

From the Microcosm to the Macrocosm: Ethos and Policy in Vives

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How can one establish interdependence between the individual and society? Vives transfers his observations regarding individual activities to the individual's position and behaviour in the system of state and society. Which relationships can be found between the normative and the descriptive in the fields of ethics, psychology and pedagogics? Are there correspondences between the capacity and talents of a person on the one hand and the types of knowledge and hierarchies within academic fields on the other? Can the order of the state be derived from an understanding of the characteristics and behaviour of the individual? Vives' treatment of poverty and poverty relief can be paradigmatically observed here. Do the peaceful or war-like relations between states exist within an isolated system, or can the example of the individual be used in the management of state and inter-state relations? In the following article Vives' ideas about learning, knowledge and talents will be examined. Following this, Vives' ideas will be explored using the example of provision of welfare for his views on internal policy and war as an example for his views on foreign policy.

Vives is not concerned with knowledge but rather with education: "There is nothing better nor more excellent in life than the education of the mind, which we term scientific studies. Through this study we differentiate ourselves from the position of animals, communicate our humanity, and raise ourselves upwards to God".¹ (Ilg, 5, 20, 33, 35, 48, 78; Neumeister) The aim of education is different for Vives than for other Humanists who take „vir eloquens“, rather than „vir bonus“, through *prudentia*, as the means to demonstrate worldly wisdom. The latter passes in the „Capacity for everything that we need in life, the situational and periodical relationships that we adapt to the people and the situation. This is the driver and steering wheel in the storm of our emotions, with which we prevent our life boat from sinking or being flung against the rocky cliffs or being consumed by the whirlpools.“ (*De disciplinis*, 5.1. VI, 386f) Wisdom is the result of the power of judgement and knowledge wrought through experience, which must be acquired by each individual independently. A guide through the experience is only necessary at the beginning, following which the individual mind is required to regulate its own inner activities and practices. The learning process is comparable with the more general process of discovery, which begins with observation and reflection in order to develop an empirical-inductive way from the individual observation to a conclusion about the general through the use of reason, through which knowledge is found. In economics and politics Vives wants neither teachers nor debates, recommending instead the observation of human emotions, of customs in the town hall and in public life. As the power of judgement cannot be taught, but must rather be inspired and informed, there is a risk of the danger of slavish ignorance and therewith the decrease of independence, the widespread *imitatio* author acknowledges. A great significance is thus placed on practice and familiarity with these practices, *habitus*, through which the easiness of the trade and inner inclination is produced (Hoppe 95). It is only through practical experience that Life-Knowledge can be taught.

¹ Nihil esse in vita vel pulchrius vel praestabilius cultu ingeniorum, quae disciplinae nominantur, qui nos a ferarum ritu et more separat, humanitati restituit, et ad Deum extollit ipsum. (Vives 1782-1790).

Vives differentiates between character types taking into consideration the mental capacities of the subjects. There are types with weaker and stronger, or with fluctuating and fixed attention spans. One group sees events as individual occurrences while the other group sees the connections between things. In relation to memory, there are those who find it easy to interpret (comprehend) something, but cannot retain it in contrast to those who comprehend little but retain it for a long time. One group can better remember words, the other deeds. In relation to thinking, one group orientate themselves through concrete examples, the other through abstract ideas. The synaesthetes summarise through what is seen, the analysts uses subtle means to deconstruct individual events. There are speculative and practical, productive and reproductive, quick and slow, stamina-full and swiftly wearied thinkers, which Vives places in connection with the gender difference and the differences between melancholic, phlegmatic, choleric and sanguine temperaments. The consideration of all of these different types enables the individual character of a child to develop. One reason for the decline of knowledge lies for Vives in that the teacher takes on as many pupils as possible for corrupt reasons such as avarice and thirst for glory, and therefore abandons his task of examining and nurturing the temperamental inclinations of the child.

The mediation between stoic composure of the wise and their moral contract to educate the ignorant is something Vives addresses in the ninth chapter of his fourth book *De concordia et discordia* under the title *De dignitate et officio sapientis* (1782-1790: V, 367-373). Here Vives raises the issues of the dignity and status of the wise: he offers the expressive picture of a deity who spends time amongst the people after he has been liberated from the power of his emotions following numerous meanderings and is already well advanced on his way to the summit of wisdom.

In this discipline there are, according to Vives, hierarchies: so it is that wisdom is unattainable to those who dedicate themselves to the forbidden arts like palmistry, cremation, and astrology. Vives does not allow the profane wisdom of the antiques to distract away from the Christian understanding of wisdom, which sees as its opposite ignorance, and understands itself as true knowledge, godly and god-given wisdom, within which all the estimations of knowledge and wisdom are contained.

