

ACTAS DEL CONGRESO INTERNACIONAL «CULTURAS GLOBALIZADAS: DEL SIGLO DE ORO AL SIGLO XXI»

**Lygia Rodrigues Vianna Peres y Liège Rinaldi
de Assis Pacheco (eds.)**



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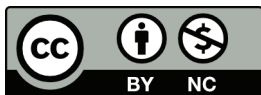
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WERE THE *ARBITRISTAS* ARBITRARY?
CRITERIA FOR DISTINCTION IN PEDRO DE VALENCIA

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When he was not translating classical works from Greek into Latin, the Cordoban humanist Pedro de Valencia (1555–1620) (figure 1) spent much of his time, it would seem, making pronouncements about whom should be included, whom should be excluded, and why. His *Discurso contra la ociosidad* (*Discourse against laziness*)¹ argued for the inclusion of women in the work force; his *Tratado acerca de los moriscos* (*Treatise regarding the Moriscos*)² advocated for the assimilation of this marginalized group as opposed to their expulsion; and his *Discurso acerca de los cuentos de las brujas* (*Discourse regarding the stories about witches*)³ criticized the Inquisition for its handling of an *auto de fe* in Logroño in 1610. His pronouncements extended to objects as well: in *Discurso sobre el pergamino y láminas de Granada* (*Discourse about the parchment and lead tablets of Granada*)⁴ he argued against the acceptance of the falsified lead books of Sacromonte as genuine. What were the criteria he used in each case? And what might his process of decision-making tell us about early modern spiritual as well as social dynamics?

Pedro de Valencia is that rare case of an intellectual figure who was relatively prominent in his own day but has been almost completely forgotten since then. He was appointed royal chronicler

¹ Valencia, *Discurso contra la ociosidad*.

² Valencia, *Tratado acerca de los moriscos*.

³ Valencia, *Discurso acerca de los cuentos de las brujas*.

⁴ Valencia, *Discurso sobre el pergamino y láminas de Granada*.

and chronicler of the Indies (two sinecure-type posts which he held simultaneously), although whenever possible he preferred to live in seclusion in his native Zafra, away from the royal court. He only published one book during his lifetime, the *Academica sive de iudicio erga verum* (*Academic, or Concerning Judgment about Truth*)⁵, a gloss on Academic skepticism which he claimed to have written in only 20 days⁶. Nevertheless, he was a prolific writer whose complete works in 10 volumes are currently still in the process of being published by the Universidad de León. (It was impossible for earlier generations of scholars to have much of an opinion about him one way or the other, due to the almost complete inaccessibility of his works.) Upon his death, Luis de Góngora praised him as «Nuestro buen amigo [...] [N]uestra nación [...] ha perdido el sujeto que mayor podía ostentar y oponer a los extranjeros» («Our good friend [...] Our nation [...] has lost the subject whom it could best hold up to rival foreign intellects»)⁷. This was high praise coming from someone who was otherwise often known for attacking his rivals—notably fellow poet Francisco de Quevedo—with a poison pen.

What little critical attention Pedro de Valencia has received has largely centered around the question of what role, if any, the philosophical position of skepticism might play in his other works. This question becomes more crucial when we consider how such skepticism might intersect with religion. Some scholars have tried to claim for Pedro de Valencia a certain pride of place as a ‘proto-modern’ thinker, asserting that although he still remained a devout believer within Catholicism, he was one of the most skeptical men of the 17th century, a «true rationalist»: «dentro del catolicismo, uno de los hombres más escépticos del siglo XVI, verdadero racionalista»⁸. Other scholars such as Juan Luis Suárez have taken a more measured view, reminding us that in the Christian Humanist vision, religion

⁵ Valencia, *Academica sive de iudicio erga verum*.

⁶ In Pedro de Valencia’s own words, «fue obra de 20 días» (Serrano y Sanz, 1910, p. 15). Serrano y Sanz quotes a letter written by Pedro de Valencia to Padre Joseph de Sigüenza in Zafra on 1 May 1597.

⁷ Góngora, «Carta a Don Francisco Corral», p. 72. Góngora’s letter to Don Francisco Corral is dated Madrid, 14 April 1620.

