roles. Yet he did see them as having equal intellectual capacities in his *De officio mariti* and he considered the most able women to be capable of a relatively high degree of literacy and philosophical knowledge. The overruling concern, it must be admitted, was a woman's silent obedience, her religious outlook, her devotion to motherhood. Vives did not imagine the 'typical' woman as being capable of equalling the breadth of study which a man might undertake; he did not argue for the standard of educational and intellectual achievement reached by Isotta Nogarola. He did not consider such excellence to be necessary for females.

How far short his educational schemes for women fell in comparison to his projected plan of studies for boys can be observed when Vives' more complex pedagogical work is discussed in the next chapter. But by setting his thought on women's education in the context of prevailing societal misogyny it might be conceded that he was less severe in his attitudes to women than were the majority of his contemporaries. For all this, Vives had as the main purpose of women's education the enhancement of their "demureness, chastity [and] sadness, because these things be required more perfect in a woman than a man."<sup>121</sup> Virtue and chastity were, even with Luis Vives, to be displayed silently, at the cost of a woman's identity.

## Chapter 5 : Vives' curriculum and the psychology of learning

...I have always held that we must render the ancients our warmest thanks, for not withholding from us... the results of their study... Moreover it is far more profitable to learning to form critical judgment on the writings of the great authors than to merely acquiesce in their authority, and to receive everything on trust from others, provided that in forming judgments we are all far removed from those pests of criticism and assertion of one's views - viz. envy, bitterness, over-haste, impudence and scurrilous wit... It is therefore clear that, if we can only apply our minds sufficiently, we can judge better over the whole round of life and nature than could... any of the ancients... Is it, then, to be forbidden to us to at least investigate, and to form our own opinions? Especially as Seneca wisely declares: "those who have been active intellectually before us, are not our masters but our leaders." Truth stands open to all. It is not as yet taken possession of. Much of Truth has been left for future generations to discover.<sup>1</sup>

Vives wrote these words in his *De disciplinis* (1531). He structured this work in two parts: the first discusses the causes of the "corruption" of the arts, the second deals specifically with education and is titled *De tradendis disciplinis*. In the above excerpt the essence of Vives' educational humanism can be discerned: critical study of classical wisdom (beyond *imitatio*) coupled with contemporary investigation to enable the formation of balanced judgements. All this was to be undertaken with a view to discovering further 'truths' by extending knowledge about life and the natural world. Vives also set great store in the transformative capacity of education, and as we have seen this was a typically humanist aim. He believed that one outcome of learning should be the enhancement of virtue.

Moreover, in company with many humanists, he rejected scholastic methodology and conceived of a curriculum which would widen the study of the arts and sciences. As with Erasmus, he placed God at the centre of his philosophy and pedagogy. In education, as with everything, Vives had emulation of Christ as fundamental to the process of gaining salvation. Thus, learning is the thing "by means of which we separate ourselves from the way of life and customs of animals and are restored to humanity and raised towards God himself..."<sup>2</sup> Vives did not simply state that education lends man a sophistication which harbours a pretence of humanity, but argued that what makes people truly human is the presence of God in them through their acceptance of His word and in their recognition of their place in His world. Vives regarded learning as being fundamental to this awareness, writing: "we are not men because of our bodies... but in consequence of the likeness of our mind to God and the angels... by the possession of reason we become most like to, and most united with, that divine Nature, which rules everything."<sup>3</sup> In some respects, then, Vives' thought epitomises the Christian-humanist synthesis. He viewed education as imparting a culture which had been 'handed down' from ancient authorities, but which was founded on God's gift of knowledge. Therefore to have a cultured mind was to please God and fulfil the intellectual potential granted by him to men. Vives thus saw education and the transmission of culture in quasi-religious terms.

It was explained in the previous chapter that, as far as educating girls was concerned, Vives looked upon education as a possible means to shape the female character. This emphasis on character formation would also be a prominent, if less overtly stated, factor in his educational programme for boys. However, as will be demonstrated, the substance of the education delineated in *De tradendis disciplinis* was much wider and more complex than that which Vives set out for girls. Following the humanist concept that education should be utilitarian in that it should produce 'virtuous' men, he believed that education had to inculcate more than sterile philosophy and facts - a 'good' education must teach conduct and



behavioural self-regulation, though this last was less an intentional aim than it was a taken-for-granted assumption. These outcomes were to be facilitated by the teaching of wisdom, but for Vives they would also be fostered by critical thinking which was to be encouraged, in part, by the conducting of investigative research. He counselled that "[the] teacher will not expound by means of narrative... but seek to investigate causes, whence things are derived, how they exist, develop, continue, act, and discharge their own functions..."<sup>4</sup> He particularly related this to the teaching of the sciences but applied this method to varying degrees in many subject areas in his curriculum, and where direct investigation was inappropriate, he advocated critical inquiry. It has been argued that in his emphasis on pragmatic observation Vives can be counted as a forerunner of Gassendi, Telesio and Bacon.<sup>5</sup>

This is not to imply that Vives' pedagogic theory gave rise to a revolutionary system of schooling in any European country or state. Initially, much of what he advocated was not practiced in its entirety, but Vives influenced other authors who proposed a psychologically oriented educational programme (most notably Jan Amos Komensky). In the subsequent sections of this chapter Vives' most comprehensive statement on education (*De tradendis disciplinis*) will be examined together with the educational thought of other renaissance authors, where appropriate. Again, the most illustrious of these authors, and the one to whom most reference will be made, is Erasmus. Aspects of his educational works (*De ratione studii* and *De pueris statim ac liberaliter instituendis*) will be offered in comparison with Vives' educational theory and curriculum as they were an important influence on the ideas of the younger man.

In *De tradendis disciplinis* Vives has a humanist goal: to prepare the child and the young man to be a social, civil entity by means of the *studia humanitatis*. It will become clear that, above all else except the Christian purpose, Vives' education was designed to be a practical

one: "[t]his, then is the fruit of all studies", he wrote, "that "[h]aving ourselves acquired the arts of scholarship, we should seek to apply them to the arts of life, and employ them for the public good..."<sup>6</sup> Study should not be an end in itself, but must have a useful aim otherwise it becomes an "inane sort of contemplation"<sup>7</sup>. This chapter will concentrate, then, on *De tradendis* in order to show how Vives shaped his plan of study and to illustrate that this plan incorporated the main elements of Christian humanism (enhancement of virtue, practicality of knowledge, reliance on Classical study,) while attempting to formulate a coherent pedagogical scheme which would enable teaching to take place in a systematic manner. Rather than being a manual of conduct for princes and courtiers (compare, for example, Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* or Erasmus' *Education of a Christian Prince*), *De tradendis* was intended for all young men provided they were of a social class which could afford to educate its children. In addition, Vives' educational work is oriented to the practicalities of teaching and to detailing a curriculum. It is significant that it contains not just essential precepts of humanism but that it is based on his theories of 'psychology' as described in *De anima et vita* (to which Vives refers explicitly in *De tradendis*<sup>8</sup>). In both his educational and psychological treatises he felt that systematic observation and investigation should play important roles: sensate knowledge was fundamental to cognition, and reasoned inquiry was fundamental to study. The concept of *á priori* knowledge was to be rejected. Vives' study of cognition encouraged him to structure his curriculum in a way which, he believed, would make most sense to students and which would present knowledge in a hierarchy graduated in difficulty to suit pupils' maturational (cognitive) abilities. Vives' thoughts on psychology are diffused throughout *De tradendis* and his examination of cognition, together with his refutation of *a priori* knowledge, meant that he was "logically driven to realise that... his only recourse was the appeal to experience."<sup>9</sup>

Experience, supported by study of the arts and sciences, was the means by which useful knowledge and reliable information were to be gained. Vives conceived of a course of



liberal studies where students would 'test' knowledge in the light of their experiences and observations. As will now be established, this was an ambitious project which was too eclectic to be wholly practicable. The remainder of this chapter will look at *De tradendis* in detail and will be largely expository. This should give sufficient information about Vives' pedagogy in preparation for subsequent discussion of his work on psychology and its relation to his educational theory.

### Luis Vives "On education"

[Classical authors] were men as we are, and were liable to be deceived and to err. They were the first discoverers of what were only... rough... shapeless blocks which they passed on to their posterity to be purified and put into shape. Seeing that they had such... charity towards us, would they not be themselves unwilling to pledge us not to use our own intellects in seeking to pass beyond their gifts... For they judged it to be of the very essence of the human race, that... it should progress in the arts, disciplines, virtue and goodness. We think ourselves men or even less, while we regard them as more than men... - not but what they excelled in many and great achievements. So we also might no less excel, in the eyes of our posterity, if we were to strive sufficiently earnestly, or we might achieve still more, since we have the advantage of what they discovered in knowledge as our basis, and can make addition to it of what our judgement finds out. For it is a... false similitude... that we are, compared to the ancients, as dwarfs upon the shoulders of giants. It is not so... [W]e are all of one stature, save that we are lifted up somewhat higher by their means, provided that there be found in us the same studiousness.. and love of truth, as was in them. If these conditions be lacking, then we are not dwarfs, nor set on the shoulders of giants, but men of competent stature, grovelling on the earth.<sup>10</sup>



Although Vives wrote this in *De disciplinis* in one of the books explaining the causes of the "corruption" of the arts, it encapsulates his attitude towards classical authority as it affects educational studies. It has been stated that his educational plan was humanistic and reliant upon the reading of classical texts, but this classicism was qualified. Ancient Greek and Roman writers were not to be accorded unmitigated acceptance or praise; they were to be regarded as human and prone to imperfection. Reading had to be tempered by judicious criticism, particularly when the author in question was Aristotle. Vives' mistrust arose from his position that certain knowledge was not to be discovered as Aristotle postulated. The closest that could be got to certain knowledge was information gained through reason relying on sensate experience. Philosophy, especially Aristotelian philosophy, did not lead to absolute certainty but was, in Vives' words, "entirely founded on opinion, conjecture and verisimilitude"<sup>11</sup>. In Vives' mind, education could not lead to the discovery of absolute truth or to the collection of a body of completely verifiable and quantifiable facts. Everything, including classical authority, was open to reasoned interpretation and to challenge, though for Vives this should not lead to the conclusion "that nothing is known" as Francisco Sanches put it. Sanches was familiar with *De disciplinis*, but he took the 'uncertainty principle' much further than Vives who would call knowledge "true, according as it lies near or is like the truth"<sup>12</sup>. However, Vives cannot escape the problem that if knowledge based on sensate experience is not certain even when rationalised, how can anyone prove there to be 'truth' existing as a reality outwith their mind?

What is striking about Vives' education is not just that it is based on his theories of psychology, but that it is to be based on enquiry, observation and critique at a time when education was still largely scholastic in character. He wrote:

I shall show that the old writers were mistaken, not through the limitations of the human intellect... but by their own fault. Therefore I have *produced my reasons from nature*, not out of

divine oracles... Moreover it is far more profitable to learning to form a critical judgment on the writings of the great authors than to merely acquiesce in their authority... Nature is not yet so effete and exhausted as to be unable to bring forth, in our times, results comparable to those of earlier ages... Further, what was the method of Aristotle himself? Did he not dare to pluck up by the root the received opinion of his predecessors? Is it, then, to be forbidden to us to at least investigate and to form our own opinions?<sup>13</sup>

Vives was not advocating the renunciation of all classical knowledge, but he objected to the stultification which arose from obeisance to classical authority at the expense of contemporary advance and enquiry. We must, he said, "partly learn what and accept what has been handed down to us, and partly think it out for ourselves and learn by practising it."<sup>14</sup> He acknowledges that classical discoveries had opened "the entrance to the comprehension of the different branches of knowledge"<sup>15</sup>; building on this, modern scholars must investigate and form their own opinions as they learn. Accordingly, God has given man a great gift, Vives writes in *De tradendis*: a mind and the power of enquiry, "with which power he can behold not only the present, but also cast his gaze over the past and the future"<sup>16</sup>. The mind permits man "to examine all things, to collect, to compare, and to roam through the universe of nature as if it were his own possession"<sup>17</sup>. Vives thus delineates what were, as far as he was concerned, the three chief mental operations: simple apprehension, composition and division, and exploration. His theory of education takes cognisance of these functions, particularly with regard to natural science.

Before detailing the studies which Vives considered necessary to a 'liberal' education, he writes in *De tradendis* about the development of society and the evolution of language. He states that man formed family and social groups in the first place for the mutual benefit of individuals. Eventually, once villages had grown and towns had been established, forms of government were created and put into place; laws came to be passed in order to give guidance in normative standards of right and wrong. The beginnings of society arose when



the needs associated with self-preservation, then "daily business", brought people together. Thereafter, "speech bound them to move as closely as possible amongst one another... By help of speech, their minds... began to reveal themselves..."<sup>18</sup> This took place initially through the use of single words, then phrases which became more complex to include different modes of speech created "as they were appropriate for use"<sup>19</sup>. Vives concludes that speech facilitates mental development, the growth of reasoning skills, and that it is "from reason that all practical wisdom springs"<sup>20</sup>.

Moreover, he notes that the

educative value of a language is in proportion to its apt suitability for supplying names to things. Its eloquence consists in its variety and abundance of words... It should have the capacity to explain most aptly what [people] think. By its means much power of judgment should be developed.<sup>21</sup>

From accumulated knowledge ("wisdom") grew a body of learning which was organised into subject areas as formal education developed. This learning also had its use in practical aspects of socio-political fields (ethics, economics, politics), but Vives warns that "all arts and all learning, without religion, are childish play"<sup>22</sup>. Eagerness for knowledge must be channeled into structured enquiry and this must have an aim, although

the human mind... is not able to attain to the conception of that ultimate end, unless it has been enlightened by the end itself... Therefore, there was need of God, not only to teach us how to come to Him, but also to lead us by the hand, since we are weak, and constantly liable to fall. This is the function of religion, which we receive from God himself...<sup>23</sup>

Knowledge cannot be an end in itself - God and salvation are the ultimate goals and wisdom is one step towards gaining the virtue which might enable a person to lead a moral life. What constitutes knowledge is in itself problematic to Vives and he writes that he will call



'knowledge' only that

which we receive when the senses are properly brought to observe things in a methodical way to which clear reason leads us on, reason so closely connected with the nature of our mind that there is no one who does not accept its lead; or our reasoning is 'probable', when it is based on our own experiences or those of others, and is confirmed by a judgment, resting upon probable conjecture.<sup>24</sup>

It can be seen that Vives has linked the gaining of knowledge to his work on psychology: knowledge is primarily derived from sensate experiences, and this type of experience can be harnessed and have order imposed on it by observing natural phenomena in a *methodical* way. In such structuring can be discerned the directive influence of reason - the ability to sort, categorise and analyse sensate experience into knowledge firmly held, though never absolutely certain, or into conjectural knowledge (what Vives terms "probable" knowledge). Importantly, the ordering of the experiences begins, for Vives, with structured observation of phenomena, followed by reasoned reflection on the data gathered through the observation. In *De anima et vita* he is concerned to explicate cognitive functioning (as far as he is able) and he utilises his observations on psychological operations in *De tradendis* firstly to underpin his explanation of the differences between certain and probable knowledge, and secondly to support his argument for a structured curriculum.

Erasmus also dealt with cognition in his *De ratione studii*, but in a far more cursory manner. He begins by making clear that thought and expression are the "materials" of instruction. Knowledge may be subdivided into knowledge of truths and knowledge of words. Ideas "are only intelligible to us by means of the words which describe them"<sup>25</sup>. Hence, Erasmus reasoned, if knowledge of language is "defective", truths cannot be properly comprehended. (Erasmus seems to have arrived at a renaissance version of a linguistic deficit model, where use of restricted language forms implies restricted cognitive abilities.) Erasmus did not trust sensate experience and wrote in *De pueris statim ac liberaliter instituendis* that children are

"prone to follow the allurements of the senses rather than the rule of reason"<sup>26</sup>. However, he does not discuss sensate experience as it relates to psychology or education, but sensualism as it relates to theology. He labels sensual experience as 'bad', believing it to derive from the episode in Eden and fearing that left unbridled it would endanger souls. Thus, children should be trained to be rational so that their sensual appetites could be controlled. In contrast, Vives studied 'psychology' in a more 'scientific' way and saw the 'findings' as applicable to the process of education. He categorises two 'special' intellectual functions which he deems vital to learning: the powers of judgement and observation. He explains the differences between them: judgement pertains to a person's actions whereas, in the observation and analysis of 'man', the intellect regards in him

not merely... a single relation, but it [the intellect] investigates man's mind and body and those things which happen to both these in their permanent states, and in their vicissitudes at various stages. Thus the mind passes to consider human inventions, which open up a wide field for observation. Thence it goes on to study spiritual things, and eventually is led to... God.<sup>27</sup>

All things are therefore linked; for Vives education is not an isolate and cognition is imperative not just to learning but is obviously fundamental to all aspects of life. Furthermore, he perceives autogonomic knowledge to be inextricably bound to social, scientific and theological knowledge.

What, then, distinguishes knowledge from an art? In teaching, Vives is concerned with the arts (scientific or humanities) and with communicating the ordered collective information which is contained in them. He argues that this is most effectively done where there is a hierarchy of difficulty, a system of work, and a set of goals to be reached. This is what constitutes an art: knowledge arranged by rules which guide the attainment of a "predetermined end". Vives puts it this way:



Every art... has an end, which keeps in view, towards which it aims everything.. Further it occupies itself with the material with regard to which the end arises; and it does not occupy itself with that material otherwise than by teaching those precepts which, being practised, lead to the end of an art.<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, any art is a systematised relevant body of knowledge which can be taught.

However, teaching any subject belonging to a discipline supposes a purpose or reward. If a subject is perceived as useless or without value then only compulsion of some kind would make someone study it. Vives regards 'value' in less exact terms than this, but does link it to the humanist ideal of personal transformation towards the 'good' and to social utility. Knowledge which has no practical function is to be avoided as are some subjects (palmetry, pyromancy, necromancy, astrology, which are "invented of the devyll"<sup>29</sup>). Learning has to be "of use to us", Vives repeats, since "we do not learn arts and sciences for their own sakes, but for our good"<sup>30</sup>. A person can decide what subjects are efficacious or harmful by judging rationally what "things are helpful and what harmful to the development and illumination of the mind".<sup>31</sup>

The humanist concept of right living is emphasised almost *ad nauseam* in *De tradendis*. Vives tends to join it to the idea of goodness being guided by sound judgement and by learning. Thus the moral imperative is generally uppermost in his pedagogy; learning equips a person intellectually and morally and, when conducted properly, ought to facilitate the "wise leading of the whole life":

Practical wisdom is increased by experience, which is supported by the memory, for knowledge of many and great things would be less useful, if there were not something which preserved them and produced them before the mind for use, just at the time of need.<sup>32</sup>

Again, Vives leads from a typically humanist concern (right living through gaining of wisdom) to discussion of psychological components in epistemological and educational



processes (in this case, memory). What he says may seem self-evident to a modern reader: if experience is invaluable to gaining wisdom it can only be so if a person remembers the experience. People cannot progress or become wiser if they constantly forget what they have experienced and learned. Vives realises that without memory cognitive functioning is impaired and he expands on this to consider the educational repercussions in *De tradendis* (Book III, Chapter III) when he writes of the importance of exercising a child's memory to encourage the ability to learn. According to Vives, memory consists of comprehension and retention of what is comprehended. Both faculties are helped by the structured arrangement of facts in teaching and by certain techniques (such as reading aloud, making written notes, and mnemonics). Moreover, he agrees with Quintilian that a child's mind will reject knowledge if too much is presented too quickly<sup>33</sup>. Learning should proceed gradually from what is simple to what is more difficult. Vives advises: "In the first beginnings, let the teacher often ask questions, and let him often supply the reasons for what he has got in answer. For great is the help to memory if reasons are associated with the matter taught."<sup>34</sup>

Having generally dealt with cognition, the categorisation of knowledge into recognised subject areas, and with some of the purposes of learning, Vives turns to pedagogy and to his methodology and curriculum.

## Vives' "course of training": choice of books and elementary subjects

It is beyond dispute that a man not instructed through reason in philosophy and sound learning is a creature lower than a brute, seeing that there is no beast more wild or more harmful than a man who is driven... by ambition, or desire, anger or envy, or lawless temper... Nature, in giving you a son presents you, let me say, with a rude, unformed creature, which it is your part to fashion so that it may become indeed a man. If this fashioning be neglected you have but an animal still: if it be contrived earnestly and wisely, you have, I had almost said, what may prove a being not far from God.<sup>35</sup>

But how was Erasmus' "rude unformed creature", less a child than an animal, referred to as "it", to be "fashioned" into this God-like adult? Predominantly by humanist methods and studies, that much has already been stated. However, in terms of the specifics, Luis Vives explains at length in *De tradendis disciplinis* how a child is to be taught, from early education to higher education. He believed that children were naturally disposed to be 'good' or 'bad', but that a wayward nature could be tamed if it was caught early enough. He felt that learning could not take place without self-discipline and, as with Erasmus, the aspect of education as 'shaping' a child's behaviour as well as its intellect was evident in his educational theory. But a child must also progress from the rudiments of literacy and numeracy to proficiency in the complexities of a range of arts and sciences. *De tradendis* informs the renaissance teacher how to accomplish this in a structured pedagogical scheme. For Erasmus and Vives men are "fashioned" and reason is what raises them from the bestial: this was a humanist 'given'. The point was to define exactly what the shaping process required. Erasmus states in *De pueris* that no age is too early to begin learning and that a child may be "trained in conduct" from birth<sup>36</sup>. Most renaissance writers concerned with 'conduct' did not, however, describe an educational process. For example, in *Il cortegiano*, Castiglione describes what attributes a courtier should have without specifying how an



educational curriculum is to effect this. In all his actions the courtier is to exhibit *sprezzatura*, performing with excellence: "in everie thing (he) shall have good grace"<sup>37</sup>. In comparison, Thomas Elyot does describe a curriculum for boys in his *Boke named the Governour* (1531), but what is lacking from this is psychological background informing the pedagogy.

In *De tradendis* Vives gives his thoughts on choice of books for the child's education, believing it prudent to choose a few "set" texts for use in schools. Books judged as harmful are to be rejected<sup>38</sup>, and sophistry is to be avoided. He emphasises that "right reading" of "heathen" works does no harm because "they contain the knowledge of antiquity and of all human memory, of so many words and deeds... by which practical wisdom is cultivated and helped"<sup>39</sup>. But if what a classical author says raises doubts about Christian faith, then this aspect of their work is to be condemned by the teacher. (The same applies if an author praises 'vices' such as pride, vanity or lust.) If a book is on the whole commendable, but contains certain 'harmful' passages, Vives has no compunction about excising these parts. In defence of expurgation, he cites Ambrose's adaptation of Cicero's *De officiis* "into a form more consistent with our faith"<sup>40</sup>, and sees nothing wrong with such moral and religious prophylaxis. Like Erasmus, Vives held that a child's soul was in peril from 'corrupt' or bad training, and part of the corrupting force might be found in the books a child read.

As regards the teaching of reading, children were first to learn the rudiments of Latin. For this Vives recommends the following authors: Donatus, Perotti, Nebrija, Melanchthon, and Manutius. Most humanists were not concerned that a child be able to read and write proficiently in vernacular, though Vives differed as, incidentally, did Castiglione who advocates the use of Tuscan citing the brilliance of style to be found in the work of Petrarca and Boccaccio<sup>41</sup>. Elyot's *Boke named the Governour* upholds the use of vernacular in



another way being the first educational treatise written in a vernacular language. Erasmus was vehement about the subject: while the vernacular might be a child's first language it is "barbarous and unformed"<sup>42</sup>, and Latin should be taught as soon as possible. To this end he recommends the use of Latin grammars by Diomedes and Perotti, and states that Latin should be studied concurrently with Greek (he mentions use of the Greek grammars by Theodore Gaza and Constantine Lascaris<sup>43</sup>).

On the process of teaching Latin (indeed any language), Erasmus and Vives agreed that "it is not by learning rules that we acquire the power of speaking a language, but by daily intercourse with those accustomed to express themselves with exactness..."<sup>44</sup> Vives writes that Latin is to be taught to pupils between the ages of seven and fifteen, but did not consider pupils at this stage of intellectual development to be suited to learning "branches of scientific knowledge"<sup>45</sup>. Greek may be taught once the pupil understands the foundations of Latin which should be "learned and learned exactly, and not in a corrupted form"<sup>46</sup>. Neither Vives nor Erasmus had patience with teachers who wasted time trying to hammer rules of grammar and syntax into children's heads. Rote learning certainly had an important place in the pedagogies of both men, but within the context of more active learning. The process of teaching had to be structured and knowledge taught in such a way that success is facilitated for students, and elements would have to be formally taught. For instance, in teaching syntax, Vives advises use of Linacre's *De emendata structura*, and "the little book on the eight parts of speech which... was composed by Lily, and revised by Erasmus"<sup>47</sup>.

Once a child learns the rudiments of syntax he should complete simple translations from his first language into Latin, and *vice versa*. Passages should gradually be lengthened as the child's proficiency grows<sup>48</sup>. For general reading, Vives suggests that younger pupils begin with simpler Latin texts like Cato's *Distichs* (a common humanist choice), the letters of Pliny Caecilius, and Calentius - all of which are "uncommonly entertaining"<sup>49</sup>. Pupils might

read the more straightforward works of Cicero, Varro, Sallust, Seneca, Quintilian<sup>50</sup>, and eventually go on to more challenging texts by Terence, Seneca, Virgil (*Aeneid* ), Horace, Prudentius, Ovid, and the histories of Livy, Valerius Maximus and Tacitus<sup>51</sup>. Moreover, Vives stresses the importance of pupils' private reading, and recommends for this purpose authors such as Valla, Linacre, Nebrija, Budé and Boccaccio (the mythological poetry)<sup>52</sup>.

Erasmus' selection of authors for pupils displays some similarities to Vives', but Erasmus' choice explicitly highlights style rather than content. He advocates prose works by Lucian, Demosthenes, Herodotus, poetry by Aristophanes, Homer, Euripides and Menander, and plays by Terence. He mentions too the standard humanist referents: Vergil, Horace, Cicero and Sallust commenting that these authors will provide a "working knowledge of Latin and Greek"<sup>53</sup>.

