

# ERASMUS DESIDERIUS

THE  
EDUCATION OF  
CHILDREN

Desiderius Erasmus  
**The Education of Children**

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# Desiderius Erasmus

## The Education of Children

If thou wilt harken vnto me, or rather to Chrisippus, the sharpeste witted of Philosophers, yu shalte prouide yt thyne infante and yonge babe be forthewyth instructed in good learnyng, whylest hys wyt is yet voyde from tares and vices, whilest his age is tender and tractable, and his mind flexible and ready to folowe euery thyng, and also wyl kepe fast good lessons and preceptes. For we remēber nothyng so well when we be olde, as those thynges yt we learne in yonge yeres. Diuision of yt confutaciō Care not thou for those fooles wordes which chatter that thys age, partly is not hable inough to receiue discipline, & partlye vnmete to abyde the labours of studies. For fyrst, the beginnynges of learning, stād specially by memorie, which as I sayd, in yōg ones is very holdfast. Secondly because nature hath made vs to knowledge the study of yt thyng can not be to hasty, wherof ye author of al thyng her self hath graffed in vs ye seedes. Beside this some thinges be necessary to be knowē whē we be sūwhat elder, which by a certē peculier readines of nature, ye tender age perceiuet both much more quickly, & also more esily thē doth ye elder, as ye first beginnynges of letters, ye knowledge of tōges, tales & fabels of poetes. Finallye, why shulde yt age be thought vnmete to lerning, which is apt to lerne maners? Or what other thinge shuld chyldrē do rather whē they be more able to speake, seyng nedes thei muste do sumwhat? How much more profite is it yt age to sporte in letters, then in trifles? Thou wilt say yt it is but of litle value yt is done in those fyrste yeres. Why is it dispised as a smal thing, which is necessary to a very greate matter? And why is yt lucre, be it neuer so litle, yet a lucre, dispised of purpose? Now if you oftē put a lytle to a litle, there riseth a greate heape. Herewith cōsider this also, if beyng an infant he lerne smaller thinges, he shalt lerne greter, growynge vpwardes in those yeres, in which those smaller shuld haue ben lerned. Finally whye he doth these thinges, at ye least he shal be kept frō those fautes, wherwt we se comēly yt age to be infected. For nothyng doth better occupy ye whole mynd of man, thē studies. Verely this lucre ought not to be set light bi. But if we shuld graūte that by these labours ye strength of ye body is sumwhat diminished; yet thinke I this losse well recōpensed by winnyng of wyt. For the minde by moderate labours is made more quicke, & lustye. And if ther be any ieopardy in this pointe, it may be auoyded by our diligēce. You must haue for this tender age a teacher to enter it by fayre meanes, & not discorage it by foule. And ther be also some things both plesaūt to be knowen, & as it wer sibbe to childrēs wittes, whiche to lerne is rather a play thē a labour. Howbeit childehod is not so weake which euē for thys is ye more mete to take paynes & labour, because they fele not what labour is. Therefore if thou wylt remember how far vnworthy he is to be counted a mā which is void of learning, and how stirring the life of man is, how slypper youth is to myschiefe, and mans age howe it desyreth to be occupied, how baren olde age is, and further how few come vnto it, thou wylt not suffer thy yong babe in the whych thou shalte lyue styll as it were borne agayne, to let go any parte of hys tyme vnoccupied, in the whych any thyng maye be gotten that eyther maye do mucche good to all ye whole lyfe afterwardes, or kepe it awaye from hurtes, and mischiefes.