⁸ Serrano y Sanz, 1910, p. 19.

was not perceived as incompatible with more 'secular' philosophy. He writes of Pedro de Valencia's entire generation, whom he describes as belated humanists: «no se adapatan claramente ni a la categoría del humanista ni a la del hombre moderno» («they do not conform clearly either to the category of humanist or to that of modern man»)⁹. One of the challenges facing scholars, now that Pedro de Valencia's works are for the first time becoming available, is the question of how to reconcile apparently disparate parts of his *corpus*. I would like to focus on a small text of his, one which could fairly be termed 'ephemeral,' and use that text as a launch pad from which to talk about some of his other unrelated works. I would like to offer this approach as one of several possible interpretive frames we might employ to unify what could otherwise appear to be a random assortment of heterogeneous writings.

The text in question is a *Descripción de la pintura de las virtudes* (*Description of the painting of the virtues*)¹⁰ written by Pedro de Valencia in collaboration with Juan Baptista Lavaña, the autograph manuscript of which (consisting of 12 folio pages, BNM 13348) can be dated precisely to 1608 and may be found at the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid (figure 2). It describes a proposed iconographical program to be painted on the walls or ceiling of a gallery in the Royal Palace of El Pardo. This text has previously seemed of interest only to art historians and was first described by Rosa López Torrijos in a conference paper later published in the journal *Cuadernos de arte e iconografía* in 1989¹¹. The manuscript describes a proposed artistic program consisting of the depiction of 12 Virtues, the 4 Cardinal Virtues plus 8 additional Virtues understood to be subordinate to those, organized into pairs. Thus the scheme or organizational pattern would look like this:

I. Prudence

1. Providence
2. Solertia (shrewdness)

II. Justice

1. Clemency
2. Gratitude

⁹ Suárez, 1999, p. 76.

¹⁰ Valencia, *Descripción de la pintura de las virtudes*.

¹¹ López Torrijos, 1989.

III. Fortitude

1. Magnanimity
2. Constancy

IV. Temperance

1. Magnificence
2. Frugality

In the description of the proposed artistic program for the palace, these Virtues appear together with their ‘fruits,’ namely Happiness, Peace, Concord, Abundance, Victory, Honor, Fame, and Eternity. The figure of Prudence, for example, should be depicted as Minerva wearing a crown and royal robes of gold and purple, with a ship’s steering wheel in her hand and an owl at her feet. But as symbols of Prudence, Valencia allows for the depiction of related images, for example a two-faced head of Janus and some ducks who are presumably prudent because they possess the ability to walk, fly or swim as the situation warrants. In addition the document recommends that the painters include historical figures who exemplify each of the Virtues; for the Virtue of Prudence he calls for paintings of Marcus Porcius Cato arguing for the destruction of Carthage before the Roman Senate, with Publius Scipio providing a rebuttal. A second historical figure for Prudence would be Pyrrhus at the moment when he was received into Athens with his soldiers¹².

Now it could be argued that this previously unpublished manuscript description of an artistic program for a palace gallery that was never painted —López Torrijos postulates that the king may have rejected the proposed religious design in favor of a secular one, namely the pagan story of Achilles— has been justly condemned to a dusty corner of the archive. What could we possibly learn in terms of intellectual history from an idea that was discarded onto the cutting room floor? But I would argue that we should not be in too much of a hurry to sweep that floor with our mental broomstick, but instead pause to examine this tidbit of cultural debris. It may turn out that this apparently insignificant artifact holds a key to our understanding the rest of its author’s pronouncements on Golden Age social problems.

In Pedro de Valencia’s other works the Virtues do not receive a systematic treatment, but instead form a sort of umbrella encompassing his writings. Alternatively, in Derridian terms, they are the inescapable

¹²Valencia, *Descripción de la pintura de las virtudes*, pp. 190–191.

phantoms haunting his texts¹³. There are some instances where this author focuses on one Virtue in particular, as for example in his *Descripción de la justicia en ocasión de querer Arias Montano comentar las leyes del reino* (*Description of Justice on the occasion of Arias Montano's wanting to comment upon the laws of the realm*)¹⁴. Here he envisions Justice as a feminine entity and calls her «señora y reina no solamente de las virtudes, sino de todos en cielo y en tierra» («lady and queen not only of the virtues, but of all in heaven and on earth»)¹⁵. He sees her as the cosmic force ordering the universe, including the movements of the stars and planets as well as the angelic armies¹⁶. As for her lineage and appearance, in typical humanist fashion, he refers to the classical myth of Astrea and describes her as «no sólo virgen, pero niña y muy tierna y delicada»¹⁷ («not only virgin, but a young girl and very tender and delicate») —an interesting choice of characterization, given how much power she wields. He of course feels the need to flatter the current monarch, Philip III, as a sovereign defender of this damsel¹⁸.

