

Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda. *Diálogo llamado Demócrates*.

Ed. Francisco Castilla Urbano. Madrid: Tecnos, 2012. €14. ISBN: 978-84-309-5473-5.

As a member of Pope Clement VII's entourage in a visit to Bologna (1532–33), the Spanish humanist Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1490–1573) became aware of the scruples that assaulted some young Spanish noblemen about the compatibility of their military duties with Christian values. Concerned with this situation — especially in the face of the Turkish threat — Sepúlveda set out to prove that a brave soldier's life need not exclude being truly Christian. He did so in his *Democrates primus* (1535), a Latin dialogue published in Rome, then translated into Spanish by Antonio Barba, and published again in Seville as the *Diálogo llamado Demócrates* (1541). The edition reviewed here, prepared by Francisco Castilla Urbano, is based on Barba's translation, which has been modernized to suit current Spanish spelling and punctuation. Its value is enhanced by Barba's apparently having consulted on certain difficult passages with Sepúlveda himself. Because of editorial timelines, Castilla Urbano was not able to take into account the edition of the *Demócrates* (2010) that has been published in volume 15 of Sepúlveda's *Obras completas*.

The *Diálogo llamado Demócrates* is a fine example of Spanish humanism in many respects. For one thing, it advocates a secular understanding of Christian

life, one in which the contemplative or celibate way of life, however valuable in itself, remains a marginal phenomenon. For the benefit of the greater part of the (Catholic) Christian peoples, Sepúlveda sets out a worldly ethical program that strongly appeals to classical models, especially Aristotelian ethics. To be sure, he does not consider this program as opposed to Christian morals, but rather as perfectly compatible with them, and this constitutes the fundamental premise of the work. In fact, Sepúlveda argues (in the voice of Demócrates, the character in the dialogue who is the mouthpiece for Sepúlveda's own views) that virtues are interlocked in such a way that, if one of them is lacking, all of them fail to develop properly. This implies that it would be impossible to cultivate Christian virtues without also practicing natural or simply human virtues. Thus the civic and military virtues of the classical world, such as magnanimity, nobility, and courage, do contribute to the forging of a truly Christian man-of-arms.

Other humanist themes appear in the *Diálogo llamado Demócrates*, such as the positive assessment of riches — as a means to properly exercise virtue — and of the active life versus a contemplative one. In certain of these themes, the work shows a unique perspective that sets Sepúlveda apart from other humanists like Machiavelli and Erasmus. Sepúlveda differs from Machiavelli in his emphasis on human and Christian values, which leaves no room for expediency. And he distances himself from Erasmus in his more realist approach to political issues, especially the just-war doctrine. So Sepúlveda would be situated — as Castilla Urbano argues in the introduction — halfway between civic humanism, with its stress on military virtue, and Christian humanism, which emphasizes evangelical and ethical values.

Particularly interesting is Sepúlveda's discussion of the traits of a magnanimous gentleman and his proper reward: true and solid glory. Sepúlveda explains how magnanimity is compatible with humility, since through it a man acknowledges his superiors and tries to fit into his proper place in the social hierarchy. Magnanimity is thus opposed to servility, but also to arrogance, since it deals with the just appraisal of one's own merits and virtues. In this regard, it is noteworthy that Sepúlveda holds a notion of excellence or nobility based chiefly on merit, more so than on birth or other extrinsic criteria. Hence a magnanimous man will regard himself as capable of great deeds, and accordingly will strive to live up to his own standards. However, only some may aspire to attain this virtue, since not everyone is capable of such distinguished feats. Thus Sepúlveda's notion of virtue still retains an aristocratic flavor.

This edition of a Spanish classic, which is very thoughtfully introduced, will certainly be useful in researching the distinctive features of Spanish humanism, especially in the fields of moral philosophy and Aristotelianism. It may also help to improve our understanding of the way Spanish humanism fit into the broader picture of sixteenth-century European humanism.

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