How to deal with the poor was an important issue in domestic policy. How does Vives deal with the issue of poverty? Although in the middle ages the Church saw the support of the poor as their task, Vives believed the state should take over the responsibility. Was Vives guided in his views on the eradication of poverty by the writings of his friend Thomas More in his *Utopia* (1516)? (Stupperich, 49-62, 51; IJsewijn, 231-238) Or was it the result of his observations in the towns of Brügge and Antwerp that led him to write his tract *De subventionem pauperum seu de humanis necessitatibus* (1526)?

In the first book, he models causes and appearances of human wretchedness and shows charity to be an element of Christian piety, while in the second book he writes about the necessity of state-controlled welfare mechanisms for the poor, and explains their financial securing against potential opponents of his project (Keck, 13). Following the loss of the paradisaical innocence, humankind is poor insofar as it is deprived. Men is lacking health, reason, and the necessary materials for the minimum requirements of existence, and to obtain these he requires assistance. War, illness and economic crises are as equal causes of poverty as laziness and waste, and provide a background to the introduction of metal money. Although for Vives it corresponds to human nature to want to help others, we are prevented from doing so by meanness, complacency and egoism. Thus, the principles of charity should not be restricted to

the pecuniary, but should also extend to health, morality and educational support. That a defect is a part of the original creation should be borne with and good-naturedly accepted, but ought not lead to inactivity and forgetfulness of our duties. Begging is something Vives refuses to engage with, as every healthy person should work in accordance with their capability and, as the Bible states, he who does not want to work should not be allowed to eat. Orphaned children should be provided with a school education.

In hospitals there should be a differentiation made between able-bodied poor people, wandering beggars and the settled poor. Citizens of the town should, in case of emergency, explore the district and organise accommodation and control this on an every day level. The money to finance this should come from charitable donations and bequests and money given into church donation boxes, and through more precise control of the distribution of money from these sources in the hospitals (Weitzmann, 23-24). Thus, Vives stands between two key viewpoints; the Medieval view that poverty is a device for cautioning against hubris in humans and a means of encouraging good in people through the virtue of thinking charitably, and the modern view that poverty should be expunged for the benefit of society, as its existence can otherwise lead to corruption and criminal activities. In 1534, Vives heard of the community of property of the Baptist church in Muenster, which led him to question whether the early Christian community of property (Acts 4:32-35) could be a model for the eradication of poverty. Nonetheless, he understood *caritas* as something voluntary, which cannot be forced as this would otherwise lead to a state of tyranny.

What position does Vives take on foreign policy? Where does he stand in regards to war as a possibility for the advancement of foreign policy? As a pacifist, Vives avoided war and rejected the distinction between just and unjust warfare as a potential pretext for legitimizing a war. Those reasons for war he did acknowledge included civil disunity/disharmony amongst relations, fights over inheritance, and alliance difficulties. Vives demanded in *De concordia et discordia in humano genere*, in *De Europae dissidiis et bello turcio* and in *Liber de pacificatione* in the first half of the 16th century that peace be attained, and grounded his demands in an argument from Christian ethics. In his first works, he differentiates between bad deeds executed in a momentary passion from those bad deeds which, like disdain, bring about any benefit or use, causing only fear, harm and trouble. Discord leads only to rage and war, which is indicated through the disregard of laws and stately power. Freedom should be linked to law and order and should begin with the self-control of human emotions. World peace should be founded primarily through the internal peace of the individual. Common sense and a congenital goodwill facilitate a sense of human community while disharmonies deviate from the fulfillment of human nature. Original sin introduced pride, vanity, ambition/avarice, jealousy, anger and hatred to the world, which later led to war (Thürlemann, 63-73). With the advances in technological warfare through the development of artillery, war could no longer be counted on to guarantee the display of courage and chivalry. If Vives, like Augustinus, had considered life to be a pilgrimage to the eternal goal then he would also have considered it all the more senseless to go to war over transient goals. Independently from the fact that war brings with it devastation, peace implicates certain freedoms even in foreign countries, which, in times of war, are not even attainable in one's own country.