In other instances throughout his works, the Virtues are mentioned specifically by name and invoked as justifications for proposed courses of action. For example, he advocates treating the Moriscos with Love and Charity, seeing in these Virtues the ultimate solution for Spain's dilemma of whether to expel them from its realms:

Conviene pues que, esparcidos los moriscos, se trate de su verdadera conversión con *amor y caridad*; que vean ellos que los queremos bien, para que se fíen de nosotros [...] los que fueren naciendo de matrimonios de cristianos viejos y moriscos, no sean tratados ni tenidos por moriscos, que a los unos ni a los otros no los afrentemos ni despreciemos. [...] Así

¹³ Derrida, 1994, pp. 4-7.

¹⁴ Valencia, *Descripción de la justicia en ocasión de querer Arias Montano comentar las leyes del reino*.

¹⁵ Valencia, *Descripción de la justicia en ocasión de querer Arias Montano comentar las leyes del reino*, p. 236.

¹⁶ Valencia, *Descripción de la justicia en ocasión de querer Arias Montano comentar las leyes del reino*, p. 236.

¹⁷ Valencia, *Descripción de la justicia en ocasión de querer Arias Montano comentar las leyes del reino*, p. 237.

¹⁸ Valencia, *Descripción de la justicia en ocasión de querer Arias Montano comentar las leyes del reino*, p. 238.

procurarán mezclarse con cristianos viejos y lo alcanzarán y se preciarán de cristianos y de honrados¹⁹.

(It is convenient, then, that—the Moriscos having been dispersed—we concern ourselves with their true conversion with *love and charity*; that they see that we love them well, so that they trust us . . . that those who were being born from marriages between Old Christians and Moriscos, not be treated or held as Moriscos, that we should not affront or despise these ones or the others. . . . Thus they will be able to mix themselves with Old Christians and they will attain it and esteem themselves as Christians and honorable.)

In similar fashion, in his discourse concerning witchcraft Pedro de Valencia appeals explicitly to the Virtue of Prudence, urging the Inquisitors to proceed with extreme caution and recalling classical precedents of individuals charged with practicing secret or mysterious rites: «Léese un ejemplo de esto muy notable en Tito Livio, y muy digno de ser considerado todo el cuento y su suceso, de todos los jueces, y más en el tribunal de la Inquisición, para recato y *prudencia*»²⁰ («Let it be read a very notable example of this in Titus Livius, and very worthy of being considered all the story and its outcome, by all the judges, and even more in the tribunal of the Inquisition, for discretion and *prudence*»).

It turns out that Prudence, at least in this author's view, is a versatile enough Virtue to be suitable for use in multiple contexts, ranging from witchcraft trials to literary criticism. In his famous letter to the Baroque poet Luis de Góngora, our humanist once again appeals to Prudence, this time regarding the poet's word choice. He urges him to avoid the Manneristic excess to which he was often prone: «y no niego a vuestra merced el arte ayudada de discreción y *prudencia* natural que suple mucho por el arte y hace buena elección»²¹ («and I do not deny to Your Mercy the art aided by discretion and natural *prudence*, which serves as a great supplement for art, and makes a good choice»).

Finally, this supremely versatile Virtue makes an appearance numerous times in Pedro de Valencia's copious correspondence, for example in his letter to Gaspar de Córdoba, royal confessor to King Philip III, regarding a tax imposed on wine and oil: «Mucha *prudencia* han

¹⁹ Valencia, *Tratado acerca de los moriscos de España*, p. 123.

²⁰ Valencia, "Borrador" for *Discurso acerca de los cuentos de las brujas*, p. 239.

²¹ Valencia, *Cartas a Góngora en censura de sus poesías*, p. 359.

menester [los príncipes y sus consejeros] para acertar en esta confusión . [...] a V. P. Rma. fácil y sin riesgo es darle consejo, porque en su *prudencia* y experiencia conocerá y no aprobará el no conveniente»²² («Much *prudence* do they need [the princes and their ministers] to choose rightly in this confusion [...] to You, Reverend Father, it is easy and without risk to give advice, because in your *prudence* and experience you will know, and will not approve that which is inconvenient»). In the same letter he appeals to Justice as the grounds for not imposing the tax, which he sees as an unreasonable and excessive burden on the poor farmers who cultivate olive groves and vineyards: «le escribiré [...] acerca de la justicia y conveniencia de la contribución de los que tienen y deben para la defensa del Reino» («I will write to you [...] regarding the *justice* and convenience of the contribution of those who have and owe [support] for the defense of the Realm»)²³. Later on in the same document he allows himself a short disquisition on the different types of Justice, replete with Latin citations, presumably in recognition of the fact that the letter's intended recipient was a high-ranking priest who would have received the educational training required to understand these subtle distinctions of moral theology: «casi siempre *Judicium* significa la *Justicia* y el derecho y *Justicia* la *caridad* y misericordia... [L]as quejas de falta de *caridad* mueven el castigo de Dios»²⁴ («almost always *Judicium* signifies Justice and the law and *Justicia* [means] *charity* and mercy... Complaints about lack of *charity* move the punishment of God»). At first glance, this aside may seem confusing —is Justice really more like Charity? This early modern humanist, like any good scholar, here acknowledges some slippage or possible overlap between categories for organizing virtuous thought and action.

