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Education of the young according to the humanist, Johann Funger

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Abstract

Johann Funger is a Dutch renaissance scholar, author of “The Correct Training and Education of the Young”, published in Antwerp (Belgium) by Christoffel Plantin in 1584. The original Latin text has recently been translated into Spanish and consists of thirty chapters. In his book, Funger deals with the contents of the studies, the intellectual habits of pupils, the virtues they should attain and the vices they should avoid.

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Introduction

“The Correct Training and Education of the Young” the title of the work was written by the Dutch scholar, Johann Funger, and published in Antwerp (Belgium) in 1584 by Christoffel Plantin. Divided into thirty chapters, the book is dedicated to the Dutch benefactors who paid for the publication and deserved praise for their philanthropy and benevolence towards the pupils of the Muses (Funger, 1584,4).

This work, originally written in Latin, has recently been translated into Spanish by José Gordillo, member of GEMYR (Medieval and Renaissance Study and Research Group) led by Professor Javier Vergara Ciordia, of the University de Educación a Distancia (UNED) in Madrid, Spain.

Funger addresses the reader, explaining that he is going to look at issues raised by many notable scholars throughout history, but that his book is not simply a copy of what others have said previously, although he does considers them. In fact, as a good Renaissance scholar he constantly cites the classics.

The scholar states that children are like clay vessels that retain the smell of the first liquid substance they hold, or that they are seeds that take root in the form of tender plants. It is the parents’ duty to protect them under optimal conditions. Bad examples that may influence them and too much pampering should be avoided.

“The first thing that must be found for a child from his most tender years is a conscientious education with a teacher or learned man” (Funger, 1584, 11). With these words Funger begins the chapter devoted to teachers, immediately stating that there are many false learned men who are simply “silver-tongued”.

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A good teacher: recognizes the defects of their pupils; has high moral principles and ideals; is moderate in anger and in meting out punishment, avoids frivolous behaviour; is concise and clear when teaching; never forgets he has to give account to God; repeats lessons in order to strengthen pupils' memory; should not participate in games so as not to diminish his authority; should be familiar with the different types of pupils and bear these in mind when teaching; must teach the nobility and usefulness of the liberal arts that should accompany virtue and piety(Funger,1584,12); should teach children Latin from a very early age (Funger says literally from the very moment children start saying their first words); should reward children with sweets and punishment should be severe (Funger,1584,13).

There is discrepancy among the classical scholars regarding the age at which studies should begin: some say the best time is six or seven, others at age of ten. As soon as they can read, they must be given maxims and aphorisms of great philosophers and poets so that their teachings become imprinted on their young minds and, at the same time, their minds are trained. Funger states that pupils should always read aloud to help with the correct understanding of the text and, as they believed in Classical times, to aid digestion. If the pupil refuses to read aloud, he must first be flattered, and then prodded (Funger, 1584,14). Nevertheless, it is preferable that pupils have fond memories of their teacher for having received from him the great prize: knowledge (Funger, 1584, 15).

Ordinarily, for pupils to carry out the tasks assigned, it should suffice to flatter or threaten them. In extreme cases, it will be necessary to cane the younger ones, but not to the extent that they hate learning because of physical punishment. Funger says literally: "There is nothing that gives more respect to a teacher than to show clemency and permissiveness at the right moment; nothing is less advisable than to lose one's temper and become enraged" (Funger, 1584, 16).

Funger discusses whether education is preferable at home or at school. He is clearly in favour of schools because they create healthy rivalry among the children and social interaction so that when they are older they are not at a loss for words in public. He cites many illustrious men who went to public schools in their childhood. Funger insists that the school is a workshop of piety and virtue where something more valuable than wealth is inculcated.

School hours were from six in the morning to four or five in the afternoon. The lesson plan proposed for the younger ones consisted of Latin grammar and revision from six to nine; then the Letters of Cicero and the dialogues of Erasmus; from twelve o'clock, Latin syntax so they could begin writing correctly in Latin from three o'clock, revision and Terence.

The older pupils would study rhetoric and dialectics from six to nine. From nine, they would recite Virgil and Horace so they would get used to complex poetry. From twelve, the teacher would present the *Cyropaedia*, Homer or Titus Livius (known as Livy in English), the last one not being well recommended by Juan Luis Vives. At four, they would read Aristotle's *Morals (Nicomachean Ethics)*, Glaucon's "The art of healing", or the fundamentals of Greek civil law (Funger,1584,27).

On returning home, the pupil must spend time revising his lessons; he should try to explain in the vernacular the main ideas that he heard in class; he should try to grasp the harmony in the verses explained, he should write the most beautiful ones that caught his attention on a blackboard or any other conspicuous place where he can see them easily. He must make the effort to achieve the desired objectives. (Funger, 1584, 28-29).