Vives observes the existence of a general spread of discord across Europe. The Italians despised their northern neighbours, considering them barbarians, whilst there was animosity between the French and the English, between the French and the

Spanish, just as between the English, Scottish and French, and also between the different regions and counties of the various countries, even within townships between the rival bands and families who lived there. Amongst the Lutherans there was neither love nor unity, and exactly the same between the various different religious orders that mutually attacked each other, accused each other and threatened one another. Vives considered one cause of the wide-spread readiness for war amongst the young nobles to be idleness: when the sons of noblemen have nothing to do other than gamble, drink and dance, they naturally seek more exciting entertainment in the alternative war provides. It would be better if they would listen to reasonable people and think of which measures could be taken to steer towns and kingdoms to peace and prosperity. That the Christians of the principalities abuse their religion and demand war seemed to Vives to be unreasonable. He cites the Christian principle of “love thy neighbour,” and mentions the Turkish, whose peace and security were guaranteed, as the Christians were totally preoccupied with fighting amongst themselves. The soldiers seemed to Vives to be impulsive, arrogant and unrestrained, especially when they were futilely waiting for their pay. He ironically summarises that the good aim of wars seems to be to allow nobody to profit and to harm the greatest number. Vives thus turns against war and regards the protagonists of war as criminals.

However, Vives has not entered into posterity through his political views, but rather through his psychological observations regarding human behaviour. In 1900 he was acknowledged as the predecessor of empirical psychology, insofar as he made experience the basic foundation of further study and emancipated psychology from the academic fields of meta-physics and theology. He did not desire to know what the soul looked like, but rather what effect it had on the person.

W. Dilthey in particular has cleared a special place for Vives in the field of psychology, especially because of his work on the role of emotion/passions in education. Vives categorised Aristotle as an important contemporary thinker and thus relativised his status as a timeless authority. Aristotle and his neo-Aristotelian scholars had disqualified themselves from consideration as real authorities due to their thirst for glory, addiction to debate, intentional deceptions, and dark modes of expression. Aristotelian physics are too quick to speculate and generalise, while the logic behind the theories include unacceptable metaphysical theories and grammatical elements. From this, Vives can be seen as an anti-Aristotelian and a founder of empiricism, albeit that he regularly expounded the same primary qualities as those found in Galens work on the liquids responsible for temperament, also echoed by Aristotle. In Vives' work, however, knowledge was considered in terms of its practical significance as a moralizing factor rather than in terms of its speculative interest. Psychological teachings became the foundations for principles of the training of the will and character. Thus he facilitated that pedagogical and ethical norms be taken seriously on a psychological basis.

Pedagogics was considered to be another fundamental starting point for Vives. Because his knowledge and learning theories are based on the composition of the intellect, i.e. the psychology of knowledge acquisition, his psychological explanations about individual attention and thinking types, the association of ideas and effect of energy fluctuations seem to be essential principles. He understood the education procedure as the realisation of the spiritual disposition and automatic seizure and use of the material. Since Vives' central concern was the reform of the teaching system, he fundamentally criticizes its corruption and deals extensively with the causes for it. Generally, however, he stands for encyclopaedic multiplicity, orientation using the

practical, realism, and for the reconciliation of humanism with Christian teachings. He shared many ideas with the classical thinker Quintilian, although he avoided courtly speech, viewing it as unbecomingly conflictual, and wanted formal eloquence to be only a means to reaching the goal rather than subordinating the contents. Vives influenced innumerable pedagogues right up until the eighteenth century. Comenius writes in the preface to his work about physics that he was given the impetus to write by Vives. Alsted, who was Comenius' teacher in the reformed high school of Herborn in the dukedom Nassau, also used religiousness as a starting point and gave preference to the scientific process of induction rather than traditional authority, accentuating the 'usefulness principle' in education and used the terminology of Vives in psychology. The process of raising a child should be natural, that is to say: the natural constructions of the raising-process should be considered, and the useful and natural should be favoured. The education of the will and personality exhibits itself therefore in a point of intersection between pedagogics, ethics, empiricism, psychology, and theology.

When Vives further applies the observations he makes regarding individuals, to their position and behaviour within the organisation of the state and society, certain fluid crossing points are revealed from the normative to the descriptive, from ethics to psychology and pedagogics. He differentiates between styles and talent types; in exactly the same way he distinguishes between corresponding knowledge types and hierarchical orders within academic studies. His analysis of the order of the State in turn stems from his theory of the individual wherein he introduces lethargy and waste as cause, and criminality as the possible consequence of poverty, and shows how it is possible to organize care for the poor in a practical way. In the same way as he does with internal policies, Vives also applies his contemplations of the individual to foreign policies. Thus, world peace has its roots in inner peace, specifically in the control of human passions, while the roots of war can be traced back to idleness, pride, thirst for glory, avarice, jealousy, resentment and envy, anger and hatred. Vives' exploration of internal and external policy reveals how his theories move from the individual to the state.

Coincidentally if Vives also seeks for Christian norms, his methodology remains nonetheless fundamentally inductive and descriptive. He observes, generalises, differentiates and draws practical conclusions for the individual as well as for the whole, in which he consistently takes into consideration the multiple dependencies between microcosm and macrocosm.

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