In still further instances, even when he does not invoke the Virtues by name, nonetheless he still clearly refers to these organizational categories for moral thought. In his *Discurso sobre el acrecentamiento de*

²² Valencia, «Carta a Fray Gaspar de Córdoba, confesor de Felipe III sobre el segundo tributo de la octava de vino y aceite, y sus inconvenientes, y sobre los pronósticos de los astrólogos (Zafra, 19 de noviembre de 1603)», p. 18.

²³ Valencia, «Carta a Fray Gaspar de Córdoba, confesor de Felipe III sobre el segundo tributo de la octava de vino y aceite, y sus inconvenientes, y sobre los pronósticos de los astrólogos (Zafra, 19 de noviembre de 1603)», p. 18.

²⁴ Valencia, «Carta a Fray Gaspar de Córdoba, confesor de Felipe III sobre el segundo tributo de la octava de vino y aceite, y sus inconvenientes, y sobre los pronósticos de los astrólogos (Zafra, 19 de noviembre de 1603)», p. 20.

la labor de la tierra (*Discourse about the growth of the labor of the land*) he advocates Temperance, albeit without mentioning its name: «deje la ociosidad y la pompa y los vicios y los gastos demasiados» («leave off laziness and pomp and excessive expense»)²⁵. It is interesting to note in his *Discurso contra la ociosidad* (*Discourse against laziness*) that he does not limit this advice to courtiers only, but instead sets his reformist sights on none other than the king, whom he criticizes for maintaining too many servants:

Se habría de ver si Su Majestad tiene mayor casa y más número de ministros y criados del que basta y solía bastar para su servicio y aparato de magnificencia y autoridad. Porque esto, demás del gasto que se recrece, ocupa y hace ociosos a un gran número. Porque muchos o todos los criados de Su Majestad tienen criados, y criados de criados, y resulta con esto una gran multiplicación²⁶.

(It should be seen whether your Majesty has a bigger house and greater number of ministers and servants than is sufficient and used to be sufficient for your service and apparatus of magnificence and authority. Because this, in addition to the expense that thus outgrows itself, occupies and makes lazy a great number [of people]. Because many and all the servants of your Majesty have servants and servants of servants, and there results with this a great multiplication.)

One wonders how this fairly harsh criticism would have been received by the monarch. Pedro de Valencia was hardly anti-monarchy, however, in other occasions praising the king or members of the royal family for exemplifying particular Virtues. For instance, he praises Queen Margarita of Austria for having founded the Monasterio de la Encarnación, an Augustinian convent in Madrid, and takes the opportunity to list out the various Virtues which these nuns as holy women would exemplify: «sabiduría, prudencia, doctrina, Justicia, fortaleza, templanza y demás virtudes y bienes» («wisdom, prudence, doctrine, Justice, strength, temperance and the other virtues and good qualities»)²⁷. This passage is reminiscent of its author's proposed iconographical program in its consideration of all the Virtues taken together as a conglomerate.

²⁵ Valencia, *Discurso sobre el acrecentamiento de la labor de la tierra*, p. 148.

²⁶ Valencia, *Discurso contra la ociosidad*, p. 165.

²⁷ Valencia, «Borrador de un discurso a la reina doña Margarita, fundadora de un monasterio de religiosas de San Agustín», p. 492.

But really, what do all these references (and implicit references) to specific Virtues actually prove? We should be wary of placing too much weight on humanists' decisions to write or even publish treatises on the Virtues, as often times in doing so they were taking a public stance in what may now be seen as a deliberately self-conscious rhetorical act. Consider the case of Christian humanist and *converso* medical doctor Andrés de Laguna, for example, who published a gloss on Aristotle bearing the title *De Virtutibus* in Cologne in 1543²⁸ in what Marcel Bataillon has described as a thinly disguised effort to demonstrate his orthodoxy²⁹. On the other hand, in the case of Pedro de Valencia these multiple references to the Virtues provide a continuous thread which may lead us through the labyrinth of his 10 volumes of apparently disconnected works. They may also help resolve a persistent quandary which has frustrated almost every scholar who has delved into this territory, namely the questions of 'how religious was Pedro de Valencia?' and 'did his religiosity win out over his skepticism?'