Vives wrote a textbook for use in the teaching of Latin: the *Linguae Latinae exercitatio* (published in 1538) which presented vocabulary and Latin structure in short dialogues between characters in everyday situations. The dialogues begin simply, and graduate to more involved discussions about life, learning and morality. Small children are depicted learning their alphabet, while in later conversations young men travel from Paris to Boulogne. Vives adopts a conversational style and builds information into the dialogues which he thinks might be interesting to pupils. For example: men of antiquity

were accustomed to write with styles. Styles were followed by reeds, especially Nile reeds... Formerly the ancient Latins wrote on parchment which was called palimpsest, because the writing could be wiped out again, written on both sides. [These] were called Opistographi<sup>54</sup>.

This might not seem particularly exciting now, but it should be remembered that renaissance children were not expected to enjoy their studies. Learning was usually an arid, repetitious



procedure, so it is possible that conversational pieces would have been like the proverbial breath of fresh air to some children. The *Linguae Latinae exercitatio* certainly became a popular textbook: fifty editions were printed in the sixteenth century alone<sup>55</sup>, and it remained in use in schools in the next century (for instance, being required reading at Westminster School in 1621, and Hertford Grammar School in 1614<sup>56</sup>). Whatever their popularity, the dialogues underscore Vives' conviction about the centrality of Latin to life and study. He states:

Very great are the uses of Latin both for speaking and thinking rightly. For that language is as it were the treasure-house of all erudition, since men of great and outstanding minds have written on every branch of knowledge in Latin speech. Nor can anyone attain to knowledge of those subjects except by first learning Latin.<sup>57</sup>

Vives also stresses his belief in the importance of language in *De tradendis* when he writes that speech is the index of the mind and that it flows from the "rational soul"<sup>58</sup> (that is, the intellect); through speech the mind is revealed.

Like Erasmus, Vives saw value in learning languages simultaneously, arguing that reciprocal understanding and improved erudition could arise from knowledge of source languages<sup>59</sup>. He gives the example of Latin as being the language from which Spanish, Italian and French are derived; the mutual benefits of studying Latin and the associated vernacular languages were thus obvious to him<sup>60</sup>. He goes into detail with regard to the method and content of teaching Latin. Single sounds are to be taught first (vowels), then combined sounds (vowels plus consonants), then syllables. Next the letters of the alphabet are to be learned and the teacher is to show how the letters combine to form words<sup>61</sup>. Thereafter, "by analogy of meanings"<sup>62</sup> the child is to be taught proper and common nouns, substantive adjectives, verbs, participles, pronouns, and, from this, more complicated grammar (declensions, and so forth). Once basic grammar is mastered each pupil is to be



given a "little Latin book... in free, conversational style, pleasant, easy" and brief<sup>63</sup>. Pupils should then be taught prosody and exposition. Older students will learn philology ("i.e. some knowledge of the circumstances, times, places, history, fables, proverbs, sentences, apothegms..."<sup>64</sup>). But Vives insists that grammatical and linguistic knowledge is to be learned "without being wearily troublesome, for while it is injurious to neglect rules, so it also injures to cling to, and to be dependent on, them too much"<sup>65</sup>. He extended this pragmatic approach to the teaching of written style. Vives did not advocate slavish *imitatio* at the expense of individual expression, though he would not accept unruly individualism to the detriment of accepted standards of elegance, form and eloquence.

### Psychological functioning and education

In formulating his educational theory, Vives did not ignore the child's disposition and aptitudes. He was adamant that study of different subjects required "distinct type[s] of mental ability for [their] successful pursuance. It is possible, however, to obtain a judgment as to which studies a particular person would wisely refrain from undertaking"<sup>66</sup>. Once into the intermediate stage of education, when the child is on the "verge" of youth, the student's psychological dispositions become ever more important<sup>67</sup>. In discussing this in *De tradendis*, Vives refers to his work *De anima et vita* and explains that

[n]atural powers of the mind are: sharpness in observing, capacity for comprehending, power in comparing and judging. Nothing physical is more similar to understanding than the eye; the one is the light of the mind, the other of the body. In the eye is the power of seeing all those things which are dim in colour, and that is called sharpness. There are some who have very great power in discerning separate scattered things, but cannot grasp many things together, or if they do grasp them for a short moment, yet do not

retain them. But often those who see, who grasp and retain images of things, cannot bring things into relation with one another; nor can they judge what the quality of a thing is by comparison of it with others. just so it is with the natural abilities of the mind. For some minds are acute and see separate things clearly, but cannot grasp them nor retain them when they are connected; their comprehension is narrow, or their memory is short and fleeting. Others grasp, but do not reflect on those things which are intuited, so as to judge and determine their nature and properties.<sup>68</sup>

Vives' recognition of such intellectual differences and his attempt to take cognisance of them in his educational programme may be said to constitute a tentative step towards a 'psychology of learning'. There is little comparable with it in contemporary or preceding renaissance pedagogical texts. Erasmus briefly mentions (in *De pueris*) that a child's temperament and talent are "innate" and a "primitive endowment"<sup>69</sup>, but his remarks are superficial and have no specific basis in a theory of cognition. He states in the same work that teachers must recognise the individuality of the pupil so that a child is not forced to study a subject "against their instinct"<sup>70</sup>. Similarly, Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560) advocated that children be grouped according to ability when learning history and Latin<sup>71</sup>. His suggestion is not based on observation of psychological activity, though it could well have been based on direct observation of pupils' learning.

Vives may have been fatalistic in assigning different cognitive abilities to different individuals, but he was at least attempting to place pedagogy on the footing of psychological analysis. In effect, he affirmed that cognitive processes affect the content and method of education as well as the progress of the pupil. He stresses the importance of recognising this with respect to deciding how material to be learned can most effectively be presented. As such his work is a move towards planned teaching activity which takes account of possible differences in individual cognition in an attempt to reduce mismatch between cognitive ability and learning procedures.



Vives categorises some of the cognitive differences that he has noted in students. Some 'minds' pour over work and become engrossed in a task, while others find concentration difficult. The former will tend to "look deeply into things", but the latter will tend to "stop at the most obvious"<sup>72</sup>. Some students may find the beginnings of study straightforward but become perplexed and easily discouraged when subjects become more advanced. Other students will revel in the challenge of increasing difficulty. Thus some

accept as joined those things which they see together: some analyse things into their separate parts by a close examination, which is called subtlety. There are some who at the right moment, by their concentration, strike at the root of things, hasten on through many fields of knowledge and do not stop to rest; others linger...<sup>73</sup>

Vives regards this as dependent upon what types of innate qualities and cognitive abilities their minds have. However, though some students have mercurial intellects, and others are more deliberative, both might still arrive at the intended learning outcome but the time they take to do so will probably differ. So, Vives advises that where a pupil does not seem to have great intellectual aptitude parents and teachers should not despair: the child's intellectual development might simply take longer to fulfil its potential than other children's<sup>74</sup>. But he cautions that if a child is not destined to be a scholar it is pointless to force him to try to be one.

Vives stipulates that, whatever their abilities, all children's progress should be monitored constantly by the teacher, and every two to three months teachers should review their pupils' progress and alter courses of study to better suit children's needs<sup>75</sup>. Teachers must tailor any programme of studies to the learner's aptitudes. For instance, if a child has what Vives calls a "narrow" mental capacity, he should not be overwhelmed with material to learn. Furthermore, teachers should bear in mind that, temperamentally, a pupil could be



disinclined to study at one stage but become interested at another time<sup>76</sup>.

Implicit throughout what Vives says regarding education is a call for the improvement of the way in which subjects were presented to pupils, in order to make education more effective. In teaching the arts, for example, "the most effectual order must be followed, so that hearers may easily learn and easily retain. The material being rightly arranged they are led naturally, and since they see that what follows grows as it were out of what precedes, they receive all as being quite certain."<sup>77</sup> In any discipline, the topics which are most suited to the pupil's capacities should be taught first. Vives shows awareness of the importance of presenting teaching material in a logically structured series that goes beyond a general grading of teaching what is 'easy' before what is 'difficult'. How children learn (assimilate and retain knowledge/information) is dependent on the order and structure of the presentation of the material to be learned. Vives' educational writing implies a professionalisation of the role of the teacher. He begins to address pedagogy from the stance of psychology and expects teachers to do likewise, and he promotes procedures (such as continuous assessment) for use by teachers as specific tools to be used by the professional in determining how best to carry out the task of educating children.

The degree to which Vives founds his pedagogical ideas on concepts of psychology is striking, especially in comparison with other renaissance works. Again, Erasmus is the most important parallel. In *De ratione* he mentions the role of the order of presentation as it affects memory, but he does so in passing. He writes that memory depends on "thorough understanding of the subject, logical ordering of the contents, repetition to ourselves"<sup>78</sup>. In the *De pueris*, many of Erasmus' comments concentrate on arguments as to *why* one should educate a child rather than dealing with how to go about it. When he does write about pedagogical practice he tends, as do most humanist educators before Vives, to give most attention to which books should be used and which subjects taught. As has been stated

earlier in this chapter, Erasmus and Vives concur on the point that children should not be forced to study against their "instincts". They also agree that the imitative abilities of very young children can be used in teaching language (learning which depends not only on memory but on imitation<sup>79</sup>), while at this stage children "delight" in activity<sup>80</sup>. Erasmus suggests that a teacher should use "attractive" teaching methods and should "in a sense become a boy again that he may draw his pupil to himself"<sup>81</sup>. The teacher must on no account expect the child to be a "diminutive adult"<sup>82</sup>. However, these are cursory references to maturation and Erasmus does not attempt to go further in associating maturation and cognition with teaching practice. The comparison with Erasmus reinforces the extent to which Vives was innovative.

### **Higher studies: expressions of practical wisdom in the curriculum for youth**

For many students of pre-Cartesian thought, the words 'scholasticism' and 'Aristotelianism' must have evoked visions of a sterile, derivative, and monolithic system obsessed with logic-chopping and leading its abstracted victims on a bookish hunt for the irrelevant. Erasmus, Rabelais, and other humanist critics immortalized the depression, enervation, and terror that they suffered in interminable bouts of indoctrination into subject-matter that they found impoverished and insipid... To confirm such sour memories we have more than enough evidence of bad, dull, doctrinaire performance in early modern classrooms. Allowing for a natural urge in students of any period to resist the formal requirements of systems to which they are introduced, one nonetheless hears an insistent note in the chorus of complaint about the lifelessness of the late scholastic curriculum... For those who despised scholasticism as a labyrinth of dreary trivialities, the contrast with humanist engagement in moral and political debate lowered the reputation of schools all the more, even though humanism left its own miasma of mind-numbing pedantry.<sup>83</sup>



In Vives' curriculum for youth (which he classified as between the ages of fourteen and twenty-five) he may not have quite escaped the "mind-numbing pedantry" to which humanism often fell foul. He produced a range of subjects for study which was wide-reaching and intended for young men to continue to learn during the course of their lives. As was stated in the earlier discussion of humanist pedagogy in Chapter 2, many humanists were preoccupied with reform of university curricula and in trying to move away from scholastic logic and disputation. In *De tradendis*, Vives was careful to outline a course of study (at pre-university and university level, and beyond) which would bypass scholasticism and present material which was less "impoverished and insipid" than had been the norm. Vives' concern to advance from the type of learning shaped by scholasticism was noted in his early work *In pseudodialecticos*. In this text he suggests the importance of the early stages of education, for if a pupil "goes astray at the beginning of [his] education it is inevitable that the more he progresses, the farther he will stray"<sup>84</sup>. He did not consider that scholasticism was a sound basis on which to build the educational method or content, being of the opinion that it was based on a "sophistic discipline" which was nothing more than a "system of verbal quibbling dependent on the distorted meaning of words"<sup>85</sup>. He believed that the scholastics concentrated on logic as an end in itself, whereas he regarded it as a skill to be used across the educational disciplines. He writes:

It should be clear... that if logic has been invented to be used by the other disciplines, then this logic which (the scholastics) teach, which cannot be put to use by the other disciplines, must be no logic at all<sup>86</sup>.

This is indicative of Vives' acceptance of the idea that education should provide useful knowledge and skills. However, in arguing for a move from scholasticism, Vives did not simply advocate a return to classicism, along humanist lines. Vives offered many subject areas including philosophy, history and natural sciences, attempting to present them in a way which demanded more of teachers than repetition of "dreary trivialities" and which tried



to engage students in a more active fashion than rote-learning and *imitatio* allowed.

As has been seen, Vives' curriculum for early education concentrates on language acquisition and basic linguistic proficiency. In his section on higher studies, he reiterates the importance of languages, which are "the gates of all sciences and arts"<sup>87</sup>. From Book IV onwards *De tradendis* deals with the arts and sciences which he believes are necessary to the education of a young man. Although hostile to scholasticism, Vives does not deny the usefulness of logic as a means of investigation. It was to be studied, with languages, once the pupil was past the elementary stage. Students were to learn to employ "critical dialectic"<sup>88</sup>, or logical proof (although Vives warns against the exemplar of Aristotle's *Prior Analytics* because much of it is obscure and unnecessary<sup>89</sup>). Teachers are to set pupils disputational tasks commensurate with their abilities, but practice in logic "should not arouse a desire for competition... It would be wiser for the teacher to conduct his pupils' studies by means of questions rather than by wordy arguments, for at this stage the pupils have not usually sufficient material knowledge about which to argue."<sup>90</sup> Once more Vives' educational prescriptions are marked by practical advice and by his recognition of pupils' maturational levels. Particularly he advises use of Socratic questioning as being "very useful not only for induction but also for sharpening wits"<sup>91</sup>. Rules of logic are to be applied to other branches of knowledge with the aim of rejecting what is inconsistent (as measured against a given premise).

Thereafter the teacher should introduce students to knowledge of nature. Again, Vives emphasises the need for a hierarchy of complexity: initially study of natural philosophy is more straightforward than study of "an abstract subject dealing with the experiences of life"<sup>92</sup>. This is because knowledge of nature can be acquired with the "natural senses" whereas abstract intellectual study requires "knowledge in many subjects of life, experience", and it necessitates having "a good memory"<sup>93</sup>. Study of nature can allow for

more direct contact between subject and student; pupils can observe and experiment using their senses to collect data from which they can abstract findings about the natural world. Characteristically, Vives uses his theories of psychology in making these suggestions, as when he cautions:

What we know of nature has been gained partly through the senses, partly through imagination, though reason has been at hand as a guide to the senses; on this account we have gained knowledge in few subjects and in those sparingly, because of those shadows which envelope and oppress the human mind. For the same reason what knowledge we have gained can only be reckoned as probable and not assumed as absolutely true.<sup>94</sup>

Thus, the first precept of nature study which should be understood by students (*contra* Aristotle and Pliny) is that certain knowledge of nature cannot be gained. However, enquiry should yield knowledge suited to the "necessities of life", to physical and mental benefit, or to the "increase of reverence"<sup>95</sup>. Curiosity alone is not enough.

Students are to begin their enquiries into natural philosophy with "those things" which are "evident to the senses. For senses open up the way to all knowledge"<sup>96</sup>. While students are to be given some general exposition by the teacher on aspects of nature such as the heavens and the elements, Vives comments that in such studies "there is no disputation necessary; there is nothing needed but the silent contemplation of Nature"<sup>97</sup>. A rudimentary form of empirical study is advocated, and while he recommends texts on natural philosophy (Strabo, Ptolemy, Dioscorides, Theophrastus, Pliny, Purbach,) he intends the reading to be underpinned by personal observation of nature<sup>98</sup>. In his "insistence on a direct confrontation between mind and nature", Vives is "implying a new standard of 'truth' emerging in new applied sciences... serving utilitarian ends"<sup>99</sup>.



## Disputation and first philosophy

Vives defined "first" philosophy as "an examination of the connexions of things, and of all the functions which arise from the very essence of anything"<sup>100</sup>. Students should study Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (though he warns against its obscurity) and *De auditu physico*, and Boethius' *Method of definition and division*<sup>101</sup>. Study of philosophy will allow students to rise above sensate knowledge to analysis of "causes" and "first principles"<sup>102</sup>. Vives states again that study of philosophy rests upon sensate knowledge and perception and that, from this, students can become more analytical and attempt to gain some insight as to the essences of things (though certain knowledge of essences is impossible) in an effort to learn about the "inner system of nature"<sup>103</sup>. In trying to move beyond recognition of an object's appearance, and in order to discover more of the "inner system", students are to be taught to collect evidence in support of arguments about what constitutes 'knowledge' or 'truth'. This moves Vives into the area of dialectic and his preferred textbook for study of this subject is Rudolph Agricola's *Dialectica*. Students must practise arguing a case and the teacher must assess their skills.

Dialectic leads Vives into discussion of the study of rhetoric and it is clear from *De tradendis* that his course of higher study is firmly oriented towards humanist ideals in its core subjects: classical languages, dialectic and rhetoric. Humanist ideals are also evident in many of the statements in *De tradendis* regarding the functions of learning. For instance, with rhetoric Vives argues that the function

is not directed to any empty use of words; that they be accounted beautiful and splendid kinds of speech; that they may be elegant and connected by a pleasant style of composition: but that we should not speak impurely and inaccurately and... we should speak so that it may be made clear that this most powerful of arts is a part of practical wisdom.<sup>104</sup>



The purpose of rhetoric is to convince, teach, and arouse listeners by the use of words "and the conceptions in them"<sup>105</sup>. Vives writes that students, while preparing an oration, should consider their own personalities and those of the audience in order to increase the effectiveness of the oration. They also need to consider the purpose of the speech in order to choose rhetorical techniques to produce the requisite effects.

In *De ratione studii*, oratory is the subject to which Erasmus devotes most attention. He retains a strict conception of what comprises 'formal oratory': for example, students are to practise "a declamation in praise of Socrates, or a denunciation of Caesar"<sup>106</sup>. A student is to be

led to consider the various methods by which he may adorn his treatment of the argument, such as simile and contrast, parallel cases, moral reflection, adages, anecdotes, parables, and so on; and he should have some guidance in choice of figure and metaphor... In regard to the logical ordering of argument as a whole, the student should be taught to attend to the niceties of exposition - the exordium, the transition, the peroration; for each of these has its own peculiar excellence, and each, moreover, admits of merit not only of precision but also of elegance.<sup>107</sup>

The central texts for both Erasmus and Vives are Cicero's *De oratore* and Quintilian's *Institutio oratorio*. Vives widens this area of study to include a general account to be given by the teacher of a theory of linguistics, explaining "in what manner languages arose, developed and decayed; how the power, nature, riches, elegance, dignity, beauty, and other special virtues for discourse of each language should be estimated"<sup>108</sup>.

## Mathematics, the sciences and history

Vives next turns his attention to the mathematical arts which he calls "silent" and contemplative, concerned with "quantity and number" and which are "theoretical and practical"<sup>109</sup>. Arithmetic and geometry are the "simplest" of the mathematical arts and give rise to astronomy, optics, perspective, and music. However, Vives states that students with poor memories are not suited to study mathematics (which requires remembering series and proofs). Most students, though, will learn arithmetic which "not only tests the understanding, but also sharpens it and makes it keener. No part of life can be devoid of the use of numbers"<sup>110</sup>. Vives recommends using James Faber's work on theory and practice of arithmetic<sup>111</sup>, as he does Cuthbert Tunstall's work<sup>112</sup>.

Geometry is to be taught after arithmetic, utilising Euclid and Thomas Bradwardine. At a more advanced level, astronomy is suggested because it

concerns itself with the number, magnitude and motion of the heavens and constellations, in all their aspects, singly and in combination. The study of astronomy should not be applied to the divination of the future or to that of hidden things. For this kind of application draws human minds with consummate vanity, and gradually lures them to impiety.<sup>113</sup>

Vives goes on to say that astronomy should enable the description and determination of time and of seasons, as well as determining position and working out distance. This is, he points out, "absolutely necessary to the general theory of navigation"<sup>114</sup>

Vives intends his curriculum of the mathematical arts to be studied in later youth (up to the age of twenty-five). It is at this stage of 'higher' education that Vives thinks it important for students to begin the study of man's soul. The teacher should present the following authors



for study: Aristotle (*De anima*), Alexander, Themistius, Plato, and Plotinus. Study of the soul exercises

a most helpful influence on all kinds of knowledge, because our knowledge is determined by the intelligence and grasp of our minds, not by the things themselves. The treatment of the development of knowledge within our souls will proceed parallel with the order of nature itself; first the discussion should be of life..., in general, then of vegetation, sensation, the feelings and the intellect, which may be said to consist of diverse functions, e.g. intelligence, memory, reason and judgment.<sup>115</sup>

Vives envisages students as learning about the soul, having dealt with physiology, so that the intellectual process might be researched and man understood as part of the natural world.

Some students - particularly those wishing to become doctors - may want to study natural history to try to grasp "the idea of causation in nature", by which is meant "changes which are more clearly visible to the senses"<sup>116</sup>. Reading should consist of Aristotle's eight books of physics, Cicero's *De natura deorum*, Plutarch's *De placitis philosophicum*, Galen, and Albertus Magnus (though Vives includes this last with reservations for "he ventures to assert some very dangerous views"<sup>117</sup>). To begin with, the teacher is to supervise students' reading of these texts and should select excerpts from them in order to "put together for his pupils a work supplying the foundations of Nature study with such clearness and brevity of method as to enable them to clearly comprehend... "<sup>118</sup> Vives remarks that natural philosophy is important for those who intend to study medicine: from "nature-knowledge" arise the subjects of "dietetics" and "Medicine proper"<sup>119</sup>. He regards medicine and dietetics as related fields:

When we have acquired a knowledge of the powers and natures of things, and compared together other living beings, especially (comparing them) with the nature and constitution of the human body, we see what is stronger than the interior of the human body can bear, as well as what is too small and weak to strengthen the



body, and to sustain it; what substance brings to the body that tone or quality which is alien or inimical to it, and, if it is taken into the body, leads to its great affliction, or pains and sufferings of the most grievous kind. We see, on the other hand, what is congruent... to the life of the body, to its senses, mind, intellect, i.e. what will preserve it... and confirm it in strength... (W)hat is suitable to... man, in common, must be considered. Then, the individual man must be studied in particular aspects and relations, e.g. as to age, place, time, activity. manners and habits. Similar observation is necessary with regard to the foods which satisfy his needs.<sup>120</sup>

Briefly, mention should be made of Vives' ideas on the study of history and related disciplines. Older students are to read historical works to learn about the course of history, and Vives suggests: Antonius Sabellicus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Livy ("a very painstaking author"), Polybius and Tacitus<sup>121</sup>. The Bible should be read as an historical work, specifically Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Chronicles, Kings and the Apocrypha. Although historical study ought to begin while one is a student, Vives regards it as a lifelong pursuit. He thought it important to study not just classical history but church history (Eusebius, Bede, Isidore), the history of Europe since the fall of the Roman Empire, and the lives of the saints. For this purpose he names modern writers (Trithemius, Bruni, Valla<sup>122</sup>) including those whose work is in vernacular (Valera, Froissart, Monstrelet, Philip de Comines<sup>123</sup>).

"Interwoven" with the teaching of history are to be the "precepts of training for both public and private life", that is, moral philosophy<sup>124</sup>. At this advanced level, moral philosophy supports reason in opposition to the emotions; for this purpose, the

whole man must be understood, from within and without. Within the mind are the intellect and emotions. We must know by what things the emotions are aroused and developed, by what things on the other hand they are restrained, calmed, removed. This enables a man "to know himself"... <sup>125</sup>

Vives proceeds to elucidate how "the passions of the mind should be subordinated to the

authority and judgment of Reason"<sup>126</sup>. This might be said to be the culmination of his curriculum which began at the earliest stages of language learning.

## Conclusion

What is contained in *De tradendis disciplinis* is a more comprehensive scheme of studies than given by Vives' renaissance contemporaries or predecessors. Criticism can be levelled at the very comprehensiveness of his educational programme, but it should be borne in mind that until the eighteenth century it was assumed that an educated man could become reasonably competent in a wide range of disciplines. In addition, having now looked at his course of studies for boys and young men, it can be seen how limited was his educational plan for girls and women.

It has been argued that in many ways *De tradendis* is more advanced than similar works by humanist authors: in its scope, its frequent references to pedagogical technique and the teacher's role as it relates to each subject area, and in the application of Vives' knowledge of psychology to the process of learning. However, at heart, *De tradendis* is firmly humanistic and rests upon the belief in a utilitarian education which can tame the emotions by the development of rationality. Vives writes that having acquired knowledge men must "turn it to usefulness, and employ it for the common good"<sup>127</sup>. Moreover, he stresses practical wisdom, stating that it arises from judgement and experience. He explains: "Experience is either personal knowledge gained by our action, or the knowledge acquired by what we have seen, read, heard of, in others. Where either of these sources is lacking a man cannot be practically wise."<sup>128</sup>



Apart from the psychological aspects of his work, a noteworthy aspect of Vives' pedagogy is his insistence on the use of experience and experiment to support the conclusions of reason and study. His rejection of *á priori* knowledge is part of a general humanist criticism of Aristotle and of medieval dialectic. But incorporated in Vives' curriculum is some active involvement by pupils in learning, and the advocacy of an early form of empirical research which is a precursor to scientific experiment. In this aspect of his method there is clearly argument for the use of

utilitarian, experimental tasks... The emphasis is... explicitly on the authority of reason as formed by contact with nature, not on the verbal authority of the ancients; words are now to be considered subordinate to the 'things' of experience. Vives heralds a whole revolution in educational thinking, where reason, working on the stuff of experience, becomes the court of ultimate appeal rather than a reason ('judgment') which is confined to the assimilation, harmonization and deployment of past authorities<sup>129</sup>.

Having said that, it is in the field of psychology, and the application of his psychological theory to education, that Vives' work was at its most original, and his investigation into the soul will be the focus of the next chapter.