### The selfe same matter enlarged by cōpye

After the longe despayred fruitfulness of thy wyfe, I hearsay thou art made a father, and that wyth a man chylde, whyche sheweth in it selfe a meruelous towardnes, and euen to be lyke the parentes: and that if so be we maye by such markes t the fast holdyng bryers of vices. ¶ Yea rather euē now loke about for some man, as of maners pure & vncorrupt, so also wel learned: & into his lap deliuer your litle chylde, as it wer to a nurse of hys tēder mind, that euē wt his milke he may sucke in swete lerning: & deuide the care of thy litle sōne to his nurses & teacher that they shuld suckun the litle body wt very good iuyce, & so indue hys mynd wt very wholsom opinions, & very honest lernyng. For I thinke it

not conuenient that yu one of al the best learned, & also wysest shuldest geue care to those piuyshewomen, or vnto mē very lyke to thē the beard excepted, whych by a cruell pytie, & hateful loue, iudge that the chyldren euen vntyl they waxe springoldes, shuld be kept at home kyssyng theyr mothers, and among the sweete wordes of theyr nurses pastymes, and vnchaste trystynges of seruauntes and maydens. And thynke that they ought vtterlye to be kepte away from learnyng as t the weakenes of the chyldrē shuld be vexed. Whyle I proue euery of these thynges false, I pray you a lytle whyle take hede, countyng as the truth is, fyrst that these thynges be writtē of him which loueth you as wel as any mā doth, & inespacially of yt thing which so pertaineth to you, yt none can do more. t thei do leudly & also vntowardli which in tilling their lād building their houses, keping their horse, vse ye gretest diligēce thei cā, & take to counsell men yt be wyse, & of great experience: in bringing vp and teachyng theyr chyldren, for whose sakes al other thinges ar gotten, take so litle regard that nether e body that is sene, hathen hyd in the secrete place. or housebande manne wolde haue it to serue for, excepte oure dylygence helpe nature? The sooner it is donne, the better will it come to passe.

t shuld shew hym self a trustye and healpyng sonne in a lawe, a good husbände to his wife, a valiaunte and profitable citizen to the common wealthe, I saye to haue suche one, eyther they take no t shal be heire of thē can not vse thē? With vnmesurable studye be possessions gotten, but of the possessor we take no kepe Who prepareth an harpe for the vnskyllfull of musycke? Who garnysheth a librarie for hym that can skyl of no bookes? And are so great ryches gotten for hym whyche can not tell howe to vse them? If thou gettest these thynges to hym that is well broughte vp, thou geueste hym instrumentes of vertue: but if thou get them for a rude and rusticall wytte, what other thyng doest thou then minister a matter of wantonnesse and mischiefe? What canne bee thoughte more folyshe then thys kynde of fathers? They prouide that the bodie of the sonne maye be wythout faute, and shulde bee made apte to do all manner thynges comelye, but the mynde, u markest to what vse he is good, & trimly thou bryngest hym vp to some craft, either of e hyst place of the citey, & there crie out as loud as he could, & caste them in the teeth wyth theyr madnesse in this wyse. You wretches what madnesse driueth you? Take you suche thought to gette money and possessions, & take you no care for your children for whom you get these thynges? As they be scante halfe mothers whych onlye bringe forth, and not vp their chyldren, so be they scante halfe fathers, which when they prouide necessaries for theyr chyldrens bodies, euē somuch t in the playing place one stone sytte not vpon an other. Very properly another Philosopher Diogenes I trowe, bearyng in the mydday a candle in his hand, walked aboute the market place that was full of men: beinge axed what

¶ It is sayde that beares caste oute a lumpe of fleshe wythout anye fashion, whych wyth longe lykkyng they forme and brynge into a fashyon, but there is no beares yonge one so euyl faured as a manne is, borne of a rude mynde.