In an effort to answer these questions, I would argue that our author was in fact extremely religious and that his religiosity *did* win out over his skepticism, but with the nuance that we must make a responsible effort to understand what precisely was the nature of his spirituality and what was meant by 'skepticism' in the early modern period—which most likely is not the same thing meant by that term today. It turns out that our humanist was educated by Jesuits, even attending one of their colleges in Córdoba whose educational regimen had been established by none other than Juan de Ávila³⁰, and his original intention—instead of becoming a lawyer—was to become a priest³¹. The Jesuits were known for their fierce practicality and willingness to 'get their hands dirty' through active engagement with the problems of the surrounding world. Pedro de Valencia's application of the principles of specific Virtues to actual economic and social issues may be seen as a process

²⁸ Laguna, *De virtutibus vere atq; adamantinus libellus / ex Graeco in sermonem Latinum per Andream a Lacuna... conuersus [sic]...; additae sunt ad calcem aliquot in Grynaeum castigaciones.*

²⁹ «preuves de son orthodoxie et de son amour de la vertu» (Bataillon, 1963, p. 233).

³⁰ Suárez, 1999, p. 65.

³¹ Manuel Serrano y Sanz confirms, «oyó Artes en el Colegio de la Compañía [de Córdoba]... Después cursó Teología con ánimo, al parecer, de ingresar en el sacerdocio; mas sus padres, que no tenían otro hijo, se opusieron á tal intento y lo enviaron á Salamanca para que estudiase Leyes» (Serrano y Sanz, 1910, p. 7).

of reasoning known within the field of ethics as *phronesis*, or practical wisdom.

Thus this seemingly ephemeral manuscript of only 12 brief folios can nonetheless help us to understand Pedro de Valencia's preoccupations and, more importantly, his way of approaching the world. As such, these pages demonstrate the importance of viewing an author's writings not in isolation but instead in concert, as they might be read in connection with one another.

This essay has turned out to be as much about scholarly method as it is about subject matter, as increasingly I find that as a scholar I want to be even more self-conscious about what I'm doing and why. At times the study of early modern humanist scholars can even inspire a certain imitation of their methods, at least in some suitably postmodern iteration. The late Christian humanist Pedro de Valencia has offered this scholar ample opportunity to engage in this type of profitable reflection.

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FIGURES



Fig. 1. *Portrait of Pedro de Valencia*, chronicler of Philip III, Instituto Valencia de Don Juan, Madrid (courtesy of Art Resource).

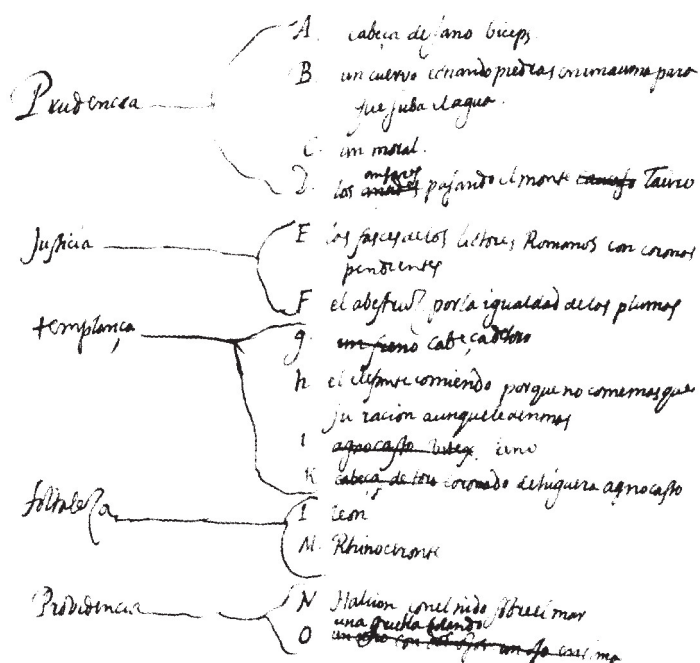


Fig. 2. List of Virtues, from *Descripción de la pintura de las virtudes*. Autograph manuscript, BNM 13348 (courtesy of Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid).