*De anima et vita* was to have some influence, directly and indirectly, on a number of authors. This influence will be analysed in chapters seven and eight, with reference to the work of Pierre Gassendi, René Descartes and John Locke. Vives' text provides an interesting indicative stage in the development of scientific method in terms of its advocacy of empirical observation. It is perhaps overstated to term Vives the "father of modern psychology" as Foster Watson did<sup>130</sup>, but *De anima et vita* was in advance of contemporary discussions of the intellect and may provide one link between the development of modern understanding of psychology (particularly educational psychology) and the concepts of mind as evinced by Aristotle, the Church Fathers and Galen.



## Chapter 6: Soul as mind: Vives and psychological function

The history of discourse on the human character may be summarized under two great headings: “Nature” and “Spirit”. Beneath the former we find naturalism, stoicism, materialism, and, ultimately, scientific determinism and logical positivism. Below the latter are the near opposites of these: spiritualism, idealism, transcendentalism, psycho-logical indeterminism, and Romanticism. Every century or so the terms change but the essential positions remain stubbornly constant. In the Hellenistic period, the controversy was over the reality of Platonic *Ideas*. Among the scholastics, this controversy surfaced in the form of the Nominalist-Realist antagonism. In the individualistic climate of the Renaissance, it becomes a battle between neo-Platonists and Aristotelians. In the twentieth century, the labels are “Behaviourism” and “Mentalism”; in the eighteenth and nineteenth, “Empiricism” and “Idealism”.<sup>1</sup>

So much for labels, then. But if the terms of the debate have remained “stubbornly constant” what were those terms from the Hellenistic age to the Renaissance? Specifically, what aspects were there to the study of ‘psychology’ and how did they develop in the work of certain influential authors (such as Plato and Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas) and which of these aspects were retained and developed by Luis Vives?

When Vives wrote *De anima et vita* (in 1538) the ‘soul’ was still regarded as the province of philosophy. At least this was the view propounded in most philosophical rhetoric. The reality was that other disciplines into which study of the soul would eventually fall were

imprecise. Medicine was rooted in folkloric remedy; physiology was inexact. Medical practice rested upon Hippocratic texts, Galen's work, and on a variety of local traditions. The study of the soul was rarely treated as coming within the province of medicine. Such study was more the field of the philosopher and theologian than of the doctor. There remained the legacy of the Aristotelian commonplace that it was the 'duty' of the "physical philosopher to reflect on first principles of disease and health"<sup>2</sup>. Aristotle explains that "most inquirers into nature, and those doctors who pursue their craft with scientific interest, are alike. For the former at the end of their inquiries reach a discussion of medicine, while the latter begin their investigations into medicine with an inquiry into nature."<sup>3</sup>

In the sixteenth century a shift becomes discernible from the classical view that philosophy was the means to cure the soul's ills. Gradually, study of the soul came to be seen as being within the scope of biology/physiology, and ultimately of a definable medico-scientific field ('psychology'). As with all progressions the shift was not strictly linear; elements of what might be termed 'psychology' can be found in classical authors, in the Church Fathers, in Galen and Avicenna. Even use of the term *psychology* itself is fraught with difficulty. In this thesis the term is used in relation to Vives' analysis of the soul in *De anima et vita*, although he did not use the term himself. It is used to denote his theory of the soul because the focus of his work is the study of the intellectual and emotional manifestations of the operations of the soul. Arguably, it is apt to regard such a study as one of psychological function and thus of psychology. The earliest use of the term may date to Philipp Melanchthon who used the word psychology, *circa* 1530, as the title of a series of academic letters<sup>4</sup>. Melanchthon is also to be noted for his underpinning of pedagogy with psychological theory. Indeed, as Eckhard Kessler points out, "Melanchthon's psychology differs greatly from the usual commentaries on the soul and resembles instead the treatise *De anima et vita* of Juan Luis Vives with which it was published several times."<sup>5</sup> However Kessler, writing with Katherine Park<sup>6</sup>, argues that the earliest example of the term psychology (*psychologia*) dates to 1575 and its use by

Joannes Freigius<sup>7</sup>. This debate notwithstanding, what is relevant for this study is the shift towards psychology (defined as the study of the intellectual and emotional manifestations of the 'soul') as empirical study of man, and as the underpinning of pedagogy.

To put Vives' work in context there will follow a discussion of various treatments of the study of the soul, from Hellenistic times through the Medieval era and the writing of the Church Fathers. Thereafter, *De anima et vita* will be considered and, as with *De tradendis disciplinis* in the previous chapter, the method will be largely expository. This will allow for explanation of Vives' concept of psychology, firstly to detail the contents and elements of empiricism, secondly to illustrate in what ways his psychology may be said to have led him to develop his pedagogy in the way that he did (see Chapter 5). Finally, it will permit continued analysis of the study of psychology as evinced by Gassendi, Descartes and Locke (all of whom were influenced, directly or indirectly, by Vives).

### **The concept of soul pre-Aristotle**

[Before Homer] the Greeks in all probability had a word for the free soul that was gradually replaced by the life soul, identified by the *psyche* or "breath", and that at the same time started to lose its purely physical function. In Homer we meet this process at a halfway stage. *Psyche* has already absorbed the role of the free soul as the soul of the dead, but it has not lost all of its original function as breath. It was to be some centuries before *psyche* developed completely into a unitary soul.<sup>8</sup>



Jan Bremmer comments<sup>9</sup> that in Homer the term '*psyche*' has no psychological connotations. Around the eighth century B.C. Homer, like Hesiod, conceived of the soul as residing in the body but did not invest the concept with the psychological implications which it had in Aristotle's *De anima*. Bremmer explains (following Ernst Arbman) that Homer distinguishes between 'free' soul equating with the term *psyche* (which represents individual personality) and a 'body' soul equating to the terms *thymos*, *nous* and *menos* (which endows the body with life)<sup>10</sup>. The *psyche* is mentioned in Homer when a person is undergoing crisis. In this respect *psyche* is identified as part of the person: when a person faints (for example, through pain) *psyche* leaves the body, then re-enters once consciousness is restored. At death, the *psyche* leaves the body and goes to Hades. However, the term as used by Homer does not fully equate with the concept of 'life breath'. What can be said is that Homer describes where the *psyche* leaves the body forever thus resulting in the death of the body<sup>11</sup>.

It seems to have been the free soul, in the form of *psyche*, which was identified by early Greeks as the soul of the dead. Again, this had no psychological connotations; *psyche* was merely distinguished from *menos*, *nous* and *thymos*. It was this free soul which was capable of afterlife. A concomitant belief was that the *psyche* was represented as an *eidolon* which looked like the living person. The free soul was accepted as being capable of leaving the body during life ('bilocation'), events which "reportedly took place in antiquity". For example, it was said of Pythagoras that "he was seen in Croton and Metapontum at the same hour on the same day, a feat later imitated by Apolonius of Tyana who was seen in Smyrna and Ephesos on the same day"<sup>12</sup>. Stories of bilocation demonstrate belief in the possibility of a free soul appearing in the form of an *eidolon*.

However the situation is not as clearly defined as the discussion so far has made it seem. In the fifth century B.C., according to Plato, Socrates writes about the epistemological

aspects surrounding the soul. By this time the soul was being regarded as the site of intellect although it was a somewhat protean concept: 'soul' continued to encapsulate more aspects of functioning than the intellectual. In classical times 'soul' was regarded as Aquinas would later regard it - as the "root principle" of life<sup>13</sup>. Intellectual functioning would be an increasingly important aspect of 'soul', particularly as it would affect the changing nature of psychological study. (For the remainder of this chapter, where 'soul' is used to refer specifically to intellect, this will be made explicit.)

As to the spiritual aspects of soul, Socrates' conception of it was a sophisticated version of Orphism which taught that the soul predates the body but becomes imprisoned in it through sin. Death liberates the soul so that it might return to the Gods<sup>14</sup>. In Socrates' descriptions the soul is an ethereal essence. Thus, "the whole point of life turns out to be the soul's readiness for its own liberation, its own next incarnation."<sup>15</sup> The epistemological aspects of Socrates' discussion of soul are advanced when he denies the epistemological validity of sensate knowledge. In so doing he appeals to the Protagorean approximation of epistemological authority: man is the measure of all things. This is, as Daniel N. Robinson argues, "an early form of the so-called *incorrigibility* thesis, according to which each percipient enjoys unimpeachable epistemic authority as regards his own experiences"<sup>16</sup>. If sensate knowledge is veridical only to the individual percipient, it follows that sensate knowledge cannot be said to be generally veridical. Therefore, Socrates' position is that perceived reality is an illusion. The realm of 'truth' is the province of the soul and this realm is beyond sensate experience. But there is a proviso to this: what universal truth is able to be known at all must be 'known' by the soul. Socrates concludes that philosophical wisdom is the "proper aim of the soul"<sup>17</sup>. Robinson effectively summarises Plato's account of Socrates' argument in the *Thaetetus*, to which he refers. However, it is notoriously difficult to ascertain in the Platonic dialogues what thought belongs to Socrates and what to



Plato. (Consequently, in the ensuing discussion of the *Thaetetus*, the reference shall be to Plato/Socrates.)

In the *Thaetetus*, Plato has Socrates seemingly reach the following conclusion in response to Thaetetus' assertion that "knowledge is simply perception"<sup>18</sup>: "my perception is true for me - because it is always a perception of that being which is peculiarly mine; and I am judge, as Protagoras said, of things that are, that they are, for me; and of things that are not, that they are not."<sup>19</sup> The *Thaetetus* is primarily a treatise on the nature of knowledge, although even Plato/Socrates cannot give an answer to the question "What is knowledge?" In the dialogue we learn what Plato/Socrates thinks knowledge is not (perception, 'true' judgement, true judgement with the "addition of an account"<sup>20</sup>). There is little mention of the soul in this: what is stated is that the soul gains knowledge through learning and study. This link between the soul and the act of knowing is hardly developed, nor is an explicit argument evolved for the soul being the seat of, or agent of, cognition. The nearest that Plato/Socrates comes to this is to state that knowledge should not be sought in sense perception "but in whatever we call that activity of the soul when it is busy by itself about the things which are"<sup>21</sup>. The soul is also quite clearly cited as the receiver of sense perception.

In Plato's work there is a definite, if rudimentary, connection between the soul, acts of cognition, and perception as the means by which knowledge is received. Plato/Socrates uses the metaphor of wax to explain the differences in perception and learning capacity between individuals:

...I want you to suppose, for the sake of the argument, that we have in our souls a block of wax, larger in one person, smaller in another, and of purer wax in one case, dirtier in another... We make impressions upon this of everything we have seen or heard or thought... ; we hold the wax under our perceptions and thoughts and take a stamp from them, in the way in which we



take the imprints of signet rings. Whatever is impressed in the wax we remember and know so long as the image remains in the wax; whatever is obliterated or cannot be impressed, we forget and do not know.<sup>22</sup>

Plato uses the extended metaphor of wax as an approximation of how the soul receives sense impressions. As will be demonstrated in this and subsequent chapters, the wax metaphor was one which was to remain in use in the age of Locke having been used hitherto as the most common approximation of how sense impressions are retained by the intellect/soul. Plato, in developing the metaphor, has Socrates speak at times as if this soul 'wax' is a reality. Wax is not the only referent used in the *Thaetetus* to convey how perception leads to learning but there is no attempt as yet at a physiological or psychological explanation of perception and cognition, nor of what part the soul (intellect) plays in the biological processes attendant in cognition. The discussion of the soul, knowledge and perception in the *Thaetetus* largely centres on semantics: explanation of the unknown (the soul and its functions) is derived from comparison of it to the known (the soul to wax, cognates to birds in an aviary<sup>23</sup>). The *Thaetetus* is, in the first instance, a philosophical discussion of epistemology; any discussion of the soul is therefore conducted in philosophical terms and is secondary to the epistemological purpose.

Plato also mentions the soul in the *Phaedo*, *Republic*, *Timaeus* and *Phaedrus*. In the *Phaedo*, soul is discussed as both life force and cognitive source though the discussion remains vague: soul is a quasi-substance which is not a property of body. Plato has Socrates refer to the human soul

sometimes as a counter-person, sometimes as an intellectual principle, sometimes as a life-bringer or life-principle, and perhaps in one passage even as a formal property (with intermediate status?) entailing life. But a fifth view remains to be distinguished. This has much in common with the view of soul as a counter-person, but is couched in more material terms. On this view the soul is something like... a ghost, which can

influence and be influenced by the bodily, and is the body's exact non-material replica.<sup>24</sup>

So, for Plato, the soul is still spoken of as an *eidolon*, even amidst dialogues which refer to it as having cognitive function. Moreover, in the *Republic*, Plato broadens the functions of the soul to include moral propensities - the “congenital evil” of the soul can militate against it being ‘just’. The result is a person displaying “injustice, licentiousness, cowardice, and ignorance”<sup>25</sup>. For Plato, the “vicious” soul

is the soul at its most limited and unrecognizable; but any soul still attached to a body... is to that degree “tainted,” in at least the minimal sense that the cares and distractions of the bodily generally divert its attention to some degree from those activities which are claimed to be the natural ones of soul in its pure state. In book five [of the *Gorgias*] a distinction is drawn between pure being, absolute non-being, and an intermediate state, the objects of “knowledge”, “ignorance”, and “opinion” respectively... The object of “opinion” is stated to be the world known to us by sense-perception; it is a world of fluid and shifting existence, with only a fleeting hold on reality, a world opined rather than known... <sup>26</sup>

Thus, Plato's concept of the soul contained many elements and the disparate aspects of his work are spread over many works rather than contained in a sustained dialogue on the nature of the soul. Such a sustained treatment comes with Aristotle's *De anima*, though the following works also have relevance to Aristotle's concept of soul: *De sensu*, *De somnis* and *De memoria*. Aristotle's work was to exert powerful influence upon subsequent analyses of the soul and its functions from the classical period through medieval and renaissance texts.

## Aristotle: what the soul is

The scope of *de anima* is much broader than either contemporary philosophy of mind or contemporary philosophical psychology. It is a metaphysical inquiry into the ontology of *psuche* and *nous*; it is philosophical psychology, a general analysis of the activities of *psyche*; it is philosophical bio-psychology, an investigation of the teleologically organized functions that are common to living bodies. It has sometimes been classified with metaphysics in a group of works on natural philosophy, and sometimes more narrowly with the physical and biological treatises.<sup>27</sup>

Amélie Oksenberg Rorty's summation of Aristotle's concerns in *De anima* aptly conveys the difficulties inherent in attempting to define Aristotle's psychology. Even to use 'psychology' in its broadest definition - the study of mind - is not straightforward. The connotations surrounding the concept of mind in the twentieth century are very different from those which Aristotle would have understood. Indeed, after Descartes, the concept of mind altered in ways which took it beyond the understanding of renaissance thinkers reliant upon Aristotelianism and Galenism. Today we site mind (intellect) in the brain, to the extent that we cannot separate the two: intellect is, by some process, a product of brain function. The brain is understood to be what enables us to reason and intellectualise. If we think of 'soul' nowadays it is in an ephemeral way, linked to the religious and the afterlife. However, just as today we equate mind with brain, Aristotle (and renaissance and scholastic thinkers) equated mind with a soul (*psyche*) which resided in the body.



For Aristotle, soul has three functions: nutritive, sensitive and cognitive. (This discussion will concentrate on the cognitive function as described by Aristotle, but in so doing will also deal with sense perception.) We have seen that the mind-soul equation was not always a common concept in classical Greek thought. Much as our idea of the mind-brain relationship developed so did that with which Aristotle was familiar: that the soul is “substance *qua* form of a natural body which has life potentially. Substance is actuality. The soul, therefore will be the actuality of a body of this kind”<sup>28</sup>. Let us turn first to Aristotle’s general conception of soul before dealing with his view of its functions and the part it plays in cognition.

Aristotle wrote (in *De partibus animalium*):

[Of] things constituted by nature some are ungenerated, imperishable, and eternal, while others are subject to generation and decay. The former are excellent beyond compare and divine, but less accessible to knowledge... Both departments, however, have their special charm. the scanty conceptions to which we can attain of celestial things give us, from their excellence, more pleasure than all our knowledge of the world in which we live. On the other hand, in certitude and completeness our knowledge of terrestrial things has the advantage... Absence of haphazard and conduciveness of everything to an end are to be found in Nature’s works... <sup>29</sup>

Herein lies the paradox of Aristotle’s study of the soul: the incorporeal aspects of the ‘soul’ belong with the “ungenerated, imperishable, and eternal” things of which we can have scant knowledge<sup>30</sup>. Yet ‘soul’ (*psyche*), which Aristotle states is the “first principle of animal life”<sup>31</sup>, is always *in* living matter (which is perishable). He seems to argue that knowledge of the terrestrial can be achieved with some certitude, while knowledge of the imperishable and eternal must remain incomplete. This does not prevent him from embarking on an enquiry into the soul in which he will speak of activities which are common to the soul and body, and others which are proper to the soul alone. He will tend

to equate 'soul' with consciousness and the body with that which is not conscious<sup>32</sup>. He will seek to separate aspects of bodily function from those of the soul, as will Vives. Underpinning Aristotle's theory is an *a priori* belief in the soul's existence: mental phenomena are experienced in the body and may ultimately be inseparable from corporeal function. But this challenges belief in an incorporeal cognitive agent. If such an agent (that is, *psyche*) is the accepted starting point of a discussion of cognition, a mind-matter dichotomy will be apparent.

Mind-body dualism has consequences even for the form of Aristotle's discussion: his enquiries into the soul are conducted in philosophical terms (as with Plato). Aristotle ascribes the study of the nature of the soul to the scope of the natural philosopher. The fact that Aristotle's method of inquiry is philosophical has specific effects upon his conclusions as to the nature and function of the soul. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty assesses the situation in this way:

By Aristotle's lights, a scientific explanation of natural phenomena focuses on their invariable and universal features... Philosophical ethics analyses the teleology and the structure of well-formed action (*praxis*). But since its subject matter is contingent and particular, it can at best provide qualified generalizations about 'what is true for the most part'.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, the biological functions as explained in *De anima* are not dealt with in the same way as are the psychological manifestations of the soul. Taking empirical methodology for granted, the modern perception of Aristotle's philosophical method of inquiry may well be that it is inappropriate for enquiry into an area such as psychology. For Aristotle there was no such perceived problem.

Aristotle's explicit task is to ascertain the ontological status of the soul and thereafter to delineate "all" the attributes of it<sup>34</sup>. It is noteworthy that Aristotle considered it possible to

enquire into the “*essence*” of psyche. This is a contention which Vives will reject. Aristotle conceded that there is no common procedure for determining the essence of things, but sets the remit of the enquiry as follows:

1. to “determine in which parts of the genera the soul is and what it is; I mean whether it is a particular thing and substance or quality or quantity... ”<sup>35</sup>;
2. to determine whether the soul exists in “potentiality” or in “actuality”, “for this makes no small difference”<sup>36</sup>;
3. to enquire whether the soul is divisible or indivisible “and whether every soul is of like kind or not; and if not of like kind, whether differing species or genus”<sup>37</sup>;
4. to enquire as to whether the human soul differs in definition from animals’ souls<sup>38</sup>.

Once we are able to give an account of all or most of the soul’s attributes as they appear to an observer, “then we shall be able to speak best about the essence”<sup>39</sup>. Here, then, is a hint of empiricism: the only way describe the essence of soul is to study its observable manifestations.

Briefly, the answers Aristotle gives to these areas of enquiry are:

1. “The soul must, then, be substance *qua* form of a natural body which has life potentially. Substance is actuality. The soul, therefore, will be actuality of a body of this kind”<sup>40</sup>;
2. “...the soul is actuality as knowledge is... ”<sup>41</sup> The soul is the “first actuality” of a natural body which “has life potentially”<sup>42</sup> and which “has organs”<sup>43</sup>;
3. “the soul or certain parts of it, if it is indivisible, cannot be separated from the body”<sup>44</sup>;
4. the soul is what is necessary for a body to be what it is (i.e. what makes a man a man, a dog a dog, etc.)<sup>45</sup>



Aristotle discusses five faculties of the soul in detail in *De anima*: the nutritive, sensory, intellectual, motive and desiderative. Apart from these faculties he details the functions and divides them into three categories: nutritive, sensory and cognitive. Man has all three functions; animals have the nutritive and sensitive functions; plants have only the nutritive function. If a thing has a soul, it lives (hence, for Aristotle, plants have a nutritive soul concerned with nourishment, growth and reproduction). Aristotle's definition of exhibiting life is where a thing displays intellect or perception, or rest in respect of place, or movement involved in nutrition, or decay and growth<sup>46</sup>. While animals and plants both live and are ensouled in some way, animals differ from plants in that they have sense perception. But as regards cognition, Aristotle thinks that "the intellect and the potentiality for contemplation" seem to belong to "a different kind of soul" from that which gives rise to nutritive and sensitive functions. It is this "intellectual" soul "alone [which] can exist separately" (that is, immaterially, without the body)<sup>47</sup>. His argument on this becomes unclear, however, with his statement that the "soul does not exist without a body and yet is not itself a kind of body"<sup>48</sup>. In this instance Aristotle appears to be referring to the nutritive and sensitive parts of the soul - he has just admitted that intellect 'seems' to be a different type of soul. In other words, he is not sure.

### **Sensation, sense perception and cognition**

Aristotle distinguishes two factors in sensation: body (*soma*) and soul (*psyche*). Sensation is "felt by the soul through the medium of the body"<sup>49</sup>. This 'fact' is "obvious" to Aristotle on "theoretical grounds" and also "apart from theory"<sup>50</sup> (so despite hints at empirical observation, theory has primacy). He does not speak of sense perception (*aisthesis*) in a

manner exactly congruent with the modern concept of 'sensation'. Aristotle means *aisthesis* to refer to "any capacity possessed by living animals for obtaining information concerning the outside world"<sup>51</sup>. The ten chapters in *De anima* dealing with sensation are perhaps the most clearly delineated aspect of this work. However, only those areas of his work on sensation which have direct relevance to cognition or acquisition of knowledge will be discussed. It must be stressed that, for Aristotle, the study of soul (mind) did not have primarily epistemological concerns.

Aristotle comments that the faculty of sense perception does not exist "by way of activity but by way of potentiality only"<sup>52</sup>. Perception is of particulars, in contrast with knowledge which is of universals. Universals, he writes, "are somehow in the soul itself"<sup>52</sup>. This seems not to be an argument for innate knowledge but rather a suggestion that the ability to gain knowledge is a property of the (intellectual) soul. Perception also requires an object which may be perceived whereas we can think whenever we wish, argues Aristotle (though he does not deal with the postulate that this still requires an object of thought). In animals, perception occurs *via* the senses. Sense is "that which can receive perceptible forms without their matter, as wax receives the imprint of the ring without the iron or gold..."<sup>54</sup> All animals perceive, but few think or understand.

If all information comes *via* sense perception, cognition must be dependent on sensate experience. Aristotle differentiates between perceiving and understanding, and between perceiving and thinking. Thought includes imagination and supposal<sup>55</sup>. He further distinguishes in this way: perception is potentiality and perceptions are "always true, while imaginings are for the most part false"<sup>56</sup>. Similarly, knowledge and intellect are "always correct"<sup>57</sup>. It is to be noted that Aristotle regards sense perception to be always true - consequently, because knowledge rests upon it, knowledge is also veridical. Belief, however, can be false. Yet, he claims that imagination "will be a movement taking place as



a result of actual sense-perception”<sup>58</sup> and even though imagination results from sense perception, imaginings are rarely true.

While the faculty of sense perception is dependent on the body. Aristotle argues that the intellect is distinct from the body; it exists “potentially”<sup>59</sup>. The part of the soul called “intellect” (the faculty of thinking and supposing) “is actually none of existing things before it thinks”<sup>60</sup>. Aristotle is here speaking of intellect as pure potentiality, actualised only when thinking takes place. This surely leads to the problem of suggesting that something (thought) can be created out of nothing (potential, but not actual, intellect)? Aristotle attempts to clarify: the intellect is “in a way potentially the objects of thought, although it is actually nothing before it thinks; potentially in the same way as there is writing on a tablet on which nothing actually written exists”<sup>61</sup>. This is a somewhat problematic analogy; the writing on a tablet does not exist potentially *in* the tablet. The words are formed and have actuality first in the mind of the writer who inscribes the tablet. This still does not explain how the words are thought by the writer’s intellect (especially if it only potentially exists).

The explanation of cognition becomes more confused when Aristotle writes: “Actual knowledge is identical with its object; but potential knowledge is prior in time in the individual but not prior even in time in general”<sup>62</sup>. There are three problems here. Firstly, the separation between ‘general’ time and time as it progresses in an individual. This is not a clear distinction. Secondly, how can actual knowledge be identical with its object (i.e. of perception)? This may be simply a semantic confusion surrounding Aristotle’s use of the term ‘identical’. Obviously, knowledge cannot be corporeal as is the perceptible object. So what does Aristotle mean by ‘identical’? Thirdly, by this argument, knowledge is existent potentially as a body of knowledge formed but not actual in the mind. If knowledge is identical with an actual perceptible object, how can it also exist potentially in the mind? Moreover, if this potential knowledge is *not* prior to time in general but *is* prior in time in



the individual, does the mind exist outwith time in general? Aristotle then states that “all things that come to be are derived from that which is so actually”<sup>63</sup>. This would seem to contradict his potentiality theory of knowledge.

## **Memory and recollection**

Before giving a summation of Aristotle’s theory of the soul, his discussion of memory will be addressed. Aristotle deals with this subject in the *Parva naturalia* asking to what part of the soul memory and recollection belong. He makes a distinction between the two faculties: people who have “good memories are not the same as those who are good at recollecting... [G]enerally speaking the slow-witted have better memories, but the quick-witted and those who learn easily are better at recollecting.”<sup>64</sup> On memory, Aristotle says that it is impossible to remember the future (this is ‘expecting’) nor can you remember the present (this is perception). Because Aristotle believes that memory cannot exist without a mental picture, he reasons that it must belong “incidentally to the thinking faculty” but in itself “to the first sense perception”<sup>65</sup>. Memory is the term for the part of the soul “to which imagination refers” because “all things which are mental pictures are in themselves subjects of memory, and those which cannot exist apart from imagination are only incidentally subjects of memory”<sup>66</sup>. Again, when describing how memories are retained. Aristotle resorts to the wax image: movement, produced in the soul by an affection, is made by an impression “just as when men seal with signet rings”<sup>67</sup>. For this reason, “the very young and the old have poor memories; they are in a state of flux, the young because of their growth, the old because of their decay”<sup>68</sup>. As a result there is nothing ‘static’ on which to impress the memory.