u forme and fashion this, thou shalt be a father of a monster and not of a man. e best maner, that matter that will obey & folow in euery poynt. If thou wylt slacke to do it, thou hast a beaste: if thou take hede thou hast, as I myght saye, a God. Chyldren euyl broughte vp, brynge shame to their parētes Agayne into what shames and greate sorowes they cast their parentes that bee euyl broughte vp. There is no nede to bryng here vnto the examples out of olde chronicles: do no more but remember in thy mind the housholdes of thine owne citey, howe many examples shalt yu haue in eueri place? I know thou doest often hear such wordes. u muste u haste gotten thē to the cōmon wealthe, not to thy self only; or to speake more lyke a christen man, yu hast begottē thē to god, not to thy selfe. Paul wryteth that so in dede women be saued, if they bryng forth chyldrē, & so brynge thē vp that they continue in ye study of vertue. God wil straitly charge the parēts wt the chyldrēs fautes. Therefore excepte yt euen forthwith thou bryng vp honestly yt, that is borne, fyrst yu dost thy self wronge, which thorow thy negligence, gettest yt to thy selfe, then the which no enemye could wyshe to an other, ether more greuous or paynful. Dionisius did effeminat wt delyghtes of the court Dions yong son yt was run awaye from him: he knew yt this shuld be more carefull to ye father, then if he had kylled hym wt a swerde. A litel whyle after when the yong manne was forced of his father that

was come to him, to returne agayne to his old vertue, he brake his necke out of a garret. In dede a certeyne wise hebriciō wrot very wisely. A wise child maketh the father glad, & a folish son is sorow to ye mother. e french pockes, beareth his death aboute wyth hym: another hathe burste by drynkyng for the beste game, an other goyng a whorehuntyng in the nyghte with a visar, was pitifullye kyllled. What was the cause? Bycause theyr parentes e tailers craft, as in time paste dyd Africa, bringeth forth some new mōster, yt we put vpon our infāt. He is taught to stand in his own cōceite: & if it be takē away, he angerly axeth for it again. the learne to loue the swearde, and to geue a strype. From such beginnynges thei are deliuered to the master: and do we merueyle if wee fynde them vnapte to lerne vertue, whych haue dronke in vyces, euen wyth the mylke? But I hear some men defendyng theyr folye thus, and saie that by thys pleasure whiche is taken of the wantōnes of infantes, the tediousnes of nursyng is recōpēsed. What is this? Shuld it be to the verry father more pleasaunt if the chylde folowe an euyll deede, or expresse a leude worde, thē if wyth his lytle stuttyng tonge, he spake a good sentence, or folowe any deede that is wel done? Nature specially hathe geuen to the fyrste age an easines to folowe and do after, but yet thys folowyng is somewhat more prone to naughtynesse then to goodnes. Is vyce more plesaunte to a good man then vertue, specially in hys chldren? If anye fylthe fall vpon the yonge chylde skyn, thou putttest it away, and dost thou infect the mynd wyth so foule t bewitche their childrē, or hurt their weake bodies with poisons: what do thei deserue which corrupt ye chiefe parte of the infāt wt most vngracious venome? t infecciō: but in dede fautes of the mind crepe vpon vs more priuely, & also more quickly, & settel deper. The apostle Paul worthily gaue this honor vnto the verse of Menāder, yt he wold recite it in his epistels: Euyl comunicaciō, corrupteth good maners: but this is neuer truer thē in infantes. Aristotle whē he was axed of a certen mā by what meanes he myghte bringe to pas, to haue a goodly horse: If he be brought vp quod he, among horses of good kynde. And yt if neyther loue nor reason can teach vs howe greate care we ought to take for ye first yeres of our children, at ye least waies let vs take example of brute beastes. For it oughte not to greue vs to learne of thē a thyng yt shall be so profitable, of whome mākinde now long ago hath lerned so many fruitful things: sence a beast called Hippopotamus hath shewed ye cutting of veines, & a bird of egipt called Ibis hath shewed ye vse of a clister, which ye phisiciōs gretly allow. t Iuy helpeth sickenesses. t nature hathe shewed vs an example in brute beastes, that they that haue not learned philosophy and other sciences, maye be warned at the least waye by them what they shulde do. Do we not se howe that euery beaste, not only doth beget yonge, but also fashion them to do their natural office? The byrde is borne to flye.

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