Recollection is “neither the recovery nor the acquisition of memory”<sup>69</sup>, though this process of recollecting “implies memory, and is followed by memory”<sup>70</sup> Recollection is the name given to the act whereby we ‘recover’ knowledge or sensation which we have had before. We collect one piece of a former impulse, then another linked piece, then another. (A rudimentary example of association which Vives expands on.)

### **Aristotle’s philosophy of mind: a summation**

Aristotle’s theory of soul is built upon a biology which is hardly acceptable today. The physiological and scientific assumptions which underpin his work on the soul appear to have little relevance to the modern reader. Ultimately, as Myles Burnyeat remarks: "Aristotle's philosophy of mind is no longer credible because Aristotelian physics is no longer credible, and the fact of that physics being incredible has quite a lot to do with there being such a thing as the mind-body problem as we face it today."<sup>71</sup> Some appreciation can be gained of how difficult Aristotle's task was in attempting to explain the functions of the soul if it is considered that with modern understanding of physics, biology and medicine, we still cannot satisfactorily resolve philosophical problems inherent in the mind-body complexity.

Many of the problems spoken of concerning Aristotle’s conjecture on the nature of *psyche* stem from what would today be termed his ignorance of physiology coupled with his use of a method which is an inappropriate means of exploring processes of perception and cognition. However, such criticism is from a post-Cartesian standpoint. Consequently, as regards ongoing questions about dualism,

Aristotle has for us a deeply alien conception of the physical. If we want to get away from Cartesian dualism, we cannot do it by travelling backwards to Aristotle, because although Aristotle has a non-Cartesian conception of soul, we are stuck with a more or less Cartesian conception of the physical. To be truly Aristotelian, we would have to stop believing that the emergence of life or mind requires explanation.<sup>72</sup>

Of course, Vives, pre-Descartes, would not be troubled by an inconsistency (dualism) which seems obvious post-Descartes. By Vives' era the emergence of life and intellect was explained by belief in God and a literal interpretation of Genesis. Man's mind reflected God's mind; it was a fraction of his perfection and the wax metaphor remained a commonplace. But during the Renaissance there was dissatisfaction with the Aristotelian explanation of the soul. While Vives would cling to remnants of Aristotle's theories, as he would cling to Galen's physiology, he was attempting an explanation not of what the soul was in its essence, but of observable functioning. But in Europe, between Aristotle and Vives, the soul was appropriated by the Christian church. A short discussion of the concept of soul in Augustine and Aquinas will now be given, as Vives was influenced as much by the thought of the Church Fathers as by Hellenistic philosophers.

### **Augustine and Aquinas on the nature of the soul**

For Augustine, the mind is the preeminent part of the soul. The *anima rationalis* is part of the mind and the will; the *anima irrationalis* is the seat of the faculties of sense perception, appetite and memory. (The latter is common to all animals; the former is found only in men.) He also refers to the existence of a 'vegetable' soul which is termed 'non-sentient' life. The concept of soul in Augustine's work is of an "immaterial, dynamic, unextended



and indivisible substance”<sup>73</sup>. He sees soul in terms of ‘life breath’ and distinguishes between the vegetative, sensitive and intellectual soul. According to Augustine’s reasoning, if a person is alive, then that person is aware that they have a soul. It is therefore the case that “though we do not perceive soul by means of any of the senses, we are nonetheless empirically aware that we have a soul because we are conscious of the fact that we are percipient beings... ”<sup>74</sup> However, while this might be an argument for belief in the existence of soul, it is far from an empirical justification for its existence, nor does it explain why human beings are capable of ratiocination. It is a rudimentary argument for individual existence, of the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* variety, but it is not an analysis of intellectual functioning.

Augustine argues that being (*esse*), together with living (*invere*) and thinking (*intelligere*), is one of three levels. (Intelligence is superior to the others.) But we do not perceive our being or our knowing with

any bodily sense, as we perceive things outside: colors by seeing, sounds by hearing, odors by smelling, flavors by tasting, hard things and soft by touching. Rather we treat images of these sensible things - images very similar to them, but no longer bodily - by thought, retain them by memory, and by their means are solicited to desire them. *But my being, my knowing... is most certain to me, not with any images or visions of a deceitful imagination, but certain and free from the deceptions of our imagination.* <sup>75</sup>

Augustine asserts, in a circular argument, that these ‘interior realities’ are self-evident and verifiable as true in themselves by dint of their self-evidence. That is, to be sure of existing one must exist. But this is not a reliable argument; simply because something appears to be self-evident there is no logical extrapolation which proves it to be ‘true’. Furthermore, the point that being is known with certainty is assertion and tells us nothing about cognitive processes involved in us being able to deduce rationally that we exist, and that we think.

As has been said, Augustine divided the soul into rational and irrational parts. The irrational soul can be disturbed by emotion and desire (that is, by *affections*). Augustine emphasises that it is the function of the rational soul to control the irrational aspects of its being. The soul is “fitted to the task of controlling the body” and in its power is “the direction of all the limbs” thus “affecting all bodily motions”<sup>76</sup>. He further divides the soul into functions which have different levels of activity: the lowest function is found in vegetative life (power of growth and self nourishment/preservation). Above this is the function which contains powers of sensory perception, movement, awareness, concentration, avoidance, dreaming, judgement, sexual instinct and memory. Above this is the rational level which comprises five activities: discursive reason, ethical activity, the level of ‘perfection’ (success over a moral struggle), and two activities of the ‘pure’ intellect (aspiration and achievement)<sup>77</sup>. The individual is expected to proceed through each of these five stages to the higher most superior part of the soul: “that by means of which we reason, comprehend, understand... is not the entire soul (*universa anima*), but some part of it.”<sup>78</sup> Only in this part of the rational soul can there be acquaintance (*agnito*) with God, and in the human mind is found to be an ‘image’ of God <sup>79</sup>.

Augustine grants that when a living body moves there is “no way revealed to our eyes by which to see the soul (*animus*), a thing which the eyes cannot see; but we perceive that there is something within that mass,... and that is life and soul (*anima*).”<sup>80</sup> The mind’s ability to think is taken as evidence of the soul’s incorporeality. Body and soul exist in symbiosis with the soul being

spread throughout the entire body which it animates, not through any local extension, but by a kind of vital tension; for it is simultaneously entirely present throughout all its parts, and is not smaller in the smaller parts or larger in the larger ones, but is in one place more tense and in another more slack, and is totally present, both in all and in the individual parts.<sup>81</sup>



In discussing the soul Augustine develops a theory of sense perception which is physiologically oriented, but he argues that sense perception is primarily a psychological process. As with Aristotle, Augustine considers the senses to be the mechanism whereby percepts are received. He explains that perception is an active process by which the soul is “moved” during the act of perception. Moreover the soul is “aware of its motions, or activities... when it perceives”<sup>82</sup>. Thus “perception is something directly undergone by the body of which the soul is aware”<sup>83</sup>. In order that percept images are retained, the memory operates instantly on perception, and memory impressions are stored for subsequent recall. Augustine writes (in *De Genesi ad litteram*):

For when something is seen by the eyes, an image of it is immediately (*continuo*) formed in the mind (*spiritus*)... Therefore, although we first see an object which we had not previously seen, and from that moment its image, by means of which we can recollect it when it is not there, begins to be in our mind (*spiritus*), it is not the object which produces that same image of it in the mind, but the mind itself which produces in itself with singular rapidity... as soon as [the object] has been seen with the eyes, its image is formed in the percipient’s mind before an instant of time has elapsed.<sup>84</sup>

Remembering is not grouped strictly with the memory; rather it is classed by Augustine as a type of imagining. The will directs

our senses to external objects, which we then perceive; in like manner, the will directs the mind towards the memory’s contents, and recollection occurs. The form (*species*) actualised in recollection and the memory-image appear to us as one: their distinction is purely conceptual.

This description is tantamount to saying that recollection is perceiving memory-images: in other words, that it is primarily concerned with actualizing memory-*traces*.<sup>85</sup>

It can be seen that Augustine’s account of the faculties of the soul is not based upon empirical observations but on philosophical argument. His account of the soul is



principally a spiritual one encapsulating his belief that the two principal subjects of inquiry in philosophy are God and the soul.<sup>86</sup>

Turning now to Aquinas, the predominance of philosophical enquiry is evident once again. A sustained discussion of soul is found in the *Summa Theologiae* (questions 75-83) but Aquinas' discourse on the nature of the soul and its functions is philosophical, examining what pertains to the essence of the soul, its power of acting, and its activities in general. Aquinas states that the soul is not corporeal, at once "non-material yet immattered"<sup>87</sup>. He gives a line of reasoning "by which it becomes plain that the soul is not corporeal":

[It] is obvious that not every principle of vital activity is a soul. Otherwise the eye would be a soul, since it is a principle of sight; and so with the other organs of the soul. What we call the soul is the root principle of life. Now though something corporeal can be some sort of principle of life, as the heart is for animals, nevertheless a body cannot be the root principle of life. For it is obvious that to be the principle of life, or that which is alive, does not belong to any bodily thing from the mere fact of its being a body; otherwise every bodily thing would be alive or a life-source... Therefore a soul, as the primary principle of life, is not a body but that which actuates a body.<sup>88</sup>

The act of understanding, "which is called the soul of man, must of necessity be some kind of incorporeal and subsistent principle"<sup>89</sup>.

According to Aquinas, understanding is a power of the soul. Human understanding is "in a state of potentiality in relation to what it can understand, and is initially *like a blank page on which nothing can be written*" (Aquinas cites Aristotle on this point). That this is so is "obvious from the fact that initially we are solely *able* to understand and afterwards we come actually to understand"<sup>90</sup>. Distinguishing the potentiality of what he terms the 'intellectual' soul from the objects of sense which "exist apart from the mind"<sup>91</sup>, he writes that an intellectual soul

is indeed actually non-material, but is in a state of potentiality as regards grasping the natures of things. Images, on the contrary, actually are likenesses of certain things grasped, but are only potentially non-material. Nothing can stop the same soul from having, because of its actual non-materiality, a power to dematerialize things by abstracting them from the conditions of material individuality - which power we call the abstractive intellect - while at the same time, because its being potentiality to such concepts, it has another power, receptive of them...<sup>92</sup>

The same criticisms of the potentiality theory applied earlier in this chapter to Aristotle apply to the argument as given by Aquinas. Moreover, in giving this argument Aquinas does not fully explain why or how he distinguishes between the two forms of understanding (potential understanding, defined as the ability to understand, and actual understanding).

Aquinas ranks the powers of the soul in a “threefold order”. The intellectual power has ascendancy over the sense powers, which in turn have ascendancy over the nutritive powers. There is also an ordering of the sense powers: sight, hearing and smell are arranged hierarchically<sup>93</sup>. The soul has five specific powers: vegetative, sensitive, appetitive, locomotive and intellective. Additionally, he describes the five senses and postulates the existence of internal senses (the 'common' sense, fantasy/imagination, instinct and memory)<sup>94</sup>.

However, the body is necessary to enable the intellect to function. Objects presented to the intellect come through the senses and sensation is a corporeal function. According to Aquinas, sensation occurs because a physical organ undergoes change when affected by a percept (for instance, colour “affects the pupil of the eye”<sup>95</sup> - in other words if the perceptible object is blue, the pupil of the eye takes on the blueness without actually becoming blue). He lists sensation as a power of the body-soul ‘composite’, as an act of the soul exercised through a corporeal organ, and explains that sensation and nourishment



“are said to be of the soul not as the subject of the powers, but as their source”<sup>96</sup>. Thus it is “because of the soul that the composite can carry out these activities”<sup>97</sup>. The operation of sense “requires a spiritual change, by which an intention of a sensible form comes to exist in a sense organ”<sup>98</sup>. A change is spiritual when “the form causing the change is received in the thing being changed according to a spiritual mode of being”<sup>99</sup>. What Aquinas seems to mean is that the sense organ receives a spiritual impression of the percept. But his thought lacks clarity here.

One other factor which Aquinas deals with must be mentioned: that of memory. This is defined by him as “the conservation of thoughts not actually being attended to”<sup>100</sup>. He notes that it is “essential to memory to be a... place of conservation for thoughts”<sup>101</sup>. The concept of memory as “memory of past things has its application in the intellectual order in that the understanding knows that it has previously understood something” although the understanding cannot grasp the past “in its here-and-now character”<sup>102</sup>. Generally, Aquinas distinguishes between the power of retention and the power of preservation. The imagination (‘fantasy’) is what retains and perceives forms. The estimative power apprehends forms not received through the senses, and the memory stores these forms.

It can be seen from these descriptions of Augustine’s and Aquinas’ concepts of soul that both men rely on Aristotle’s *De anima* for their idea of the essence and nature of soul. But as has been stated, their analyses of the intellect are philosophical and heavily influenced by their religious belief. Religion also affected Luis Vives’ concept of the immortality of the soul but, as shall now be explained, his remit was not to study the soul’s essence; rather, it was to study the observable functions and aptitudes which could be said to stem from the soul’s functioning.



## Vives' *De anima et vita*

The exceptional importance of Vives' treatise *De Anima et Vita* lies in the paradoxical fact that its content has little to do with the title of the book. *De Anima* does not say much about the soul itself, the nature of which it professes to ignore: "It is not important for us to know what the soul is, but it is essential to know which are its operations." We are even unable to know the operations themselves "and to define them in an absolute way"; Vives' real concern is to investigate "how these operations are conducive to the reform of our morals."<sup>103</sup>

It is not strictly correct to state, as Carlos Noreña does here, that the content of Vives' *De anima et vita* has "little to do with the title of the book". The comments from *De anima* to which Noreña directly refers are taken from Book 1, Chapter 12 (hereafter l.12) and the contents of Chapter 12 alone, far less the entire treatise, are not as simply summarised as Noreña suggests. Vives' concern with the reform of morals does not dictate the content of *De anima* which is an account of the soul's actions and activities (as far as can be deduced from observing external functioning of the organism). His underlying concern, it is true, is with self-knowledge because if men have self-knowledge they can govern their actions. Moreover, his comment (in *De anima* l.12) that we cannot declare what the soul is "directly" because the soul's essence is not placed before our sight, is a direct rebuttal of Aristotle's premise in his *De anima* that the essence of the soul can be described and understood<sup>104</sup>. (In this contention Vives had been somewhat pre-empted by Gregor Reisch, who stated in his work *Margarita philosophica* that "spiritual" substances "including the soul... cannot be perceived by the senses"<sup>105</sup>.) However, this does not mean that Vives ignores the nature of the soul, as Noreña argues: Vives writes that the soul must be observed in its corporeal

functions as the soul itself does not fall within the jurisdiction of our senses<sup>106</sup>. He therefore sets the parameters of his investigation (part introspection, part rudimentary empiricism, part reliance upon classical authority) and cautions that it is easy to infer what the soul is *not* and from there declare what the soul *is* <sup>107</sup>. He argues that it is futile to ask what the soul is in its essence but proceeds in *De anima et vita* to discuss its observable functions, the part played in cognition by the senses, and how the emotions ('passions') might affect the soul/intellect.

The introduction to *De anima et vita* outlines the topic. Vives writes that rational human life is preeminent among all life forms and that rationality lies between the spiritual and the corporeal<sup>108</sup>. In man, the "faculties of the senses" are "subordinate to the mind"<sup>109</sup>. His description of the basic functions of the soul have a distinctly Aristotelian ring. He speaks of the nutritive and generative faculties and delineates two instruments of the nutritive soul (heat and humidity)<sup>110</sup>. Heat, which is life's "vital principle"<sup>111</sup> preserves the soul in the body while corporeal functions (such as hunger and thirst) result from the nutritive by-product of heat. The generative faculty is universal to all living things<sup>112</sup>. Vives follows Aristotle's argument that plants have a vegetative soul, animals have both vegetative and sensitive souls (and also a form of interior consciousness). Humans have, in addition, cognitive abilities beyond sensitive information.

Vives argues that the soul is "clearly" an "active principle" essential for life in a body which is capable of living<sup>113</sup>. But *De anima et vita* is given over to dealing with the senses, rationality and emotion as they are directed by the soul or as they permit information to be processed by it. Before Vives looks at intellectual and emotional functioning, he must explain sensate functioning as far as he is able. Animals are aware of the world because of their senses. Plants are capable of sensate life as are animals, but plants lack consciousness, sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell<sup>114</sup>. Plant life is sensitive in that it grows, feeds and reproduces, but in this case the sensitive and nutritive aspects of life appear to be largely



similar in Vives' explanation. However, from what he goes on to say, sensate life is a class of 'being in the present'. Vives delineates three classes of consciousness:

1. that which only 'knows' in the present (sensation);
2. that which understands that which is 'missing';
3. that which understands mixed and combined things<sup>115</sup>.

This describes a hierarchy of consciousness - the lowest being a form of sensate awareness of existence which is not cognitive (which seems paradoxical to say the least).

Next Vives turns his attention to the five senses. He distinguishes between inner consciousness (operations of the soul) and the outer senses (the passive receivers of sensate information). In Book I he devotes time to explaining what is known from observation about each of the senses. He begins with sight. The exterior organs of sight are the eyes<sup>116</sup>, and, while Vives does not name the optic nerves, he states that the "interior organ" of sight "are (*sic*) two nerves which arrive to (the eyes) from the brain"<sup>117</sup>. It is not clear whether he means that one nerve goes to each eye, or that two nerves go to each eye. From dissection of ape's eyes, Galen described two nerves involved in vision. He named the optic nerve and although he described the oculomotor nerve he did not name it<sup>118</sup>. It may be that Vives is referring only to the optic nerve. Vives also states that the eyes work as mirrors do: both are concave in structure and receive an image, although the image reflected in the eye is far smaller than that reflected in a mirror. His physiological description is rudimentary and lacks first-hand knowledge of the internal structure of the eye. Moreover, he does not give as detailed an account of the eye as can be found in Galen. When Vives discusses sight he must do so by comparison (eye with mirror). In contrast, Galen bases his discussion on observation, utilising dissection, and postulates "two alternative pathways of the image to the optic nerve: one by pneuma via the lens and the retinal fibers, the other by light rays



directly and rectilinearly through the lens and the vitreous (humour)"<sup>119</sup>. Vives writes, on vision, that it is a "thing of wonder" that "something" may arrive from an object to the eyes with such speed that the image arrives at the eyes "in an instant": at the moment of perception of the image, the light illuminating the object travels "great distances"<sup>120</sup>.

In describing hearing, Vives comments that sound production is "difficult to explain"<sup>121</sup>. The exterior organ of hearing is, of course, the ear; internally, two nerves run from the ear to the brain. If two "bodies" are struck together, the impact produces sound by "pushing" the air which carries the sound as far as the ear. His best explanation for hearing is that awareness of sound is effected by the air which is pushed into the ear, confined there, and while it seeks a way out sound is produced much in the way air reverberating in a trumpet produces a note<sup>122</sup>. Vives here attempts an explanation of why we hear by referring to an empirical comparison, as he also does when discussing touch. (He comments that if something is put on the skin, the skin experiences sensation *via* the sense of touch<sup>123</sup>. Hence, touch must be disseminated in all the nerves of the body, particularly those of the flesh.)

Direct observation is further apparent when Vives speaks of the faculties of taste and smell (1.7/8). The "sensory organ of taste" is a "nerve which extends from the tongue, to which taste arrives conveyed in the saliva", (rather like touch being conveyed through the fingers)<sup>124</sup>. There is a need for saliva in order to taste properly; Vives notes that a dry mouth affects the taste of food, as when someone has a fever. Smell and taste have an affinity with each other; if something tastes good, it smells good, if it tastes bad it smells bad<sup>125</sup>.

Generally, Vives does not go into physiological detail about sensory perception because he does not have the medical background or the direct experience of dissection to enable him to do so. But he does discuss the organs of perception by comparison with the known and

observable, and he uses experience as a direct referent. He assigns a medium to each sensory perception: light to vision, air to audition, flesh to touch, saliva to taste. Noreña writes that "typical" of Vives' "careless style was the omission of the medium to be allocated to the olfactory sense"<sup>126</sup>. Noreña is here referring to *De anima* 1.9. However, in this chapter Vives argues that smell is a "force" of dense air, and that odour resides in the phenomenon of evaporation. He explicitly states that "smell is aerial"<sup>127</sup>. Furthermore, he devotes an entire chapter to each of the senses including the olfactory<sup>128</sup>.

On how sense impressions are received by the soul Vives comments that they are specifically dealt with by the faculties of imagination and memory. He writes that images which are "impressed" upon the senses are received by the imagination which retains them, though memory also serves for image retention<sup>129</sup>. There is a third faculty termed "fantasy" (*"fantasia"*) and Vives says that there are many who confuse imagination with fantasy, using both names vaguely or implying that both have the same function. (As we have seen earlier, Aquinas joins imagination with fantasy.) Vives argues that they have distinct functions and categorises them as two of four faculties of soul (together with estimation and memory). Fantasy is "prodigious" and "forms, reforms, combines, unites and disassociates"<sup>130</sup> all that comes to it *via* the will. It links ideas which are distinct, and if it is not adequately controlled by reason it disturbs the soul as a storm disturbs the sea<sup>131</sup>. The faculty of estimation provides an individual with the ability to make judgements from "sensible impressions"<sup>132</sup> and permits determination of what is beneficial as opposed to harmful (compare this to Aquinas' view of the estimative power, above, page 196).



## **Book II: treatise of the soul and life**

Vives moves on to intellectual operations, having demonstrated - as far as possible - how information about the world is perceived. In Book II he deals extensively with the faculties of the rational soul: "They are the mind or intelligence, the will and the memory" <sup>133</sup>. He then categorises the functions of the mind as simple intelligence, reflection, retention, comparison, reasoning, criticism and attention. Vives treats of these systematically in Book II, Chapters 1-11, beginning with simple intelligence. Before he does so, however, he again warns about the difficulties of investigating the soul. He writes that it is "very arduous and very difficult... to investigate the operations of these faculties" of the soul, given that they are, metaphorically, "submerged in darkness"<sup>134</sup>. He considers the three faculties and their associated functions, and alludes to the complexities of studying them when he wonders what is the origin and cause of "their development, their growth, their decrease, and their decline"<sup>135</sup>. He states that "God gave us these faculties... for our use (in order) to acquire knowledge"<sup>136</sup> - knowledge of, amongst other things, the faculties of the soul. But in trying to gain understanding of the operations of the soul Vives remarks that "we are, one and the same, simple labourers" who "utilize" the faculties given by God<sup>137</sup>. Vives thus emphasizes the limits placed on us in the attempt to study the operations of the soul.

His treatment of simple intelligence is not altogether clear, but he categorises it as the faculty which first receives images/concepts offered to the mind<sup>138</sup>. What he seems to argue is that 'simple' intelligence is not so called because it facilitates comprehension of simple things, but because it is the first stage whereby images or ideas are stored for processing. His discussion of this becomes conflated with further explanation of the part played in understanding by imagination and fantasy once ideas or images are present to the simple intelligence<sup>139</sup>. If a "simple , uncombined" object is present to the senses the imagination



receives the image, as has been explained. If the object is not immediately present to the senses, that is, it is absent but has at some time come under the "domain" of the senses and been "impressed" on the memory, fantasy forms a "figure", taking it from memory<sup>140</sup>. If the "figure" is beyond the jurisdiction of the external senses (that is, if it is a purely abstract percept) it is the intellect which infers it through reason.

Once images and ideas are processed by the simple intelligence, they must be retained by some faculty, otherwise cognition would be impossible. It seems self-evident to say that the memory is the function which does this. Vives writes that memory is to the intellect what a canvas is to a painter, and this is his preferred metaphor when describing the process of memory<sup>141</sup>. He also states that the memory has two functions analogous to those of the hand: to grasp and to retain<sup>142</sup>. The memory grasps percepts stored in the intellect and retains them for future retrieval. In attempting to describe how it is able to do this, Vives does not use the wax analogy directly, but uses terms such as "stamped" and "impressed" when referring to the memory process. This is particularly the case when he writes of problems with memory and of the different facilities for remembering amongst individuals<sup>143</sup>: for example, if something is stamped into fluid the image is not retained because the material is not dry. Vives compares the memory to an observable effect - a solid object has to be imprinted into a malleable substance which is firm enough to retain the image of the object. To Vives, the memory must work in a similar way. This leads him to discuss the effect the humours have on memory<sup>144</sup>: young people have better memories than the old because of their bodily and cranial heat and humidity. The old can make up for this lack of retention, however, because they have accumulated wisdom and experience<sup>145</sup>

Vives expands on this: not everyone has equal capacity for memory and obviously this is something which he could have affirmed by observation (though explaining why it is so is a different matter). He states that some people retain information readily and remember with

ease; others remember best what is unusual<sup>146</sup>. Those who have "slower wits" have a more "tenacious" memory, but the quick-witted tend to find retrieving memories easy<sup>147</sup>. If the memory is not exercised it "dulls"<sup>148</sup>, growing slower "each day"<sup>149</sup>, and becoming increasingly "weak" due to "idleness and stillness"<sup>150</sup>. Vives outlines four ways in which the memory is negated:

1. when an image "printed" on the memory is erased before it is complete;
2. when the memory-image is interrupted and partially destroyed;
3. when the memory-image is retained but "conceals" itself from the individual's inquiry;
4. when the memory-image is obscured similarly as a physical object is obscured by darkness. (Vives comments that this type of memory loss usually occurs for physiological reasons such as illness or emotional excitement.)<sup>151</sup>

What Vives has to say about memory can be seen to have implications for the learning process and for partial explanation of different capacities for learning and retention of information. As has been discussed in Chapter 5, he notes in *De tradendis disciplinis* the importance of the main faculties of cognition (which he comments on in *De anima* - retention, judgement, comparison, memory,) as they affect learning.

In *De anima*, Vives also discusses the association of ideas in the memory, and uses introspection and observation to do so. He reflects that whenever he is in Brussels and sees a house

which is not far from the royal palace, I remember Idiaquez, whose house it was, and in which we [engaged] in [stimulating] conversation... Whenever it comes to me to recall the memory of Idiaquez I do not think of that house; the reason is because in my mind his memory is more noteworthy than that of his house.<sup>152</sup>

It is the emotional connotations surrounding "Idiaquez" (friend, liking, enjoyment) which are uppermost in Vives' mind and it is these connotations which he remembers when he



thinks of Idiaquez, not the house in Brussels (which is the least important of the possible connotations). But when Vives is presented with the house in reality, it only has meaning for him because Idiaquez lived there. Seeing the house triggers memories of the more important thing (his friend), though he notes that the process is not the same in reverse. Similarly, he writes that when he was a child in Valencia he was ill and confined to bed because of a fever. At the time, he ate some cherries and many years later whenever he eats cherries he remembers the fever and how ill he felt then<sup>153</sup>.

According to Vives, the faculties of the mind are arranged to serve reason<sup>154</sup>. He envisages a system where the senses serve the imagination, which in turn serves the fantasy which permits 'extension' of, and reflection upon, thought. Reflection then serves the memory which has reason as its ultimate end<sup>155</sup>. Knowledge therefore originates with information taken in by the senses<sup>156</sup>. The senses deal with objects in present time (that is, things immediately present to them); imagination deals with percepts no longer present to the senses; the faculty of reflection scrutinises the resources (contents) of the mind and reflects upon them<sup>157</sup>. Vives states that there is no ratiocinative function in the power of reflection, which is a "quiet", reflexive, action,<sup>158</sup> the purpose of which is to mull over what has been collected by reason.

Reason, in tandem with volition, controls appetitiveness. As Carlos Noreña highlights, in *De anima* Vives "clearly distinguished between... speculative reason, the end of which is the True, and... practical reason oriented towards the Good."<sup>159</sup> But, in humanist fashion, Vives also emphasises the power of reason to control emotional appetites. Moreover, he decides that part of the function of the will is the facilitation of the ability to choose between good and bad and it allows judgement of what is potentially harmful or beneficial. In animals this function is permitted *via* the sensual appetite, but in humans the will is what directs us to seek the good and avoid the bad<sup>160</sup>. Vives cites two acts of the will:



"approbation" and "approval"<sup>161</sup>. He concludes that if the will rules human acts then it is in its hands that lie "good works" and bad, "virtue or vice", "praise or blame", "prize or penalty"<sup>162</sup>.

Physiologically, the body reaches its peak then deteriorates with advancing age<sup>163</sup>. Youth is a state of organic "perfection" and also a state of equilibrium between qualities of heat and humidity, therefore youth is a state of vigour and health<sup>164</sup>. At death, the soul leaves the body but is immortal and survives as a type of altered consciousness<sup>165</sup>. The crux of Vives' argument for the soul's immortality is that if the soul is not immortal then what is the point of a good person being good?<sup>166</sup> There must be compensation after life for the virtuous<sup>167</sup>. This use of *a priori* reasoning is curiously juxtaposed with an implicit argument for the empirical methods of what Vives calls the "man of science"<sup>168</sup>: by "intensely examining" and applying the "strength of his intelligence" to all aspects of the natural world (plants, animals, men, elements, stars, skies) the man of science will be able to gain knowledge of his creator<sup>169</sup>. Thus by observing natural phenomena the scientist/philosopher will have to postulate a creator of the world. Vives accepts the value of observation and examining of natural phenomena as a means to discover the existence of things, yet he links this to *a priori* arguments for the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. Articles of faith, he suggests, can be inferred through science.<sup>170</sup> Vives lived during a period of transition when empirical methodology was hardly formulated and argument *a posteriori* was far from being taken for granted.

### **Book III: the passions**

Vives writes that study of the effects which the passions (emotions) have on the soul is difficult because of the diversity of the range of emotions. Just as the waves in the sea have many sizes in response to the wind depending on whether it is a "gentle breeze", a "fresh", strong wind, or a "ferocious storm"<sup>171</sup>. In other words, the soul can be disturbed depending on the strength of the emotions. He goes on to discuss a variety of emotional responses in the chapters which make up Book III. Amongst them are anger, love, desire, veneration/respect, sympathy, joy, envy, sadness and pride. Again, Vives ranks these in a specific order - for example, he classifies love as the source of the following feelings: favour, respect, compassion; under happiness comes delight, under desire comes hope, under sadness comes grief and sorrow. In contrast, Vives names pride as being a mixture of emotions (happiness, desire and confidence). It is an emotion "born of arrogance"<sup>171</sup>.

"Love" is a movement of the will/desire and manifests itself in the individual who feels happy. Vives argues that being in love affects our perceptions, for instance the loved one looks more perfect, sunrises look more "luminous" and everything looks better<sup>173</sup>. Love is therefore a prime example of an emotion which affects our ability to be rational and to perceive actualities. He believes that we tend to love people who have similar natures to ourselves and that we feel love towards people who love us in return<sup>174</sup>. He warns that lust can be confused with "true love"<sup>175</sup>.

According to Vives, desire is an appetite for the good which allows us to provide for our wellbeing (that is, when we desire what is good for us)<sup>176</sup>. However, some desires, such as avarice, are unwelcome and may be harmful. Each desire has a specific object: ambition is linked to honours, avarice to money, gluttony to food and drink<sup>177</sup>. The imagination

knows no bounds and it is this which permits unbridled desire for honour and ambition<sup>178</sup>. Desire is thus a form of love but Vives regards it as a kind of "false" love<sup>179</sup>. He goes on to discuss various characteristics of love: true love is not selfish and originates in sincerity and the wish for communication between people<sup>180</sup>. Vives repeatedly warns against lustfulness which leads to flattery and praises<sup>181</sup> and cites the love of a mother for her child as one of the strongest, purest forms of love - she will love her child even where "others loathe it"<sup>182</sup>.

Vives then turns to discuss anger and sadness as the emotional opposites of love and happiness. All rage is born of anger, but he describes rage and anger as having distinct causes: rage is directed at the specific, anger at something in general (although both have similar effects)<sup>183</sup>. Anger is a specific movement of the soul, a disturbance, whereas irascibility is a temperament, a natural disposition<sup>184</sup>. Vives thinks that an individual may have a tendency to become angry but still requires an object for that anger. Dislike, envy, jealousy, indignation and cruelty follow from a propensity for anger and rage, and the relationship which one emotion has with others is a complex one.

With regard to sadness, Vives asserts that it is a "shrinking" of the soul and is an emotion which is "totally contrary" to happiness<sup>185</sup>. It generally has a specific cause (Vives gives the example of a mother's grief at the "death of her only child"<sup>186</sup>.) The most obvious manifestation of sadness is crying. A tear is a humour, he states, produced by the physiological effects caused by the emotional disturbance of sadness<sup>187</sup>, although he notes that it is not only those who are sad who have the propensity for tears: so also do those of a "gentle" disposition, children, women, the sick and the drunk<sup>188</sup>.

In his discussion of emotion, then, it is clear that Vives writes from the standpoint of the judicious observer. Although there is consistent reference to the physiological effects of emotion (for instance, that sadness causes the production of black bile<sup>189</sup>, that tears are



produced as a by-product of excessive humidity in the brain<sup>190</sup>, that the principal effect of fear is to "contract the heart"<sup>191</sup>), his explanations of how emotion affects a person are readily observable in ourselves and in others. Granted, his distaste for the sexual and condemnation of the sinful arise from a perspective concomitant with the prevailing religious climate in sixteenth century Europe. His morals colour his depiction of emotions such as shame which results particularly in those who surrender to sexual pleasure. Thus fantasy "excites sinful movements of desire"<sup>192</sup>. But feeling ashamed depends on believing that the act committed is wrong or sinful and shame tends to be greater "in the presence of those who command respect from us"<sup>193</sup>.

## Conclusion

Throughout *De anima et vita* there is a mixture of old and new methodology (though empirical methods were not, strictly speaking, new: elements are found in Aristotle's biology and in the methods of Roger Bacon, for example). However, Vives uses introspection and observation consistently in this treatise. He does not establish a method which is recognizably 'scientific' in any modern sense of the word, but he does state unequivocally that his examination of the soul will be based on what can be observed of its functions. Psychological and emotional effects are subsequently discussed in relation to observable phenomena and this is the basis on which Vives builds his analyses. He can be explicit in this technique of observation, and works from the premise that speculation about the unseen has to arise from observation of actual effects. This is a hypothesis which is implemented in a consistent manner throughout *De anima et vita*, even if the conclusions surrounding various aspects of Vives' inquiry now seem doubtful or absurd.

There is therefore some importance in Vives' inquiry into psychology both for its implicit reliance on and explicit references to observation, and for the scope of its study. Furthermore, as has been argued in the previous chapter, his conclusions regarding memory and perception were utilised in his educational theories. This allowed Vives to construct a pedagogy which took account of the mind of the learner as well as dealing with the formation of the pupil's character. Had this never been done pupils would have continued to be regarded as empty vessels to be stuffed with the contents of lessons regardless of their individual capacities and abilities. With respect to Vives' work, this conclusion must not be overstated; his application of psychology to education may seem tenuous today. However, recognition of the importance of the psychology of learning was not self-evident to educators before or during the Renaissance, and the development of an educational programme integrating psychology as one of the crucial components was to be far in the future.

Despite Vives' retention of Aristotle's general categories of soul, his analysis is more complex and lengthy than was Aristotle's. Vives was critical of the scholastic adherence to Aristotelianism and one overall aim in *De anima et vita* is to divorce his study from both scholasticism and Aristotelianism. In this he was only partially successful. His conception of the functions of the soul has many similarities to Aristotle's conception. But his means of analysis differs; his empiricism might be sketchy but he attempts to apply it to the study in ways that Aristotle did not. Moreover, unlike Plato, Vives' concern in his *De anima* is not epistemological but psychological, and his method is very different to that employed by Augustine and Aquinas. Aquinas' method followed the typical scholastic philosophical model: argument for a contention preceded by argument against the same contention, all set out in a series of disputed questions. Vives' treatise is certainly removed from this formula. And, in spite of the fact that he makes particular moral judgements and allows his religious beliefs to lead him into *a priori* arguments for the existence of the soul, *De anima et vita* is

not suffused in entirety with a religious message. Unlike the Church Fathers, the religious aspects of the study of the soul, while not neglected in Vives' work, are not on the whole the main focus of the analysis.

Certain of Vives' ideas (particularly the pedagogical and psychological) would seem to have been similar to those produced by a number of authors in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe (for instance Comenius, Sturm and Huarte). The influence of Vives' work will be studied in the next chapter which concentrates upon the general influence of Vives' thought on Gassendi and the specific similarities which *De anima et vita* bears to Descartes' *Les Passions de l'Ame*. (It is of particular interest to this analysis to examine the differing methodologies used by Descartes and Vives.) Finally, in the concluding chapter, aspects of Vives' pedagogy and psychology which can be said to be forerunners of certain of John Locke's ideas will be examined.



## Chapter 7: The Empirical and the Rational - the opposing methodologies of Gassendi and Descartes

Gassendi was one of the significant influences on the development of science and the mechanical philosophy in the second half of the seventeenth century... [Gassendi's] "baptism" of Epicurus permitted atomism to be considered a viable philosophy of nature, even in an era characterized by a morbid fear of atheism. Boyle's writings on corpuscularianism and Newton's early notebook on natural philosophy reveal the imprint of Gassendi's revival of Epicurean atomism... Gassendi's mitigated skepticism and nominalist ontology became characteristic of English science as represented in the works of Boyle and Newton. John Locke took up Gassendi's views and elaborated them in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, which is marked by many of Gassendi's arguments and, in places, even his language.<sup>1</sup>

The development of any line of thought is marked by a matrix of influences of authors upon other authors. During the period under study (the Renaissance and the seventeenth century) it was normal for authors to 'borrow' from predecessors without acknowledging the source. In consequence it tends to be very difficult to specify direct influences upon particular authors unless they explicitly mention a writer whose work is known to them. Pierre Gassendi (1592-1655) and René Descartes (1596-1650), the subjects of this chapter, mention Luis Vives and in discussing Vives' influence upon them reference will be made to two texts in particular: Gassendi's *Institutio Logica* and Descartes' *Les Passions de l'Ame*. What can also be discerned in the study of certain texts, though with less certainty than in cases where attribution is evident, is where various elements of an author's thought echo the

work of earlier philosophers. Direct attribution of influence is usually unwise in such cases, but it may be said that the evolution of a body of thought is discernible. What is striking about the era which marks the development of scientific method is “the longevity of the humanist vision of the course of science. Although the humanist picture was sharpened, enriched, and qualified, the original outlines were still visible four hundred years later.”<sup>2</sup> It is as part of this tradition that Vives’ work will be discussed.

As has been stated in the previous chapter, Vives’ method of analysis in *De anima et vita* used observation as a key component of the study. However, he had little recourse to anything resembling what would now be termed ‘scientific’ or empirical methodology. Indeed, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries metaphysics was still

widely held to be a legitimate member of the sciences, if not the most basic science. It was... a science of pre-suppositions, or of “first principles”, but not of *unconscious* first principles. The aim of metaphysics was to argue for, at least explicitly to portray, fundamental or basic principles and concepts. Whether defined by its subject matter (typically “being” considered in general) or, as came increasingly to be the case in the modern period, by its method (a priori intellection), metaphysics constituted a distinct intellectual enterprise.<sup>3</sup>

But metaphysics was not an enterprise which Vives applied to his investigations of the soul, as has been seen. ‘Scientific’ method post-Newton would build upon a mathematical tool (calculus) and upon the establishment of models for experimental procedures. The importance of mathematics to the development of science is displayed in the present day when, as John D. Barrow highlights, mathematics is held to be

the most sophisticated language we know of which possesses a built-in logic and a way of deducing its own limitations. It is a recipe for writing down analytic truths, or tautologies, and science aims to show these to be equivalent to various natural events which on the face of it appear to be non-analytic, or non-tautological truths. All our precise current knowledge about Nature is at root mathematical, but we cannot be sure whether



this bears witness to the intrinsic character of the world or to the fact that mathematical properties are the only ones which we have been able to find out systematically.<sup>4</sup>

So, defining the 'true' nature of the world is as much a problem today as it was for Vives, only the method of enquiry has changed.

Gassendi was one seventeenth century philosopher whose work involves a shift from purely philosophical reasoning towards advocacy of empiricism. Like Vives, he sought to reconcile his observations of the natural world with his religious beliefs. Gassendi would not allow the materialist leanings of his philosophy to lead to questioning of Christian faith. Matters of faith were not to be treated as matters concerning the natural world; matters of faith "belonged to a different order of knowledge based on different principles and required a different methodology"<sup>5</sup> from that which could be used to investigate natural phenomena. As with Vives, this juxtaposition between observation of natural philosophy and adherence to religious tenets lead to tensions in Gassendi's work. Problems of philosophical coherence result, and there is a mismatch between old forms of thinking (*apriori* philosophising and religious dogma) and 'new' (empiricism).

Gassendi's purported method ran counter to Descartes', whose *Les Passions de l'Ame* remains philosophical in character. Descartes' treatise on the passions will be discussed in the second part of this chapter. For the time being the focus will be on Pierre Gassendi and the rejection of Aristotelianism which, in his mind at least, permitted him the licence to adopt a method of inquiry into natural philosophy different from that used by Aristotle. In so doing the influence of Vives will be explained and attention will be drawn to points of similarity between Gassendi's *Institutio Logica* and Vives' *De anima et vita* .



## The *Institutio Logica*

Pierre Gassendi was born in 1592 in Provence. He enrolled in 1609 at the University of Aix, and studied philosophy. He was appointed Professor of Rhetoric at Digne, and was ordained a priest in 1616<sup>6</sup>. Gassendi's thought is notable for its rehabilitation of atomism, a doctrine famously espoused by Epicurus and rejected by the majority of medieval and renaissance philosophers, Vives included. When Gassendi deals with perception and epistemology he presents no new observations and analyses, but he was fascinated by Epicurus' theories (publishing his *De vita et moribus Epicuri* in 1647) and was drawn to contemporary atomists such as Isaac Beekman whom he called "le meilleur philosophe que j'age encore rencontre"<sup>7</sup>. Gassendi was further influenced by Sextus Empiricus and Lucretius, and was broadly in agreement with the Socratic argument that knowledge is probable<sup>8</sup> - that is, the only certain knowledge that an individual has is that (s)he knows nothing. Gassendi was therefore mindful that in natural philosophy what was being sought was probable knowledge.

It is Gassendi's epistemology which is of interest to this study and with regard to this area of his work he may be defined as adopting a stance which is both anti-Aristotelian and sceptical. His criticism of Aristotle and scholasticism was influenced by Vives, Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, Pierre Charron and Pierre de la Ramee (known as Ramus, and who had also been influenced by Vives). Gassendi wrote: "When I read Vives and my own Charron my spirits rose... I saw there was nothing wrong in suspecting that the Aristotelians were not always correct..."<sup>9</sup> It may be that Vives' criticism

of the Aristotelian system of knowledge opened the eyes of many later thinkers to the possibility that Aristotle's scientific vision was incorrect in many areas and that new advances in knowledge were continually being made. To argue that Aristotle

was infallible in all of his writings was to deny the possibility of scientific progress and the evidence of history. This belief in progress... was characteristic of Vives' conception of philosophy...<sup>10</sup>

Gassendi's critique of scholasticism is very similar to that outlined in Vives' early work *In pseudodialecticos*, and is typical of the sort of criticism which was found in renaissance arguments against scholastic method. Gassendi contended that scholastic methods were theatrical, resting on spurious dialectic, that the philosophy was useless and the teachers arrogant fools. The scholastics neglected genuine sources of classical wisdom and Aristotelians had perverted philosophy into useless disputation designed to produce disputants not philosophers<sup>11</sup>. On scholastics Vives had written: "[t]hey certainly have not even a passing acquaintance with Aristotle, in natural or moral philosophy or even in dialectic, which they shamelessly profess to teach, although they themselves have never understood it."<sup>12</sup> Time spent on the futile dialectic taught by the scholastics is wasted, Vives argued. Teachers and students who learn scholastic dialectic are "quite unsuited to business, to serve on embassies, administer public or private affairs, or deal with popular opinion; they are of no more use in affairs of this kind than men of straw"<sup>13</sup>. Scholastic logicians, in short, use "stupid" methods and Vives asks: "...am I to believe that a person's wit can be sharpened by something that is false... foolish, frivolous and unsound?"<sup>14</sup> Gassendi was to be particularly scathing about the schoolmasters who peddled their perverse brand of Aristotelianism saying: "In a word, they examine nothing in this world. When they enter their Schools they enter into another nature which has nothing in common with this nature outside."<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Vives wrote of Scholastic professors at the University of Paris:

When these people leave the nest of their schools to mix with normal and prudent folk, they act so stupidly... You should see the expressions on their faces when they are confronted with reality. They just behave as if they were coming from a different world, to such an extent they ignore real life and common sense.<sup>16</sup>



Gassendi believed that Aristotelianism had to be attacked because it was preventing progress in empirical study of natural effects. Yet, as Barry Brundell comments, it was as a "Renaissance philosopher rather than as a specialist in the experimental approach to nature that Gassendi confronted Aristotelianism"<sup>17</sup>. In this confrontation Gassendi appealed to the work of Vives and Charron, and paired these authors' work with regard to their respective emphases. Brundell explains that "by coupling Vives and Charron, Gassendi indicated the stress that he placed on ethics as the supreme part of philosophy" while renaissance admiration for classical authors "had led Vives, Charron and now Gassendi onto contentious ground as they advocated pagan morality in a Christian world."<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, by linking Vives and Charron, Gassendi was indicating their influence on him with regard to scepticism. Charron was much more direct in his scepticism than was Vives who would have denied the sceptical elements in his work. But Vives, in rejecting Aristotelianism and in holding that knowledge was in the first instance sensate, was partly responsible for opening the way for the sceptical thought of Gassendi. Vives also emphasised the limitations of human knowledge in *De disciplinis* and argued that "philosophy is entirely founded on opinion, conjecture and verisimilitude"<sup>19</sup>. Ultimately, as Brundell points out, Gassendi's scepticism was rather less a wholehearted mind-set and more "a limited weapon taken up for a specific purpose, namely his polemic against Aristotelianism"<sup>20</sup>. For Vives the only sure source of knowledge was reasoning based upon sensate information. The importance of this lies in the assumption by empiricists that all sources of knowledge are sensory. The natural sciences have largely been pursued through empirical methodologies, so empiricism was necessary for modern science to develop as it did<sup>21</sup>.

The basis of Gassendi's epistemology is that essence, or the inner nature of objects, cannot be known. All that can be known is the sensible appearance of objects and sensate



information is thus the first referent of 'knowledge'. Gassendi tried to shape his thoughts concerning sensation and 'psychology' into a 'method' of logic (the *Institutio Logica*). He defined logic as the "art of correct thinking"<sup>22</sup>, 'thinking' being an "inner conversation" the mind has with itself<sup>23</sup> and he postulates that four elements are involved in 'correct' thinking: imagining correctly, proposing correctly, inferring correctly, and ordering correctly<sup>24</sup>. But Gassendi never defines what he means by the term "correctly" and this is a significant drawback to his argument. Gassendi accords a paramount place in the logical process to the faculty of imagination. He writes that it is vital "in the first place to imagine an individual object correctly, that is, by means of the object hovering as it were before the mind"<sup>25</sup>. This is the first element in thinking. Again, the obvious criticism is to ask "what is *correct*?" An individual may believe that (s)he has imagined an object precisely and therefore correctly, but her/his account of the object may lack certain details which the account of another individual includes. If by "correctly" Gassendi means "precisely", different observers may give different versions of what a concrete object looks like (in which case the referent is the appearance of the object), or even what the object is. Thus, if by "correctly" he means "truthfully" then the referent ceases to be the concrete object itself and becomes the subject's version of the object which will be true for her/him (but perhaps not true for another observer). The situation becomes even more confused when the object of imagining is abstract. How will any definition of Gassendi's term "correctly" apply to a belief, an idea or an assertion?

"Imagining" is, however, only the first stage in the process. Gassendi continues by stressing the importance of forming propositions, that is, stating what something is or is not by "predicating or attributing to each thing what corresponds to it"<sup>26</sup>. Then, when given two propositions, it is crucial to "infer something legitimately and truly (*sic*)"<sup>27</sup>, and thereafter it is "useful" to form notions (in other words, to arrange propositions and inferences in a "fitting order")<sup>28</sup>. Now, the four elements are based upon some extremely imprecise

terminology: “correctly”, “legitimately”, “truly” and “fitting order”. All are terms which are context and subject dependent and it is difficult to ascribe definitive meaning to them. It is going to be difficult, then, to build a method of logic which will be applicable across a range of instances and situations, with a variety of individuals implementing it and which will provide - regardless of context - a means to certitude. This attempt at a method of logic seems opposed to Gassendi’s avowal of scepticism, but Gassendi’s scepticism is exhibited in a weak form. Certain knowledge of essences is impossible; however, there can be knowledge of appearances. His method of logic is an attempt (albeit a flawed one) to provide a set of formal rules for doing just this, and for giving people a framework for ordered thinking based on sensible appearance of the world. However, it is a possibility that “logic alone cannot reveal to us the existence of new types of entity”, in that it has “little use for experiment or observation.”<sup>29</sup> This was a possibility which Gassendi did not accept.

### On “simple imagination”

Gassendi states that “[w]e use the expression *simple* imagination... [because] we imagine a thing purely and simply in and by itself, without making of it any judgment...”<sup>30</sup>. That is, the imagination in the first instance produces an image which does not lead to the production of a proposition or a sentence. Simple imagination encapsulates the “whole description” of a perceptible thing. This image is “thrust” before the mind and is popularly termed “idea”, “form”, “concept”, “preconception”, “anticipation” and “phantasm”<sup>31</sup>. (Gassendi states that he will use the term “idea” because it is a “commonplace”<sup>32</sup>.) Gassendi’s view of simple imagination is broadly in accordance with Vives’ concept of the simple intelligence which,



as has been stated (see Chapter 5 above), is the name he gives to the faculty which first receives images from the senses in the mind.

Further similarity arises when Gassendi writes that the idea which is the product of simple imagination is inseparable from the imagination itself<sup>33</sup>. Vives writes that the image of an object immediately present to the senses is received by the imagination, while he conflates imagination and simple intelligence<sup>34</sup>. Gassendi argues that every idea which is in the mind “takes its origin from the senses”<sup>35</sup> and expands on this:

Here is the point of the well-known saying ‘there is nothing in the understanding which was not first in the sense’, and the dictum that the understanding or the mind is a blank tablet... Indeed, those who claim that ideas have been imprinted in the mind by nature and not acquired through the senses are very far from proving what they say.<sup>36</sup>

Gassendi explains that ideas either come through the senses or are formed from (prior) ideas which have come through the senses. This was an argument which Vives also gave, stating that “[w]e enter into knowledge though the gates of the senses”<sup>37</sup>, making it plain that he believes that *all* knowledge derives from sense experience. In the *De prima philosophia* Vives gives this comparison:

Like those who live in a basement, with only one little window to the outside, do not see except through that window, thus we see nothing except through our senses. Nevertheless... with our mind we infer the existence of something beyond our senses, but only as much as our senses permit us to do. Our mind rises upon the senses, but is based upon [them]... The senses point the way, nor is there any other. The mind infers the existence of something, but it does not see it.<sup>38</sup>

Gassendi is also in agreement with Vives that ideas which pass through the senses are “impressed” upon the mind<sup>39</sup>. Such ideas are always singular and the mind forms general ideas from singular ones<sup>40</sup>. Ideas are gained “either from personal experience or from



someone else's report"<sup>41</sup>, but Gassendi qualifies this by asserting that an idea which is gained through one's own senses is "more perfect"<sup>42</sup>. This is because things which "enter through the ears stimulate the mind in less lively a way than what our reliable eyes have seen"<sup>43</sup>. It is noticeable that this assertion is not based on observation although Gassendi uses observable phenomena to illustrate that the eyes can be deceived: for example, "a stick which is actually straight appears crooked if it is placed half in and half out of water"<sup>44</sup>. He argues that observation should be made to discern whether the appearance of a thing "corresponds to the reality"<sup>45</sup>.

Gassendi then argues that "temperament, disposition, custom, and preconceived opinion" can all affect our perception<sup>46</sup>. But with regard to the effects of temperament and emotion on cognition he does not give as detailed an account as does Vives in *De anima et vita*. Gassendi uses temperament as a warning to be judicious. Consequently, he writes that

when it is a matter of holding a true idea of something, it is necessary to pay particular attention lest any deception arise from these or similar considerations; and care must be taken that all prejudice, whether it stems from temperament or some other source, be eradicated and the mind be free and neutral in examining and determining what idea it will hold to be true.<sup>47</sup>

Unlike Vives, Gassendi's objective is not to examine cognition as part of a treatise on psychological functions. He is interested in sensation and perception as they affect epistemology and the preparation of a logical 'method'. Ultimately, for Gassendi, the "more complete a person's ideas and the more the things of which he has ideas, the more he excels in knowledge"<sup>48</sup>. The method was supposed to facilitate such acquisition of knowledge by sharpening the individual's ability to reason.

Concerning logical method, Gassendi explains that it "is nothing other than a progression of thoughts organised or arranged in a determined pattern"<sup>49</sup>. His method rests upon the

exercise of judgement relying on sensate information; or, where the question relates to a “matter which can be resolved by the understanding alone”, upon the faculty of reason<sup>50</sup>. The method starts with the “resolution”, that is, discerning the goal which is to be attained before indicating the “stages which must be reached for the end result to be secured”<sup>51</sup>. According to Gassendi, each subject (arts, sciences or practical crafts) has a structure which may be worked through, and the process can be divided into stages. For instance,

in researching the natural world... wherever possible we call upon anatomy and chemistry and the other sciences to enable us as far as possible to analyse bodies and break them down into their structural units in an attempt to understand the precise nature of their composition and to determine by extrapolation whether the composition of other bodies can be accounted for in the same or in a different way.<sup>52</sup>

This has application for teaching methods as Gassendi, like Vives, realised. Gassendi mentions that the “method of instruction ought to be such that the subject matter is presented in the clearest possible way”<sup>53</sup>. Moreover, the instructor “ought to present the material in such a way that the pupil gains understanding of it”<sup>54</sup>. As has been explained in Chapter 5 of this thesis, these aspects are present in Vives’ pedagogy. And when Gassendi states that in teaching “care” must be taken “to start from what is better known and more fundamental to the understanding of what is to follow”<sup>55</sup>, he is giving an axiom with which Vives was entirely familiar.

## Descartes and the passions of the soul

Descartes initiated the modern interpretation of the soul in the *Meditations*, as is generally conceded. Of all the Cartesian doctrines, his account of the soul has received least examination. One reason for this neglect is that the major changes he effected have become taken for granted, even by his critics. According to the dominant pre-modern tradition of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and the medievals, the soul is responsible for two functions... life or motion, and awareness, discerning, or thinking... With Descartes the soul performs one function only. It is exclusively a 'thinking thing', a mind, or a 'consciousness'... After Descartes it is hard to name a thinker of the first rank, of whatever metaphysical or anti-metaphysical posture, who has sought to restore to the soul... its original 'organic' meaning as responsible for life and motion and 'wordly' activity.<sup>56</sup>

Descartes' treatise *Les Passions de l'Ame* (*The Passions of the Soul*) perhaps does not epitomise the singular conception of soul here mentioned by Richard Kennington as much as does the *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Despite Kennington's remarks about the rejection of the 'organic' meaning of soul, Descartes does speak in *Les Passions* of the soul as a life-giving or animating force as well as enumerating the passions and describing how they affect the soul. Of course, what he has to say in this work must be placed in the context of his general argument for the separation of mind (as a purely intellectual function) from body. Yet *Les Passions de l'Ame* has a decidedly renaissance tone, and much of its content has its parallel in Vives' *De anima et vita* (to which Descartes refers in *Les Passions* <sup>57</sup>).

Descartes' concept of the soul as the thinking part of the organism was opposed to earlier "two-function" theories espoused not only by classical and medieval commentators but by many renaissance authors, amongst them Luis Vives. The manner of Descartes'



investigations into the soul in *Les Passions de l'Ame* and in the *Meditations* (which will both be discussed below) is philosophical and is more akin to that found in the scholastic analysis of Aquinas than that used in Vives' *De anima*. In contrast with Vives, Descartes' method is speculative 'first philosophy'.

In the *Discourse on Method* Descartes affirmed his belief that the soul is immortal<sup>58</sup>. Once the body 'fails' the soul leaves it. As has been said, the functions of the soul are addressed in his *Les Passions de l'Ame* in which he begins by stating that the task of describing these passions should not be difficult "since everyone feels passions in himself and so has no need to look elsewhere for observations to establish their nature"<sup>59</sup>. The expectation is, then, that Descartes will use an introspective method, rather than a strictly empirical one relying on observation of effects. Before beginning his explanation of the passions he argues the need to sort out the differences between the functions of the soul and those of the body. He again states that this will not be difficult if

we bear in mind that anything we experience as being in us, and which we see can also exist in wholly inanimate bodies, must be attributed only to our body. On the other hand, anything in us which we cannot conceive in any way as capable of belonging to a body must be attributed to our soul.<sup>60</sup>

Using this 'method' it follows for Descartes that, because we have no conception of a body being able to think for itself, "we have reason to believe that every kind of thought present in us belongs to the soul"<sup>61</sup>.

According to Descartes, the soul directly functions "most particularly" in the mid-brain in the pineal gland<sup>62</sup>, but it "radiates through the rest of the body by means of animal spirits, the nerves, and even the blood..."<sup>63</sup>. Passions are caused by the "spirits contained in the cavities of the brain making their way to the nerves which serve to expand or constrict the

orifices of the heart...”<sup>64</sup>. He writes that the main effect of the passions is to “dispose the soul to want things for which they prepare the body. Thus the feeling of fear moves the soul to want to flee...”<sup>65</sup>. However, the soul does not have full control over the passions. It can more readily control lesser emotions, but finds it harder to contain the “more violent ones”<sup>66</sup>. Passions can be caused by an action of the soul or a temperament of the body, but they can also be “excited by objects which stimulate the senses”<sup>67</sup>. This last is the most common cause of the “arousal” of the passions. Descartes claims that it is of interest, in enumerating the passions, to conduct an “orderly examination” of the ways in which the senses can be stimulated by their objects<sup>68</sup>. Descartes lists the passions in Part II of *Les Passions de l’Ame*, but during this enumeration speaks very generally of the causes of the passions; elsewhere he writes in more detail about sensation and perception and about how the senses are stimulated. This problematic aspect of his work will be dealt with after detailing his categorisation of the passions as he understands them.

### **Descartes’ *Number and Order* of the passions**

Descartes describes the following emotions in *Les Passions de l’Ame*: wonder (and its subsidiaries such as esteem and contempt), love and hatred, desire, hope, irresolution, remorse, joy and sadness, envy, anger, pride and shame, and disgust<sup>69</sup>. He places wonder as the ‘first’ of the passions because we express surprise and wonder at what is new to us before we ascertain whether that thing is beneficial or harmful. Wonder is linked with esteem and contempt depending on whether we value the object of wonder or think it to be “insignificant”<sup>70</sup>. If we think something is beneficial to us we love it; if we perceive it to be

harmful “this arouses hatred in us”<sup>71</sup>. Descartes asserts that this consideration of good and evil is the origin of the passions, except those which can be produced without perception of whether the object of them is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ (for example, passions such as veneration and scorn, esteem and contempt, generosity and pride). In discussing the passions arising from consideration of good and evil Descartes begins with desire.

He writes that desire “always concerns the future”, and that it is an “agitation of the soul”<sup>72</sup>. In comparison, Vives states that the passions in general agitate the soul as waves are agitated by the wind<sup>73</sup>. What Descartes says about desire is generally in keeping with Vives’ opinion that desire is an ‘appetite’ for the good which allows us to cater for our well-being. Descartes puts it this way: we are

prompted to desire the acquisition of a good or the avoidance of an evil simply if we think it possible to acquire the good or avoid the evil. But when we go beyond this and consider whether there is much hope of our getting what we desire, then whatever points to the former excites hope in us, and whatever points to the latter excites anxiety.<sup>74</sup>

Descartes' contentions here may be said to be verifiable from personal experience, although he does not mention at this stage that he is using experience as a referent. Good and evil, he continues, can also lead to feelings of pride and shame. For instance, an ‘evil’ done to us by others can stir up anger in us if we are the target; where someone else is the target we feel indignation. Moreover, when Descartes comments that a “good or evil which is in us” produces “pride or shame respectively, when it is related to the opinion which others have of it”<sup>75</sup>, he echoes Vives’ comment that shame is “greater in the presence of those who inspire respect in us”<sup>76</sup>. However, Descartes does not go much further in naming the passions than to distinguish what emotions the words describe. He does not really explain them with respect to psychological function.



Descartes speaks of there being only six “primitive passions” (wonder, love, hate, desire, joy and sadness)<sup>77</sup>. All the others are composed of a mixture of these. He describes the attributes of each, taking wonder as the first of them. Wonder is a “sudden surprise of the soul which brings it to consider... the objects that seem to it unusual and extraordinary”<sup>78</sup>. (It is a characteristic of *Les Passions de l’Ame* that Descartes writes about the soul as if it were separate from the person. Consequently the person does not express “sudden surprise”, the soul does.) Wonder is marked by two physiological occurrences: firstly, an “impression in the brain, which represents the object as something unusual”; secondly, a “movement of the spirits” in the brain<sup>79</sup>. Wonder does not provoke changes “in the heart or in the blood” as do the other passions<sup>80</sup>, but the ability to wonder makes us learn and retain the things we learn in the memory. But if we wonder about things which merit “little or no consideration” this might inhibit the use of reason<sup>81</sup>. Therefore

although it is good to be born with some inclination to wonder, since it makes us disposed to acquire scientific knowledge, yet after acquiring such knowledge we must attempt to free ourselves from this inclination as much as possible. For we may easily make good its absence through that special state of reflection and attention which our will can always impose upon our understanding when we judge the matter before us to be worth serious consideration. But there is no remedy for excessive wonder except to acquire the knowledge of many things...<sup>82</sup>

Descartes warns that excessive wonder can become habitual and that efforts should be made to correct it<sup>83</sup>. As with desire, all passions can become excessive if not controlled. Descartes declares that the “exercise of virtue is a supreme remedy against the passions”<sup>84</sup> and that it is

certain that, provided our soul always has the means of happiness within itself, all the troubles coming from elsewhere are powerless to harm it. Such troubles will serve rather to increase its joy; for seeing it can be harmed by them, it becomes aware of its perfection. And in order that our soul should have the means of happiness, it needs only to pursue virtue diligently. If anyone lives in such a way that his conscience cannot reproach him for ever failing to do something he judges to be the best..., he will receive from this a satisfaction which has such power to make him

happy that the most violent assaults of the passions never have sufficient power to disturb the tranquility of his soul<sup>85</sup>.

Thus, to Descartes, it is virtue rather than reason which is the means to govern the passions.

Descartes next turns his attentions to love and hatred. Love is "an emotion of the soul caused by a movement of the spirits, which impels the soul to join itself willingly to objects that appear to be agreeable to it"<sup>86</sup>. Vives writes similarly in *De anima* <sup>87</sup> when he contends that resemblance is a cause of love: our souls, he says, have a tendency to be disposed towards beauty<sup>88</sup> and in some people there exists an "admirable conformity of spirit" which creates sympathy between them<sup>89</sup>. Descartes argues that hatred is also caused by animal spirits impelling the soul to separate itself from harmful objects<sup>90</sup>.

As was seen with Vives' warnings against lust, Descartes too makes the distinction between "concupiscent" and "benevolent" love<sup>91</sup>. The latter makes us "wish for the well-being of what we love", the former prompts us to desire the object of our love<sup>92</sup>. Descartes argues that his distinction refers only to the effects of love not to its "essence" and contends that seemingly different passions can be said to "partake of" (that is, stem from) love<sup>93</sup>. This may be said because there are different objects of love.

Consider, for example, the passions which an ambitious man has for glory, a miser for money, a drunkard for wine, a brutish man for a woman he wishes to violate, an honourable man for his friend or mistress, and a good father for his children. Although very different from one another, these passions are similar in so far as they all partake of love. But the men in the first four examples have love only for the possession of objects themselves... Whereas the love of a good father for his children is so pure that he desires to have nothing from them... He regards them, rather, as other parts of himself, and seeks their good as he does their own, or even more assiduously.<sup>94</sup>



As has been stated, Vives used the example of the mother's love for her child as the strongest form of love<sup>95</sup>, loving her child even if everyone else "loathes" it<sup>96</sup>. Furthermore, while Descartes links ambition, miserliness and drunkenness to love of specific objects, Vives links similar 'vices' (avarice, ambition and gluttony) to desire, which he states is a "false" love<sup>97</sup>.

Descartes now attends to joy and sadness. Joy is a "pleasant emotion"<sup>98</sup> while sadness is an "unpleasant listlessness which affects the soul when it suffers discomfort"<sup>99</sup>. People can feel sad or joyful for no apparent reason<sup>100</sup>. Descartes notes that laughter can be caused "without any joy", for instance because of indignation, aversion, or any emotion which "may suddenly make the lungs swell up" so causing the "external action of laughter"<sup>101</sup>.

Descartes mentions that regarding this matter

Vives writes that when he had gone without eating for a long time, the first pieces of food that he put in his mouth caused him to laugh. This could result from the fact that his lungs, emptied of blood by the lack of nourishment, were rapidly swollen by the first juice which passed from his stomach to his heart, and which the mere imagination of eating could direct there even before the arrival of the juice of the food he was eating.<sup>102</sup>

Descartes does not name the text from which this example comes, but it is in fact from *De anima et vita*, the example coming from Book Three, Chapter Ten. (Given this, and given the similarities in the contents of *Les Passions* and *De anima*, it is reasonable to suppose that Descartes had read *De anima* in its entirety.) Vives states that at the "first or second mouthful" eaten "after a prolonged fast" he was "unable to contain" his laughter<sup>103</sup>, explaining that this is because the food expanded his diaphragm and restricted its movement. He also comments that there is laughter which is not 'true' and this originates in sadness or indignation<sup>104</sup>. Descartes similarly remarks that "we are never so ready to laugh



as when we are sad"<sup>105</sup> while the section in which he paraphrases Vives is titled "What causes laughter in the case of indignation"<sup>106</sup>.

Having thus appraised Descartes' account of the major passions, his thought concerning sensation and perception will now be addressed, as he maintains that these are functions of the soul. The following section will refer to Descartes' *Discourse on Method* and *Principles of Philosophy*.

### **Descartes on sense perception and affirmation of truth**

As has been mentioned, Descartes' method for analysing the functions of the soul is not principally based on observation. His method is epistemological, as he explains in the *Meditations*; the soul has to be known through intellectualising. Descartes ponders on the "attributes of soul" to "see if there are any of these" in him if he has no physical body<sup>107</sup>. He concludes that eating, walking, and sensing would be "impossible without the body" but that the one attribute of the soul which would be possible would be thinking<sup>108</sup>. Thought is the only attribute which "cannot be detached from me. *I am, I exist* : This is certain, but for how long? For as long as I think..."<sup>109</sup>. For Descartes, his being is entirely bound up with his ability to think and he states that he is "therefore, precisely speaking, only a thing which thinks, that is to say a mind, understanding, or reason..."<sup>110</sup>. He continues:

I am not this assemblage of limbs called the human body; I am not a thin and penetrating air spread through all these members; I am not a wind, a breath of air, a vapour, or anything at all that I can invent or imagine, since I have supposed that all those things were nothing, and yet, without changing this supposition, I find that I am nevertheless certain that I am something.<sup>111</sup>

Thus the essence of a person is purely intellectual; the human body is merely a machine. This is the heart of dualism and in looking at the problems associated with this, the difficulties inherent in Descartes' conception of sense perception will be unavoidable.

There are two especially perturbing aspects of the mind-body theory, as John Cottingham indicates. The first of these he labels

the 'non-corporeality dogma': by insisting on the essential non-corporeality of the mind, Cartesian dualism is committed to a thesis which modern advances in neurophysiology have made less and less plausible. The claim, made by Descartes, that an act of thinking or doubting 'does not require any place or depend on any material thing' (e.g. requires no brain) seems... to be a non-starter.<sup>112</sup>

The second aspect concerns the epistemological consequences of dualism, as will be explained in due course. With respect to the issue of non-corporeality Descartes' claim that thinking requires no material dependence is contradictory to his insistence that the soul, which is the seat not just of the passions but of cognitive function, has the pineal gland as the centre of its functions. In Part Four of his *Principles of Philosophy* he makes a statement that the human soul has "its principal seat in the brain"<sup>113</sup>. In Meditation 4 he writes that the mind is a thinking thing, not extended in length, breadth, depth, and not participating "in anything that pertains to the body"<sup>114</sup>. Now, Descartes could conceive of the soul/mind as a type of unquantifiable 'spirit' suffused through the body, having its locus in the pineal gland, and just about maintain his argument for mind-body separatism. But if he insists on the statement that the mind does not *participate* in anything pertaining to the body then a clearer definition of 'participate' is required, because his explanations of the soul's activity in *Les Passions de l'Ame* can be interpreted as implying participation in pineal gland activity. Descartes was not unaware of this seeming contradiction. In his later thought he attempts to reach a middle position to account for what might be seen as



inconsistency in his theory of intellect. He seems to give a description of mind-body dualism as a potential rather than an actual state. As shall be explained later in this section, his explanations do not wholly remove the confusions surrounding this aspect of his work. Some of these confusions will now be examined.

In the *Conversation with Burman* (the interview Descartes gave to Frans Burman at Egmond-Binnen) Descartes is reported as saying:

When external objects act upon my senses, they print on them an idea... And when the mind attends to these images imprinted on the [pineal] gland... in this way it is said to have *sense-perception* (*sentire*) . When, on the other hand, the images on the gland are imprinted in the mind itself, which fashions and shapes them in the brain in the absence of external objects, then we have imagination. The difference between sense-perception and imagination is really just this, that in sense-perception the images are imprinted on the brain by external objects which are actually present, while in the case of imagination the images are imprinted by the mind without any external objects, and with the windows shut, as it were.<sup>115</sup>

Descartes is here taking a traditional 'imprinting' theory of sense perception, as did Vives, although in Descartes' case it is unclear how the incorporeal mind can imprint images on the imagination, which is also incorporeal. This insistence on physiological activity as integral to sense perception does not sit well with Descartes' postulation of the mind as pure (incorporeal) intellect able to function without reliance upon physical activity. This confusion is increased by his persistence in holding to the 'imprinting' theory elsewhere in his work, for instance in the *Rules for Direction of the Mind*. In this he writes:

First in so far as our external senses are all part of the body, sense-perception, strictly speaking, is merely passive, even though our application of the senses to objects involves action viz. local motion; sense-perception occurs in the same way in which wax takes on the impression from a seal. *It should not be thought that I have a mere analogy in mind here:* we must think



of the external shape of the sentient body as being really changed by the object in exactly the same way as the shape of the surface of the wax is altered by the seal.<sup>116</sup>

Descartes has a problem here: he is insisting upon the actuality of the imprinting model rather than using it as a metaphor. He thus has the membranes of the sense organs actually physically altered by the percept itself. He goes on by explaining that the figure received by the external sense organ is conveyed to another part of the body known as the "common sense"<sup>117</sup>. As has been said, Vives also deals with the common sense as regards perception, conceiving of it as a combination of imagination and fantasy<sup>118</sup>. The common sense according to Descartes "functions like a seal, fashioning the phantasy or imagination, as if in wax, the same figures or ideas which come, pure and without body, from the external senses"<sup>119</sup>. But if these figures come "without body" how can they be impressed in something, far less something which is itself incorporeal?

The second problematic aspect associated with Descartes' dualism is defined by John Cottingham as

the 'mental or physical?' dilemma. By insisting that all attributes be regarded either as modes of thought or as modes of extension, Cartesian dualism seems to lumber itself with an impossible choice when it comes to complex psycho-physical phenomena like sensations. [Descartes'] attempts to deal with the dilemma lead him to the bizarre position that... having a sensation is a kind of thinking...<sup>120</sup>

It has been argued that for Vives and for Gassendi sense perception is the primary means by which knowledge is gathered; it is the starting point in the epistemological process. Both Vives and Gassendi could adopt this concept unproblematically because they did not envision such an absolute dichotomy between mind and body as did Descartes. Neither posited the theory of stripping away all physical attributes and asking "what is left?" Because Descartes argues that it is mind and not body which makes a person a person, and

that mind is all that is required (theoretically) to enable existence, the problem arises of explaining how we become aware of the information that constitutes a body of knowledge. How do we learn? How do we gather percepts which lead to thoughts and ideas?

In *Meditations* 1 Descartes writes that everything he has learned and holds to be true he learned through the senses, though the senses can at times be false<sup>121</sup>. The senses can deceive us “concerning things which are barely perceptible or at a great distance<sup>122</sup>. Even seemingly indubitable sensate information (“that I am here, sitting by the fire, wearing a dressing gown”<sup>123</sup>) may be a dream. And yet, in the *Discourse on Method* he insists that “light, sounds, smells, tastes, heat and all the other qualities of external objects can imprint different ideas in the brain by means of the senses”<sup>124</sup>. Here is a clear definition of sense perception. Descartes describes percepts being transposed into ideas in the brain via the external sense organs. Moreover, in Part Four of the *Principles of Philosophy* he argues that sensory awareness “comes about by means of nerves, which stretch like threads from the brain to all the limbs”<sup>125</sup>. It is the “movements” set up in the brain by the nerves which result in sensation. For both sensation and sense perception generally Descartes appears to give physiological explanations which contradict a strict mind-body dichotomy.

However, in partial answer to such an accusation, Descartes reviewed his theory to try to clarify the matter. In the *Conversation with Burman* he characterises mind as a thinking ‘thing’: that is, “there is in addition to the thinking a substance which does the thinking”<sup>126</sup>. He speaks of mind and body respectively as “thinking substance” and “extended substance”<sup>127</sup>. He apparently regards mind as a “substance” distinct from “body”, classifying the two substances (mental and corporeal) as being not just distinct but “actually incompatible”<sup>128</sup>. None of this fully explains what characteristics a thinking “substance” might have; it is being depicted as an incorporeal entity. It may be, as John Cottingham suggests<sup>129</sup>, that Descartes’ distinction is a conceptual rather than a ‘real’ one. However, this



implies that Descartes is, in his conversation with Burman, conducting a philosophical exercise which does not aim at describing how intellectual processes function in actuality. It is not clear that this is what he intends. Nor does this point help elucidate what form of “substance” thinking substance is, what this incorporeal entity might actually be.

Descartes typically identifies “substance” as substrate, adopting the traditional view of substance as what underlies the attributes of any thing. In the Second Replies he interprets substance as the term which “applies to *every thing in which* whatever we perceive is immediately located, as in a subject; or every thing by means of which whatever we perceive exists”<sup>130</sup>. Thus our perceptions are first located in the percepts inhering in substance. Thought/ideas are based on perception so ‘thought’ could be said to derive from what is perceptible in substance. Descartes writes:

When external objects act on my senses, they print on them an idea, or rather a figure, of themselves; and when the mind attends to these images imprinted on the [pineal] gland in this way it is said to *perceive*. When... the images on the gland are not imprinted by external objects but by the mind itself, which fashions and shapes them in the brain in the absence of external objects, then we have *imagination*.<sup>131</sup>

This explains how the mind acts upon percepts which are transferred to it via the pineal gland. But the mind still acts upon these imprints and, furthermore, it can itself imprint on the pineal gland. The mind and body are therefore posited as acting together through the intermediary of the pineal gland, but Descartes does not make plain how this occurs if the two “substances” (mental and corporeal) are “actually incompatible”. Furthermore, he refers to one operation of the ‘soul’ which does take place independently of the body, what he calls “pure understanding”<sup>132</sup>. Cottingham observes that these aspects of Descartes’ theory “must be among the most bizarre psycho-physical transactions in Descartes’ philosophical psychology”<sup>133</sup>.



We are left, then, with Descartes' contention that the mind is capable of existing separately from the body, but does not actually do so: human beings are a "compound of these two separable but not separated components"<sup>134</sup>. Moreover, there is no observable means to prove the potential for intellect to exist separately. The confusions which attend Descartes' delineation of mind and body emerge from his need to align his philosophical thought with his physics<sup>135</sup>. He has to maintain concepts of mind and body which do not "disrupt the argument of most importance to the foundations of [his] physics, the claim that our idea of body, properly considered, is the idea of a thing all of whose properties are geometrical, which is capable of existing apart from the mind."<sup>136</sup>

This proviso notwithstanding, Descartes' explanations also prove problematic in another respect. Because of his (confused) dualistic position, any claim that sensate percepts (leading to cognition, awareness, understanding,) arise from corporeality is troublesome. Descartes endeavours to get round this by asserting that perception is thinking. In the second *Meditation* he has this to say:

I am the same being who senses, that is to say who apprehends and knows things, as by the sense-organs, since, in truth, I see light, hear noise and feel heat. But it will be said that these appearances are false and that I am dreaming. Let it be so; all the same, at least, it is very certain that it seems to me that I see light, hear a noise and feel heat; and this is properly what in me is called perceiving and this, taken in its precise sense, is nothing other than thinking.<sup>137</sup>

In the *Principles of Philosophy* Part One (*The Principles of Human Knowledge*) Descartes' concept of sensation as 'thought' is again evident. He writes that knowledge of our mind is "prior to" and "more certain than the knowledge of our body"<sup>138</sup>. Therefore it is possible for us to be sure we exist because we are thinking. He then asserts that "[we] possess only two modes of thinking: the perception of the intellect and the operation of the will"<sup>139</sup>. These are general categories; under intellectual perception comes not just imagination and 'pure

understanding' but sensory perception. Under operation of the will comes "desire, aversion, assertion, denial and doubt"<sup>140</sup>.

So, for Descartes, feeling, sensation and imagination are all modes of thinking. By this argument sensation is not primarily a physiological occurrence even though we have seen that elsewhere he explains sensation in physiological terms. By "thought" he "understand[s] everything which we are aware of as happening within us, in so far as we have awareness of it. Hence, thinking is to be identified here not merely with understanding, willing and imagining, but also with sensory awareness."<sup>141</sup> However, as Zeno Vendler points out, in doing this Descartes

persistently confuses sensations of a certain kind with the idea of such sensations: pain with the idea of pain, the experiences of light, of sound, with the ideas of light, of sound, etc. This confusion leads to the empiricist attempt to construe all ideas or most ideas, out of sensory elements - a tendency against which Descartes himself fulminates in his replies to Hobbes' objections... and elsewhere.<sup>142</sup>

Descartes never clears up this confusion. If someone sprains her/his ankle (s)he is aware of the pain in the sense of feeling the pain in the site of the injury. The pain may be so severe that (s)he reasons that the ankle cannot merely be sprained and judges that it is probably broken. If the pain was a mode of thought then diverting her/his attention and causing her/him to think of something else would stop the pain (that is, if it is granted that someone cannot think of two thoughts simultaneously). It is a cognitive phenomenon that awareness of pain can lessen temporarily if the individual is sufficiently diverted but once attention to the diversion has lapsed the pain is felt once more at the site of the physical problem. And if the pain is very severe, this diversion tends not to happen. Moreover, if pain was a mode of thought, and if thinking requires volition, the individual would have had to have willed the pain to exist if it was to be experienced at all. It would not be contingent upon physical



injury or infection. The individual would have had to have willed the pain in the first place and then have placed it in a particular location (her/his ankle). Finally, after the broken ankle has healed, (s)he may think about the pain caused by the break and remember the severity of it, and (s)he may describe what the pain was like to others, but in so doing (s)he will not *feel* the pain in her ankle.

Descartes' case on sensation as it relates to knowledge and thought is further confused when he discusses errors in perception<sup>143</sup> - or rather, errors in judgement. He states that error is only a factor when we make judgements about what we perceive: "...it is easy for us to extend our will beyond what we clearly perceive; and when we do this it is no wonder that we may happen to go wrong."<sup>144</sup> Again, this argument seems to divide sensory perception from thinking: we perceive via the external senses and then think about what we have perceived (that is, we judge it). But this is a distinction which Descartes repeatedly denies. However, this apparent separation between sensing and the faculties of thought is reinforced in the *Principles of Philosophy* when Descartes writes that "we will never mistake the false for the true provided we give our assent only to what we clearly and distinctly perceive"<sup>145</sup>. Thus, perceptions which are "clear" and "distinct" are veridical if we do not misuse our judgement (our power of *reason*) when we apply it to our perceptions. Descartes goes on to argue that we can clearly perceive sensations if we "take great care in our judgements concerning them to include no more than what is strictly contained in our perception."<sup>146</sup> This is a "difficult rule to observe", he warns, because "all of us, from our early childhood judged that all the objects of our sense-perception are things existing outside our minds and closely resembling our sensations..."<sup>147</sup> We therefore take these judgements to be indisputable when they may not be. Yet, following Descartes' arguments, we must bring intellection and judgement to bear on what we perceive: he comments that "there is nothing whose true nature we perceive by the senses alone"<sup>148</sup>. This is nothing short of a double bind: sensate information is not enough to allow us to discern the "true nature" of



things therefore we have to use reason. But our judgement is the cause of error so how can we ever know with certainty that our judgement is sound?

Furthermore, Descartes has made the task more difficult by contending that our judgement is extremely prone to error because of our preconceived opinions about the nature of things, formed in childhood. He attempts to deal with the problem of how we affirm the existence of material things in Part Two of the *Principles of Philosophy*<sup>149</sup>, and it might be hoped that the attendant confusions will be resolved allowing us to confirm the existence of actual physical objects which we perceive. Descartes' argument runs as follows:

1. sensations “come to us from something that is distinct from our mind”<sup>150</sup>;
2. as a “result of sensory stimulation we have a clear and distinct perception” of “some kind of matter” “which is extended in length, breadth and depth...”<sup>151</sup>;
3. we have a “clear understanding of this matter as something which is quite different from God and from ourselves or our mind”, and we “appear to see clearly that the idea of it comes from things located outside ourselves...”<sup>152</sup>;
4. the “unavoidable conclusion”, then, is that there exists “something extended in length, breadth and depth and possessing all the properties which we clearly perceive to belong to an extended thing. And it is this extended thing that we call ‘body’ or ‘matter’.”<sup>153</sup>

But this does not solve the problem of how we judge our perceptions of physical objects to be truthful, and this has obvious epistemological consequences. In his argument, Descartes is judging, by way of logic, that external objects exist. However, he has already told us that errors occur at the level of judgement. He cannot judge any conclusion of his to be “unavoidable”; he still does not know with certainty that material things exist outwith the mind. Even if he chooses to believe that they do, his argument leaves him little or no means of asserting the truthfulness of how these objects appear to him, let alone of describing their “true nature”.

## Conclusion

It can be seen that, in comparison with problems associated with the work of Vives and Gassendi, a different set of problems arises with Descartes' views on cognitive processes. His epistemology is not linked to psychology and his approach is that of a philosopher, rather than of someone who wishes to apply his theories of cognition to a practical process (like teaching). In this chapter it has been argued that the confusions arising from Descartes' work on cognition stem from his separation of mind and body but, as has been shown, there are various areas of similarity between his theories on the passions and Vives' theories as set out in *De anima et vita* in spite of the differing methodologies. However, Descartes' conclusions are shaped inevitably by the logic of his argument, and this logic arises from the initial premise that there can be separation of mind-body function. Overall, he adopts a rationalist approach as opposed to the more empirical elements found in the work of Vives and Gassendi. Nevertheless, despite the problems to be found in Descartes' work on perception, he provides

a paradigm of what it is to argue metaphysically in the early modern period. He argues for a version of the "nature of reality" in an a priori manner, on the basis of an account of the knowing subject and with the aim of achieving absolute certainty. He claims to have penetrated to the essences of things and to have provided a basic taxonomy of being. His metaphysics provides a general account of the created world: It includes everything that exists, considered generally, within its subject matter.<sup>154</sup>

Descartes' influence upon generations of thinkers was immense. The influence of Vives and Gassendi is less immediately recognisable. Pierre Gassendi's theory (based on the theories of Sextus Empiricus and Pierre Charron), that while matter exists in actuality it is impossible to know its nature (essence), appears in the work of John Locke. (Locke mentions Gassendi's name once in the third letter to Stillingfleet<sup>155</sup>.) Although Locke

rarely acknowledges his debts to previous thinkers, it is obvious, if only from the testimony of Leibniz ("Nouveaux Essais", bk.1, ch 1) that he owed to Gassendi the theory of mind as *tabularasa* and the suggestion that matter might be able to think - two notions which struck at the foundation of Cartesian orthodoxy.<sup>156</sup>

One of Locke's general aims in his work was to attempt to develop in a "coherent, systematic and rational way what he took to be the fundamental tenets of the corpuscularian philosophy"<sup>157</sup>. The works which will be of interest to this study are those which deal with sense perception, knowledge and learning: the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, and *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. As well as being influenced by Gassendi, Locke was influenced by Descartes, though he argued against the Cartesian distinction between *a priori* 'necessary' knowledge and held that there were no innate ideas. Various aspects of Locke's theories on both sense perception and education had also been espoused earlier by Luis Vives. In discussing Locke's work in the concluding chapter of this research, similarities with Vives' theories will be highlighted. It will be argued that there is a discernible continuum in areas of epistemology, psychology and education from the time of renaissance humanism to the Enlightenment.



## Chapter 8: Locke, education and human understanding

The great work of a *Governour* is to fashion the Carriage, and form the Mind; to settle in his Pupil good Habits, and the Principles of Vertue and Wisdom; to give him by little and little a view of Mankind; and work him into a love and imitation of what is Excellent and Praise-worthy; and in the Prosecution of it to give him Vigour, Activity and Industry. The Studies which he sets him upon, are but as it were the Exercises of his Faculties, and Imployment of his Time, to keep him from... Idleness, and to give him some little taste of what his own industry must perfect. For who expects, that under a *Tutor* a young Gentleman should be an accomplished Critick, Orator, or Logician? Go to the bottom of Metaphysicks, Natural Philosophy or Mathematicks? Or be a Master in History or Chronology? Though something of each of these is to be taught to him: But it is only to open the Door, that he may look in, and as it were begin an Acquaintance, but not to dwell there... But of good Breeding, Knowledge of the World, Vertue, Industry, and a love of Reputation, he cannot have too much...<sup>1</sup>

This chapter will be concerned with two aspects of John Locke's work: his theory of education and his enquiry into human understanding. Two texts will be central to the study: *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) and the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689). Comparison will be made between aspects of Locke's and Vives' pedagogy and epistemology (with specific reference to *De anima et vita*). At heart, Locke's system of education retains the humanist aim of shaping character, and emphasises good 'breeding', virtue and learning. It is an education for a gentleman and Locke often suggests educational outcomes which are similar to those found in renaissance texts, for instance Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*. Castiglione writes:

I will have this our Courtier theretofore to bee a gentleman borne of good house. For it is a great deale less dispraise for him that is not borne a gentleman to faile in the actes of vertue, than for a gentleman. If he swerve from the steps of his ancestors, hee staineth the name of his familie.<sup>2</sup>

And as Locke would not have a gentleman “go to the bottom” of physics, natural philosophy or mathematics, nor be an accomplished orator, Castiglione argues that while a gentleman should be proficient in writing and speaking he should not fall into the trap of exhibiting “an over great desire to show much knowledge”<sup>3</sup>.

Locke agrees with this view. The gentleman must have enough learning to enable him to display knowledge on a range of subjects, but a tutor’s main purpose in education should be to train the young man for the sort of life he will lead. Thus, just as a gentleman must wear the correct clothes and have correct deportment, so Locke would have him display enough erudition on a few well chosen topics to be entertaining without being too serious or overly intellectual. He admits that learning is the least of the endowments to be engendered:

Reading, and Writing, and *Learning*, I allow to be necessary, but yet not the chief Business. I imagine you would think him a very foolish Fellow, that should not value a Vertuous, or a Wise Man, infinitely before a great Scholar. Not but that I think *Learning* a great help to both in well dispos’d Minds; but yet it must be confess’d also, that in others not so dispos’d, it helps them only to be the more foolish, or worse Men.<sup>4</sup>

This seems a retrograde step from the curriculum suggested by Vives (or indeed of other educators such as Comenius and Sturm). As was argued in Chapter 5, one of Vives’ curricular aims was the inculcation of virtue and wisdom, but he moved away from the traditional renaissance aim of producing a courtier or gentleman. In theory, his curriculum was generally applicable; in practice, education was a provision for the elite unless the education was aimed at gild entry. Whereas Vives’ *De tradendis disciplinis* is not a handbook of conduct and primarily deals with the content and method of teaching, Locke’s



*Thoughts Concerning Education* is largely given over to discussion of a child's upbringing and the forming of 'good' habits. Discussion of learning merits fifty-nine pages as opposed to the one hundred and thirty-nine pages spent on upbringing and conduct. Locke is clear from the outset about the main task of the tutor: it is to "fashion the Carriage, and form the mind; to settle in his pupil good Habits, and Principles of Vertue and Wisdom...; and work him into a love and imitation of what is Excellent and Praise-worthy..."<sup>5</sup>. The fashioning of habits takes precedence over the forming of the mind in Locke's work, and this may be partly due to the intended audience for *Some Thoughts*. It is not, after all, aimed at professional teachers.

It has been implied in this study that Vives' pedagogy was in advance of contemporary trends. Much of what he wrote predated what John Locke would advise on education. Certain elements of Locke's theory of education revert to an earlier, more courtly, tradition. He does underpin some of what he has to say on education with his thoughts on psychology, but not to an extent comparable with Vives. In the ensuing discussion of *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* areas in which Vives was a precursor will be demonstrated, though Locke's text will principally be dealt with in its own right as background to the discussion of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. The *Essay* will be dealt with thereafter, and it is here that similarities between Vives' theory of psychology and Locke's become apparent. In so doing it is not the intention to deny that Locke's work was of immense importance, nor to suggest that Vives' writing was a direct influence upon Locke's theory of psychology. Rather the intent is to understand how Locke's work fits into and follows European traditions of epistemology and pedagogy. It will be argued that his work promulgates this tradition rather than advances it.



## Some Thoughts Concerning Education

The great mistake I have observed in People's breeding of their Children has been, that this has not been taken care enough in its *due Season*; That the Mind has not been made obedient to Discipline, and pliant to Reason, when first it was most tender, most easy to be bowed. Parents, being wisely ordain'd by Nature to love their Children, are very apt, if Reason watch not that natural Affection very warily... to let it run into Fondness. They love their little ones, and 'tis their Duty: But they often, with them, cherish their Faults too... But to a fond Parent, that would not have his Child corrected for a perverse Trick, but excused it, saying, it was a small Matter; *Solon* very well replied, Ay, but Custom is a great one.<sup>6</sup>

As has been stated, in certain ways, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* returns to the type of handbooks of conduct exemplified by Erasmus' *Education of a Christian Prince* and Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*. In Locke's work it is no longer the prince or courtier who is to be fashioned, it is the young gentleman. His treatise emphasises the importance of inculcating proper habits into a child in what is at heart a discourse on diet, environment and general upbringing. Locke advises on diet and exercise because the child's body must be strengthened "so that it may be able to obey and execute the Orders of the *Mind*"<sup>7</sup>. It will be the task of parents and tutors to "set the [child's] Mind right" and thereby form a "rational Creature"<sup>8</sup>. It can be seen that, for educational writers like Locke, conduct and habit were considered to be as important at the end of the seventeenth century as they were during the Renaissance.

It was Locke's purpose, then, to describe ways for fashioning the character as much as for educating the mind. In his *Conduct of the Understanding* he comments that the "business of education" is not "to make [pupils] perfect in any one of the sciences, but so to open and dispose their minds as may best make them capable of any, when they shall apply themselves to it"<sup>9</sup>. Hence, during Locke's process of training the educator must prepare

the child's mental, moral and physical capabilities to meet any situation... Needless to say, this is... the hallmark of a liberal education, and we are indebted to Locke for helping to carry that ancient tradition across the centuries from its home in classical Greece.<sup>10</sup>

Despite James Axtell's somewhat romanticised turn of phrase, his point is valid: Locke's educational texts promote a view of classical liberal education which had been shaped during the Renaissance and subsequently popularised and modified.

As with Erasmus and Vives, Locke's belief is that a child can be trained towards becoming virtuous. Crucial to this outcome is the denial of the individual's desires: the child must be taught "purely to follow what Reason directs as best, tho' the Appetite lean the other way"<sup>11</sup>. If a child's whims and demands are indulged he will become wayward and uncontrollable. Locke regards the issue of control in much the same way as earlier authors like Vives: it is a crucial concept, of fundamental importance to the cultivation of self-discipline. Without control there will be anarchy, and anarchy begins with the individual. By curbing individual desires when a child is beginning to become 'willful', a habit of control might be engendered. Locke states: "He that is not used to submit his Will to the Reason of others, *when* he is *Young*, will scarce hearken or submit to his own Reason, when he is of an Age to make use of it."<sup>12</sup> Locke's educational theories imply distaste for, if not fear of, unreasonableness. Reason was the bedrock of society and so the training of young gentlemen who would govern society was of no small importance. It is in this context that Locke's comments on training should be seen. He advises that training must

begin when the mind of the child is “most tender, most easy to be bowed”<sup>13</sup>, while parents must not indulge children’s appetites out of ‘fondness’ for their offspring. At a practical level he is all too aware of the ‘dangers’ of giving in to a child’s tantrum with the result that the child learns that a tantrum is the means to getting his own way. But he regards control as necessary to the process of curbing children’s behaviour without addressing the problematic aspects of control and enforcement except when force becomes excessive. (For instance, he does not favour “vicious” corporal punishment<sup>14</sup>.) Neither does Locke explain why it is that willfulness militates against rationality. A causal link is assumed rather than proven.

It has been pointed out<sup>15</sup> that Locke’s educational philosophy contains tensions between the concepts of autonomy and ‘habituation’ (the internalisation of control, effecting self-discipline). As has been suggested, the inculcation of ‘reasonable’ habits is of paramount concern to Locke, but does not such habituation run counter to the cultivation of epistemic autonomy which he implies is desirable? Locke’s concept of teaching does not hold as crucial the memorisation of facts but gives preference to the encouragement of habits which will allow development of skills. These skills will enable the child to learn any subject area more successfully than reliance on rote learning would allow. Thus the child will be encouraged to think for himself. Quite how this transformation is produced is not discussed in depth by Locke. Indeed, there may well be an irresolvable paradox in his theory<sup>16</sup>, and it is a matter of question how truly autonomous an individual’s thoughts and behaviour ever are. But the paradox is not an issue for Locke.



## The method and content of education

Locke considers that a child is to be taught as few rules as possible<sup>17</sup>, and notes that a fault in the "ordinary Method of Education" is the "Charging of Children's Memories, upon all Occasions, with *Rules* and Precepts, which they often do not understand, and constantly as soon forget as given"<sup>18</sup>. The pupils' capabilities must also be considered to ensure that tasks are not too advanced for the child's developmental stage. It has been stated in Chapter 5 that Vives advised similarly and suggested that teachers assess pupils' abilities. Locke likewise insists that the teacher should study children's "Natures and Aptitudes" to determine "what turn they easily take and what becomes them" with regard to study<sup>19</sup>. He writes that children's dispositions will dictate what subjects they study at a particular time. They may be disposed to study reading one day and not the next. However, he advocates that if a child does not display a "good Disposition" towards a subject he must be "talked into one"<sup>20</sup>. Children can therefore be excused study of a subject if they are intellectually unsuited to it, but not where they simply dislike it.

On the content of a course of education, Locke argues that children should be taught to read as soon as they can talk<sup>21</sup>. Teaching is not to be conducted in a "tiresome" manner: "*Learning might be made a Play and Recreation to Children*" so that they will "desire to be taught"<sup>22</sup>. With regard to this aspect of Locke's education, Margaret Ezell comments that he is emphasizing the "rights of the governed" in the educative process<sup>23</sup>. She views Locke's advocacy that children should not "be hindered from being Children, or from playing"<sup>24</sup> as demonstrating his recognition of a "nature peculiar to children"<sup>25</sup>. That is, she sees in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* a recognition of childhood as a distinct stage of development, having its own characteristics. She argues that Locke's remarks contain a "tacit assertion of the existence of a distinct period between infancy and maturity which must

be permitted to run its course with no unnatural or forcible shortening"<sup>26</sup>. This is perhaps to read into Locke's work the acceptance of too modern an interpretation of childhood. Moreover, the recognition of play as being important in child development dates at least to Quintilian. It was certainly something which Vives understood, as was the importance of making learning enjoyable. Vives writes, in *De tradendis disciplinis*, that teaching - especially of grammar - should not be "wearily troublesome"<sup>37</sup>.

### **Reading, the learning of languages, and the sciences.**

Locke maintains that children are to learn to read the vernacular before learning Latin. The alphabet is to be taught first before syllables are introduced. Thereafter "some easy pleasant Book suited to (the child's) Capacity, should be put into his Hands, wherein the entertainment, that he finds, might draw him on, and reward his Pains in Reading..."<sup>28</sup>. It will be remembered that Vives felt that textbooks should be, initially, "pleasant" and "easy"<sup>29</sup>, while recommending for young children authors whom he thought to be "uncommonly entertaining"<sup>30</sup>.

Locke advises that once the child is proficient in speaking English he should learn another language. He prefers French for the first choice, then Latin<sup>31</sup>. When mentioning Latin he echoes Vives' recommendation in *De tradendis* that Latin is best learned by speaking it rather than by writing alone. Locke states that Latin is "absolutely necessary to a Gentleman"<sup>32</sup>, but that when teaching it to a child recourse should not initially be made to a grammar book. He would rather have Latin taught "as *English* has been, without the perplexity of Rules" and primarily through the medium of speech<sup>33</sup>. Vives may, then, have

been somewhat ahead of his time as he goes into detail on this matter more than one hundred and fifty years earlier than Locke. In *De tradendis*, Vives writes that pupils are to be taught Latin through the medium of their first language:

[Pupils] should first speak their mother-tongue, which is born with them and the teacher should correct their mistakes. Then they should, little by little, learn Latin... [L]et them intermingle with the vernacular what they have heard in Latin... But outside the school they should speak the mother-tongue so that they should not become accustomed to a hotch-potch of languages...<sup>34</sup>

The teacher must "know the mother-tongue" of the pupils so that "by this means, with more ease and readiness, he may teach the learned languages"<sup>35</sup>.

Once a child has studied a foreign language, Locke thinks that they should be introduced to the natural sciences. Pupils are to be taught 'knowledge' of

[t]hings, that fall under the senses, and require little more than Memory. For there, if we would take the true way, our Knowledge should begin, and in those Things be laid the Foundation; and not in the abstract notions of *Logick* and *Metaphysicks*, which are fitter to amuze, than inform the Understanding in its first setting out towards Knowledge.<sup>36</sup>

Vives also advocated that after pupils begin the learning of languages they should study natural science. He termed this a pursuit of the "knowledge of nature" and deemed it to be "easier" than "an abstract subject dealing with experiences of life"<sup>37</sup>. Moreover, knowledge of nature is acquired with the "natural senses"<sup>38</sup>; accordingly, students are to commence study of nature with "those things that are evident to the senses. For the senses open up the way to all knowledge"<sup>39</sup>. In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, Locke writes that, where teaching of "general" knowledge of nature is concerned, the tutor is to begin with "that which lies most obvious to the senses"<sup>40</sup>.



Older pupils are to study rhetoric and logic, but Locke warns against these subjects being the mainstays of education because they are of "little advantage to young People"<sup>41</sup>. He fears that studying logic will lead to the student being subjected to scholastic method, which he opposes. Furthermore, he would have a young man "*learn a Trade, a Manual Trade*" even though this seems inconsistent with an education "tending towards a Gentleman's calling"<sup>42</sup>. In a letter of 1688 to Edward Clarke, Locke suggests that it might be fitting for a young man to spend a year abroad perhaps with "some sober and skilful jeweller, either in Holland, or in some other convenient country... that there he may learn that trade"<sup>43</sup>. He also mentions gardening and carpentry for a youth destined to be a "country gentleman"<sup>44</sup>. Vives recommends a similar course: where a student wishes to learn "practical arts" he must learn from a craftsman who practices it<sup>45</sup>.

It is evident that little of Locke's treatise on education rests upon his work on psychology apart from the concern that tutors take account of pupils' development and suit materials to their maturational stage, the suggestion that early learning be made enjoyable, and that the natural sciences are at first to be taught with regard to pupils' sensate experience. Locke's work on psychology does not, then, overly inform his pedagogy. However, his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* is a substantial work in its own right, and like *Some Thoughts* it was written in stages over a period of time.

In the *Essay*, Locke enquires into the nature and scope of understanding, something he had explicitly wondered about in his essay *Of Study* in which he wrote: "It would be of great service to us to know how far our faculties can reach..."<sup>46</sup>. In this earlier essay he contends that the "essences... of substantial beings are beyond our ken"<sup>47</sup>; only some things are "the proper objects of our enquiries and understanding"<sup>48</sup>. These points were to be central to the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. James Axtell comments that in this work Locke displays a "seeming disregard of anything the preceding philosophical traditions -

Aristotelian, Hobbesian, Cartesian - had done"<sup>49</sup>. But Axtell's point extends only so far, and his qualifying words ("seeming disregard") are well chosen. Locke, in fact, relied on a variety of previous philosophers including those named by Axtell. That said, the *Essay* has traditionally been described as contributing "as much to psychology as to philosophy"<sup>50</sup>, and stands at the centre of Locke's reputation. But as will be made clear in the next section, Locke's contribution to psychology had been somewhat anticipated by Vives' *De anima*.

### Locke's "survey of our understandings"

[Locke] has been generally credited with laying the intellectual foundations both of liberal democracy and of modern empirical philosophy. An empiricist is someone who believes that our conceptions about what exists can never pass entirely beyond the bounds of experience - that everything we can conceive of has either been experienced or is constructed out of elements which have been experienced. Some version of this doctrine has been accepted by many of the greatest philosophers since Locke, and philosophy in the English-speaking world has never escaped its dominance for long. So familiar has it become that many people nowadays regard it as obvious - just plain common sense - but when Locke propounded it it was an idea with revolutionary implications...<sup>51</sup>

Despite any revolutionary implications which may be ascribed to empirical philosophy at the time of the writing of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, many aspects of Locke's epistemology had been outlined by earlier thinkers such as Pierre Gassendi and Luis Vives; for instance, the theory of sensitive knowledge and the place of the senses in acquiring the 'information' which makes up the contents of the intellect. In the classical



world, Aristotle did recognise the important role of the senses, but believed that certain knowledge of substantial essences could be had. Nor could Aristotle be termed an "empiricist" with respect to his philosophical method, or to the content of his epistemological theory. Mere recognition that the senses have some role in perception does not make an empiricist. Locke undoubtedly went further than this, and does warrant credit for having a part in the promotion of an early version of what is now termed "empirical philosophy".

Although Locke is fairly described as one of the most influential Western philosophers, it is patent that "anyone studying the history of philosophy chronologically, and therefore coming to Locke after studying his predecessors, cannot but be struck by how much of what Locke said had already been said by his predecessors"<sup>52</sup>. While similarities in the *Essay* to the work of both Descartes and Gassendi have been recognised, similarities between the essay and what Vives writes in Book II of *De anima* have not been considered in depth. Much of Locke's analysis of the understanding has parallels with the preceding theories of *De anima et vita*, beginning with the very parameters set for the investigation.

Like Vives, Locke is explicit in the limitations of an inquiry into the mind/soul. (Locke predominantly uses the term "mind", but does refer to it as "soul".) He is not going to examine "wherein [the mind's] essence consists"<sup>53</sup>. As with Vives, Locke does not believe that we can have knowledge of the essence of any thing; instead he will enquire into the origin of ideas and "the ways whereby the understanding comes to be furnished with them"<sup>54</sup>. Unlike Vives, Locke does not accord space to a discussion of the passions. His main task is to determine how ideas come to exist in the mind. He defines an idea as "whatsoever is the *object* of the understanding when a man thinks", and uses the term idea "to express whatever is meant by *phantasm*, *notion*, *species*, or *whatever it is which the mind can be employed about in thinking*"<sup>55</sup>. Vives uses the term "notions"<sup>56</sup>, but more



regularly refers to "things" which are "present to the senses"<sup>57</sup>. Locke gives a definition of the term "idea" as a signification for mental contents, and attempts to use it consistently throughout the *Essay*, though he does not always succeed. His definition approximates that given by Gassendi who stated that the term "idea" suffers "less from ambiguity" than terms such as "species", "notion", "phantasm" or "concept"<sup>58</sup>. Michael Ayers points out that although "idea" had been in use as a technical term, with various meanings, there was a shift in the connotations associated with the word. This was particularly apparent during the seventeenth century.

Then, largely perhaps because of the way it was taken up by Descartes, it became an extremely popular term for what one might in general call a 'mental content'. But despite this broad agreement in their usage of the term, Descartes and Locke hold very different views on the nature of ideas or mental contents. For Descartes, the idea is something fundamentally intellectual. For Locke it is something fundamentally sensory.<sup>59</sup>

As we have seen, a "notion" (idea) begins for Vives with perception: "In the first consideration, the soul follows the report of the sense"<sup>60</sup>. The imagination receives this initial sensory information, the memory retains it, and percepts thereafter are dealt with by "internal consciousness"<sup>61</sup>. Correspondingly, Locke states that the senses "at first let in particular ideas, and furnish the yet empty cabinet"<sup>62</sup>. These ideas are then "lodged in the memory, and names got to them"<sup>63</sup>. However, whereas Vives refers in general terms to "things got" by the senses, or to the "report of the sense" (implying sensate information of some sort), Locke regards the sensate information as "ideas". Hence Ayers' statement that the idea is fundamentally sensory for Locke.

## Sensation and reflection

Locke believes that "qualities" in a sensible object affect the senses and produce ideas in the mind<sup>64</sup>. This follows the stance taken by earlier writers like Gassendi and Vives, as does his insistence that knowledge of objects cannot extend to essences. Knowledge of objects depends on "simple ideas" received from sense information. Vives also maintains that the external senses cannot perceive that which lacks "extension and quantity"<sup>65</sup>. For Locke, all ideas stem either from reflection on ideas or from simple ideas acquired through the senses (in a process similar to Vives' "simple apprehension"<sup>66</sup>). He comments:

I pretend not to teach, but to inquire; and therefore cannot but confess here again that external and internal sensation are the only passages that I can find of knowledge to the understanding. These alone, as far as I can discover, are the windows by which light is let into this *dark room*. For, methinks, the understanding is not much unlike a closet wholly shut from light, with only some little opening left, to let in external visible resemblances, or ideas of things without...<sup>67</sup>

As we have seen, Vives uses the same metaphor in his description of the relationship between sensation and knowledge acquisition:

Like those who live in a basement, with only one little window to the outside, do not see except through our senses, thus we see nothing except through our senses. Nevertheless, we peep into the outside and with our mind we infer the existence of something beyond our senses, but only as much as our senses permit us to do. Our mind rises upon the senses, but is based on [them]... <sup>68</sup>

Both writers are in accord as to how they conceptualise the mechanics of sensation.

Locke, does not accept that there are innate ideas in the mind, even about concepts such as "justice" or "truth"<sup>69</sup>. Every idea, even those arising from reflection, is based upon a simple

idea gained via the senses. Locke concludes that it is "evident, the Mind knows not Things immediately, but only by the Intervention of the *Ideas* it has of them. *Our Knowledge* therefore is *real*, only so far as there is a conformity between our *Ideas* and the reality of Things."<sup>70</sup> So, simple ideas, gained from sensate knowledge, correspond to actual objects. Vives also describes a form of "simple" knowledge gained from sensate information<sup>71</sup>. He writes that all animals have this type of knowledge, but what sets man apart from "lesser" animals is the ability to reason in a structured way, proceeding from "A to go to B to end in knowing C"<sup>72</sup>.

While Locke calls sensate information "knowledge", Vives gives a comparable description. Of the three classes of knowledge which he defines, one is sensate: "That which we call corporal [bodily] sensation is none other than the knowledge of the soul through the external instrument of the body."<sup>73</sup> Locke argues that we have sensitive "knowledge" of the "particular existence" of finite beings "without us"<sup>74</sup>. Sensate knowledge results in an idea being in the mind - an idea which corresponds to an actual object. Sensitive knowledge is "narrower" than other forms of knowledge given that it reaches "no further than the existence of things actually present to the senses"<sup>75</sup>. Vives' thought is consonant: he speaks of the "first", "most simple", kind of knowledge as coming through the senses. From this knowledge stems all other forms<sup>76</sup>.

Locke describes the mind prior to receiving sensate ideas as being like "white paper, void of all characters"<sup>77</sup>. All the "materials of reason and knowledge" come from experience: "Our observation employed either about external sensible objects, or about the internal operations of our minds perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is what supplies our understandings with all the materials of thinking."<sup>78</sup> Locke's postulation is that the "soul begins to have ideas when it begins to perceive"<sup>79</sup>. (Vives calls the faculty which performs this operation of the soul the imagination.)



It is conspicuous, then, that there is accordance between the views of Locke and Vives on sense perception and the reception of percepts. Locke's "simple idea" equates with Vives' "simple intelligence" as the term for the initial information to be dealt with by the soul/mind. Vives writes that "things" in the mind come "bodily" via the eyes and intellectually via the imagination<sup>80</sup>: the distinction between ideas gained from sensation and those gained from mental operations which Locke describes. For Vives, the first stage "simple" concepts gained from sensation are transformed into "compound" concepts by the imagination. Locke also regards perception as "the first faculty of the mind exercised about our ideas"<sup>81</sup>, a faculty possessed in "some degree" by "all animals"<sup>82</sup>. Like Vives, Locke regards simple ideas as being used to form 'compound' ideas<sup>83</sup>. Vives argues that if a "simple object" ("without combination") is "presented to the mind", the imagination receives the "same figure" as was offered to the senses. If the object is not present to the senses, but has been "impressed" in the memory, the fantasy reforms the image taking it from the memory. Where the object is not one which has been perceived directly by the senses it is a product of the intellect which infers its existence through reason<sup>84</sup>.

Similarly, Locke speaks of "objects" falling under the senses and being transferred to the brain, producing in the mind the "particular idea we have of them"<sup>85</sup>. He comments that ideas gained by perception can be kept in the memory and recalled<sup>86</sup>, while the mind can "invent" or enumerate "notions we cannot see"<sup>87</sup>. Locke calls these "mixed modes"<sup>88</sup>. He then argues that the 'next' mental faculty which allows progress to knowledge is called "retention", which is the "keeping of simple ideas"<sup>89</sup>. Retention is effected in one of two ways: by contemplation (keeping the simple idea "in view"<sup>90</sup>), or by memory. Locke defines memory as the power to "revive" in our minds ideas which have been "laid aside" after "initial imprinting"<sup>91</sup>. Closer attention will now be given to this aspect of the *Essay*.

## Memory

Locke states that memory revives stored ideas and "paint[s] them anew on itself"<sup>92</sup>. This is an analogy familiar to Vives who twice uses it to describe the process of memory retention: memory is like "the panel which a painter illuminates"<sup>93</sup>. He writes in *De anima* that in the same way as an image seen by the eyes produces a "notion", so the memory makes a notion for the "eyes of the soul"<sup>94</sup>. Memory loss occurs when an image "painted" on the memory is erased before it is complete<sup>95</sup>.

Locke calls the memory the "storehouse" of our ideas, a "repository" in which they are kept<sup>96</sup>. Vives, too, calls the memory a "storehouse" (*depósito*) when discussing memory failure<sup>97</sup>, and in the introduction to Book II of *De anima* he refers to the memory as a "receptacle or storehouse (*almacen*)" for ideas<sup>98</sup>. It may be that this similarity is due to the effects of translation (from Latin to Spanish in the case of *De anima*). It may also be the case that "storehouse"/"repository" was a common simile for the memory. Juan Huarte, who is acknowledged to have been influenced by Vives' *De anima*<sup>99</sup>, does not compare memory to a "storehouse" but does choose to quote Galen's use of the similar term "repository"<sup>100</sup>. Locke had a copy of Huarte's only book *Examen de Ingenios* (the *Tryal of Wits*)<sup>101</sup> but in this instance it does not explain the similarity in Locke's and Vives' terminology. Both use a comparison which could well have been a commonplace.

Locke depicts two ways in which memory can be adversely affected: "Oblivion and Slowness"<sup>102</sup>. With oblivion, memory "loses the idea"; with slowness, the memory retrieves the idea too slowly to "serve the mind"<sup>103</sup>. Vives mentions things which produce "oblivion" in the memory<sup>104</sup>. Locke and Vives note that disease and illness can "influence the memory" (as Locke puts it)<sup>105</sup>. And, for both writers, the discussion on memory is



followed by descriptions of how simple ideas are used to form complex ideas. Locke refers to "composition" or "compounding" as being the most important mental operation (that is, the forming of complex ideas from simple ones)<sup>106</sup>. Vives terms this mental operation "compound intelligence" and describes it as being a comparative function as well as having the ability to classify "elements" arising from sensate information<sup>107</sup>.

A final point of comparison between the descriptions of memory in Locke's *Essay* and Vives' *De anima* concerns their discussion of the association of ideas. Locke believes that some of our ideas have a "*natural* correspondence and connexion one with another" and that it is the "office and excellency of our reason to trace these, and hold them together"<sup>108</sup>. Connection between ideas can occur through "chance" or "custom". He gives this example:

A grown person surfeiting with honey no sooner hears the name of it, but his fancy immediately carries sickness and qualms to his stomach, and he cannot bear the very idea of it; other ideas of dislike, and sickness... presently accompany it, and he is disturbed; but he knows from whence to date this weakness... Had this happened to him by an over-dose of honey when a child, all the same effects would have followed; but the cause would have been mistaken, and the antipathy counted natural.<sup>109</sup>

It has been mentioned that Vives noted association of ideas in *De anima*, giving as examples his aversion to cherries which dated to a childhood illness, and the memories of his friend Idiaquez prompted by seeing his friend's house in Brussels<sup>110</sup>.

Although Locke's descriptions of these aspects of "human understanding" have their corollaries in earlier works, notably in *De anima et vita*, his discussion of ideas entered philosophical territory into which an earlier author such as Vives would not have strayed. The final section of this chapter will look briefly at the logical consequences arising from Locke's discussion of ideas and sensate knowledge. This will give an indication of how



ideas which characterise the work of a thinker like Vives were developed by Locke in a very different intellectual climate and may be of help in relation to the question of intellectual influence as a whole. It will also give insight into aspects arising from Locke's *Essay* which did have 'revolutionary' ramifications (for instance, atheism as a consequence of adopting the materialist position).

### **Locke's theories: some implications**

One area of particular interest emerging from the *Essay* concerns how we can be sure of material objects if we have no direct knowledge of essences. We can only speculate about such things and rely on our observation of appearances to do so. Superficially, Vives' argument on this issue is similar to Locke's: we reason based on sensate information about perceptible objects, but this information cannot extend to essences. However, Vives does not go into detail about how an "idea" might be said to correspond to reality and so his theory does not succumb to the position of scepticism in the same way as does Locke's theory. Locke devotes much of the *Essay* to explaining his thinking about ideas, and how they correspond to 'reality'. He decides that some ideas resemble what they represent in actuality, while others bear no such relation.

There is a problem with Locke's argument that essence or "hidden" substance cannot be known yet is not unknowable in principle. (That is, essence can be speculated about, based on observation.) He states that we can define the nominal essence of an object but that we "know not" the "real" essence<sup>111</sup>. Our faculties carry us no further towards knowledge of corporeal substances than the apprehension of sensible ideas about those substances. Such

sensible ideas are, of course, gained by observation. Elements of Locke's thought on this derive from Gassendi's position that observation of an object can allow us to give a detailed account of the sensible qualities of the object but that the "alleged naked, or rather hidden, substance is something we can neither conceive ourselves nor explain to others."<sup>112</sup>

Contemporary critics of Locke argued that his position might be taken as implying that certain knowledge about "reality" is impossible, and that he adopts a "materialist" position with possible logical consequences resulting in the denial of immaterial substance (such as the soul). This latter stance is not one which Locke adopts: the *Essay* argues, quite categorically, for the immateriality of the soul. Nevertheless, in Locke's theory percipients do not directly perceive the world. Instead they have ideas in their minds which conform to real objects, and which represent real objects. The percipient perceives the world 'mediately' rather than 'immediately'. Given Locke's premise it is questionable that we can know with certainty that an object exists independently of our minds because the immediate object of knowledge is the *idea* of the object (not the object itself). However, Locke remains convinced of the existence of objective reality, although his epistemology is prey to philosophical questioning about the role of the perceiver and her/his relationship with reality.

Locke does confer a degree of certainty upon sensate knowledge, and in so doing his philosophical position may be labelled 'limited' empiricism. What we know is derived partly from sensate experience, and partly from reflection based on abstract ideas. Because Locke grants sensate experience some certainty, his scheme allows percipients to have a measure of certainty that sensate experience of the world corresponds to actual objects being perceived. Locke argues that some certainty about knowledge is also facilitated by the faculty of reason. He claims that the "greatest part" of our knowledge



depends upon deductions and intermediate ideas; and in these cases where we are fain to substitute assent instead of knowledge, and take propositions for true, without being certain they are so, we have need to find out, examine and compare the grounds of their probability. In both these cases, the faculty which finds out the means and rightly applies them, to discover certainty in the one and probability in the other, is that which we call *reason*.<sup>113</sup>

If carefully carried out, reasoning can lead us to make inferences about the unobservable which are probably correct. On the other hand, if "probably correct" is the closest approximation we can achieve about unobservable things, how can we be sure of the correctness of concepts such as morality or of the existence of God?

Locke does not give a cogent answer in defence of belief in moral imperatives, though he is careful to defend the 'reality' of the existence of God<sup>114</sup>. In order to remain consistent with his epistemological position he has to contend that knowledge of God, being immaterial, is not innate<sup>115</sup>. It could be argued that this logically implies that "knowledge" of God is a human construct. Even if Locke holds that knowledge of God can be gained through observing reality, he has declared that we can only have concepts of the nominal essences of substances. God is insubstantial, so how can Locke (or anyone) be certain of His existence? Locke's answer is that we can reason, founded on the "intuitive certainty" of our own existence<sup>116</sup>. If we exist, some greater power must have created us since man knows - again with "intuitive certainty" - that "Nothing cannot produce a Being"<sup>117</sup>. Furthermore, because we are thinking beings, it can be deduced that another "cogitative" being had to produce us<sup>118</sup>. Actually, Locke is not really providing us with much other than dogmatic assertion in support of *a priori* belief in the existence of God. Like Vives, he accepts *a priori* belief in God's existence, and for Locke this leads to a lack of fit between his epistemology (with its partial empiricism) and his acceptance of the certain reality of God. Locke's justification of the existence of God is by appeal to faith however much he attempts "reasonable" argument in the Essay. But then the alternative was the promotion of atheism.



## Conclusion

What Locke attempts in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* is to give a "psychological account of the origin of our ideas", which includes appeal to experience as the means of gaining sense-based knowledge<sup>119</sup>. Belief in the existence of sensitive knowledge is "central to his philosophical position", as we have seen, and his "counting it as knowledge at all placed him with Gassendi and Hobbes, against Descartes"<sup>120</sup>. Moreover, it has been argued here that important concepts in the *Essay* echo the earlier theories of Vives.

While readings of the *Essay* and *De anima* suggest similarities, there is no direct evidence to prove that Locke had read Vives' work. Given Huarte's reliance on Vives, and Locke's ownership of Huarte's *Examen*, it might be postulated as a possible source. However, Huarte's *Examen* is substantially different in content from Locke's *Essay*, and a reading of Huarte does not support the argument that it is a clear link between Locke and Vives. The only aspect which all three authors share is the insistence on sensate information as the basis of all knowledge, and Huarte does not give as sophisticated a rendition of this as do the other men.

Having said that elements of Locke's work are either derivative or had been predated by earlier thought, he can nonetheless be credited as being one of the founders of modern empirical philosophy. His work in the *Essay* also suited what he saw as a necessary purpose: his attempt to "cut down the pretensions of philosophers like Descartes who thought that they had already arrived at a deductive science of things"<sup>121</sup>. In addition, the *Essay*, together with *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, reflects Locke's advocacy of self-mastery. Rationality and education are to be utilised in the process of mastery of the

self, and ultimately of the environment<sup>122</sup>. To renounce the rule of reason was to have "quit the Principles of Human Nature"<sup>123</sup>, to have become degenerate and bestial. Locke's work reflects late Renaissance moves towards mastery of the environment, developed by writers like Francis Bacon and transformed by the 'new' science of Locke's contemporary Isaac Newton. Newtonian physics would alter the way in which the natural world was seen: it made modern physics possible and effected the separation of philosophy from "science" as the most apt means of describing physical phenomena. Locke's advocacy of self-mastery emerges from a tradition of belief in the superiority of the intellect over the emotions, but points to the championing of rationality which exemplified the Age of Reason.

## Conclusion

Although little of what was believed to be scientific in the past would be reconcilable to our own construction of scientific reality, the claim of 'science' to 'truth' became firmly established by the eighteenth century. That science became equivalent to truth in a world which was primarily religiously oriented was a major shift in the *Weltanschauung* of an age and much more important than the 'decline of magic'.<sup>1</sup>

The Renaissance marked the beginning of declining belief in magic, as experiment became allied less to magical practice and more to 'scientific' endeavour. While Luis Vives could as yet warn against dabbling in the magical arts, a philosopher like Locke worked in a time when science was being linked conceptually to claims of 'truth'. But it should be noted that the interest in magic had not declined altogether by the time of the 'new' science: Isaac Newton retained an interest in alchemy. And, as has been seen, the legacy of renaissance interest in the soul lingered in the work of Descartes.

With respect to the history of ideas, this thesis has drawn parallels between Vives' texts and the work of Pierre Gassendi, René Descartes and John Locke. In each instance it is evident that aspects of Vives' theories predate those of the later philosophers. Moreover, it has been the intention to illustrate the development of philosophical approaches to epistemology and psychology from the renaissance to the early eighteenth century. A case has been made that the development of philosophical thought outlined in the works of these authors took place against a background of the growth of a 'scientific' approach to natural philosophy which would culminate in the 'scientific revolution'. Of particular significance to this issue has been a comparison of Vives' approach to the study of the soul (in the sixteenth century)



with that of Descartes (in the seventeenth). This aspect is indicative of the nonlinearity to be found in the attempts to develop a method other than metaphysics for examining physical and psychological phenomena. In part it was the theories of perception arising from inquiries like that contained in *De anima et vita* which would precipitate a philosophical atmosphere in which observation and reliance on inquiry (rather than on *apriori* deduction) became taken for granted as a means to investigate the physical world. But while Descartes accepted the epistemic limitations arising from the need to rely on sensate information as the first stage in perceptual awareness, he remained loyal to metaphysics as the agent for the discovery of incontrovertible knowledge. Indeed, Descartes "at no time... put into question that the primary function of philosophy is to know what there is"<sup>2</sup> in reality, nor did he question "the human capacity to know and to do so with certainty"<sup>3</sup>. In his work, therefore, forms of proof do not rest principally on appeal to evidence gained empirically and demonstrated *a posteriori*. He remained faithful to the idea that intuition and deduction were the only mental operations requisite to scientific enquiry<sup>4</sup>. Descartes does refer to the need to observe physical phenomena in a few isolated instances in his works on the soul and the intellect<sup>5</sup>, but in this respect he does not advocate the requirement that hypothetical deduction about the soul or intellect be founded on and considered against empirical data. And, as Ernan McMullin argues<sup>6</sup>, where data gained via observation of physical phenomena contradicted Descartes' *apriori* deductions he usually explained the contradictions away and adhered to his original postulations. Tellingly, in a response to Beekman's experimental data which contradicted Descartes' theory of the pendulum, Descartes wrote that even were Beekman to make "a thousand experiments to find [the pendulum acceleration] more exactly, I do not have to take the trouble to do these myself, if they cannot be explained by reason."<sup>7</sup>

This thesis has argued that such a methodological perspective differs from that implied by Vives' directive in *De anima et vita* that the soul cannot be studied directly. In what he has to

say on the functions of the soul, he writes from a position which acknowledges the limitations placed by reliance on sensate impressions, most notably from observation, on the nature of our knowledge. Thus Vives links knowing to sensing/observing in a type of causal relation: what we observe and sense determines both the extent to which we can understand physical and psychological phenomena, and the remit we can properly set for any investigation of the physical world. It is apparent, then, that the place of doubt is central to the methodological differences found in *De anima et vita* and *Les Passions de l'Ame*. For Descartes' method, doubt is "instrumental rather than final and its primary function (is) to ensure that the piece of knowledge that survives it is established with absolute certainty"<sup>8</sup>. Descartes' doubt is an explicit part of his metaphysics and is intended to facilitate certainty. In Vives' *De anima*, however, doubt has a different (implicit) function: it limits how much can be understood about the world and it arises from the epistemic consequences of our needing to rely on sensate information as the basis of our understanding.

Of importance to the discussion has been Vives' theory of soul because it stands as an early inquiry into what would now be termed 'psychology'. In addition, as Stephen Gaukroger points out, Vives was, with Descartes, one of the "two most influential later writers on the passions"<sup>9</sup>. In the late twentieth century we may not recognise the complexity of such early theories of psychology. Aspects of Vives' search to understand the soul may now seem naive, but it should be remembered that even in this age we struggle to define neurological and psychological processes. Indeed as late as 1923 the psychologist and statistician Charles Spearman had a place in his view of science for the soul. He stated:

Deeper than the uniformities of occurrence which are noticeable... without its aid, [science] discovers others more abstruse, but correspondingly more comprehensive, upon which the name of laws is bestowed... When we look around for any approach to this ideal, something of the sort can actually be found in the science of physics as based on the three primary laws of motion. Coordinate with this *physica corporis* [physics of bodies], then, we are today in search of a *physica animae* [physics of the soul].<sup>10</sup>



So, almost four hundred years after Vives wrote *De anima* it would appear that psychologists like Spearman were largely in the dark about what might constitute scientific research into the 'soul'. Attempts to understand the nature of the human psyche remain difficult for scientists, but what connects those who study psychology today with philosophers like Vives is the search to understand the essence of what it is to be a human being.

It has also been argued that aspects of the work of Luis Vives show tentative use of components which would come to be regarded as cornerstones of empirical methodology: observation and reliance on sensate information. What remained to be done was to refine and sophisticate such aspects of empirical philosophy, and to translate empiricism into experimentalism. Thinkers like Newton, Descartes and Leibniz were to be part of the evolution of method which

established the texture of science, and in whatever variation [their work was] debated, modified, 'misunderstood', they none the less introduced axiomatically the factual authority of the experiment, the division of spirit from matter (however tortuous were the conceptual bridges that still accounted for 'soul') and of mechanism...<sup>11</sup>

However, it has not been suggested that Vives' work is empirical in the sense that it used experimental methods or rested upon the axiomatic. It did not do so. But in an era when claims to truth were tied to religious belief, he attempted a description of mental processes and epistemology which relied in part on observation, introspection and an argument for sensation as the first stage in cognition. Significantly, in the field of natural philosophy, Vives described the senses as receptors of information issuing from the outside world; the senses emit nothing and are passive in the process of sensation.



This thesis has stressed the need to understand Vives' theory of the soul in order to appreciate that his concepts of psychology informed his pedagogy. It has been stated that the result was a more sophisticated approach to teaching in Vives' work than is seen in his near contemporaries. He took cognisance of the maturational stage of the learner, accorded an element of professionalisation to the role of the teacher, acknowledged the place of enjoyment in early learning, believed that learners should begin natural philosophy by studying the things which were most evident to the senses, and underpinned his comments on memory with his analysis in *De anima et vita*. Observation and experience integrated into study of the arts and sciences were the means by which Vives intended individuals to gain knowledge. Moreover, it has been proposed that Vives' educational plan for girls and women marks a departure from the usual narrow 'housetraining' which renaissance females were accorded. Although the education he prescribed for girls is more constrained than that which he outlined for boys it remains broader in scope than most contemporary versions.

The work of Luis Vives provides an interesting example of psychological and educational ideas which were forward thinking in many ways. Although his ideas retain aspects which were typical of renaissance thought he nevertheless "deserves an important place in the intellectual history of Europe"<sup>12</sup>. In describing Vives' educational theories it might be argued that his most significant contribution lies within the area of the history of education. He knew his limits as a philosopher and study of his work partially upholds this view; he was not one of the greatest philosophers of his age when compared with the leading lights. However, when consideration is made of his educational work, his conscious attempt to construct a programme of learning which recognised psychological theory, and his advocacy of study for women, it might fairly be said of Vives that he was an impressive thinker within these fields.

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16. On this, see Neill, ibid. He argues that there is only an apparent paradox, since the habituation may be said to be a process which permits and individual to control anti-rational 'passions' and thus allow reasoning to take place. Arguably, this does not completely resolve the central logical contradictions, nor remove the philosophical paradox of how a state of individual intellectual freedom can ensue from external control and a process forced upon that individual without choice.
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29. Vives, op. cit., p.97
30. Ibid., p.134
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32. Ibid., p.268
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67. Locke, op. cit., p.131, at 2.11.17
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## Conclusion

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