Funger considers that Greek should be included with the study of Latin. Pupils should be able to translate letters in the vernacular to Latin and Greek and write poems in both languages according to the rules of metrics. Regarding Dialectics, he recommends reading Duns Scotus, Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, William of Ockham, etc. In Rhetoric, he thought Cicero and Quintilian were best. In any case, "the healthiest studies are those that the soul yearns for, those that are neither tedious nor confusing, vacuous or useless"(Funger,1584,32). Funger recommends that pupils in the middle grade study history according to Cicero: "History is the witness that testifies to the passing of time; it illumines reality, vitalizes memory, provides guidance in daily life and brings us tidings of antiquity

(Cicero, 1998, 2-3)”. In the higher grades, Ethics, Natural Science, Metaphysics and Mathematics can be explained and later Theology, Law and Medicine. He recommends that every pupil develop a passion for reading; endeavour to have reasonable judgement on any subject and be eloquent; avoiding, however, any display of arrogance. On what to read, he advises the careful reading of the best scholars (Funger, 1584, 34).

Pupils should read on their own, and outside class, works that improve their style and discourse. On the other hand, Funger discourages pupils from imitating exclusively one scholar they may admire and states literally: “I would not tolerate pupils that reverence and blindly imitate any one scholar, but I always encourage them to imitate a certain number of scholars that adapt to a particular character” (Funger, 1584, 38), Budé, Vives and Erasmus declared more or less the same.

The teacher should help his pupils to draw out, as if from a pantry, the best words to express themselves in an appropriate style. If, from a very young age they are provided with good reading matter, it will be much easier for them to refrain from the use of fillers, neologisms, archaisms, and use clear, pure, carefully chosen and classical words. It is advisable for them to practise, from an early age the art of declamation, initially, from a composition they have written. According to Funger, the best scholar to imitate in the spoken language is Cicero, but one has to be bold to imitate him because of his greatness.

Funger states that for both younger and older pupils, debates “serve to arouse a certain rivalry among them, find the truth, teach the ignorant and remember what they have already learnt”(Funger,1584,42).

Rules for debate include:

- when a question is controversial, the teacher must clarify it with authority.
- one must guard against the excessive desire for glory because it conceals arrogance.
- one must search for truth and not victory.

According to Funger, “when refuting or seconding an opinion, the teacher will remain detached so as not to get involved in complicated arguments; if something has to be corrected, he must avoid taking sides either for or against, as if this stance would somehow discredit his impartiality. In this way he will be able to discern the inconsistent arguments as well as determine and explain the dubious”(Funger,1584,42-43).

From a very young age, Funger believes children's minds can be trained through the repetition of words and sentences at bedtime “because, once you fall asleep, the mind revives what has diminished during the day” (Funger, 1584, 44). The same should be done when rising because “dawn is friend of the Muses (Funger, 1584, 44).

In class, the teacher should tell his pupils to repeat silently what has to be memorized; it is a good idea to have competitions by repeating aloud what they have memorised and everyone contributes to completing what was omitted.

It is advisable that every week pupils repeat by heart what they have studied during this time; this is the way “the teacher, with the affection of a father but the severity of a judge, can evaluate what the pupils have learnt.”(Funger, 1584, 44).

Regarding health and eating in moderation, Funger is in favour of a frugal dinner rather than a frugal lunch and advises his pupils to avoid feasts at night (Funger, 1584, 46). He advises rebuilding strength through some physical exercise, for example, before eating. Citing Ovid, he states: “He who does not rest is not able to last; rest builds strength and alleviates tired limbs” (Ovid, 2001, 4, 38). If someone asks, explains Funger, about what games are noble, “I recognize as such, following the criteria of experts, jumping, racing, wrestling, fencing, gymnastics, jumping through the hoop, ballgames, swimming and, finally, music” (Funger, 1584, 47). In the opinion of Johann Funger, young people should be banned from card games and games of chance (Funger, 1584, 48). However, he is in favour of any type of open-air entertainment, or telling fables or funny stories and observing the stars.

Funger explains how pupils should behave in the library: silently and respectfully. Signs indicating a finger over closed lips should be placed in different parts of the library so that pupils keep quiet. What little is spoken should be in Latin, never in the vernacular. In the absence of a teacher, if a pupil has an urgent problem to resolve, he should consult the most experienced pupil on the matter and not cause a commotion.

Regarding nocturnal rest, Funger states, “before going to sleep, the pupil should contemplate whether he has done anything to improve his education, if his behaviour deserves praise, if he has been good, moderate, attentive”(Funger,1584,51). It is a way for the pupil to examine his conscience, who is striving to improve his everyday attitude and rectify what needs to be improved. Funger considers seven hours' sleep sufficient (Funger, 1584, 52).

It is relatively easy for a pupil to stray from the straight and narrow path because of evil passions, unless they are checked by reason and judgement; that is how categorical Johann Funger is when dealing with this question. He writes that, for example, wrath is so aggressive it is capable of making good men confront each other not only not only verbally but with fists, clubs and knives and making them behave like thugs (Funger,1584,53).

Funger believes the pupil shares the common *humanitas*, which is understood to be training in the liberal arts, and the poet Ovid told his pupils: “Moreover constant study of the liberal arts civilizes the character, and inhibits cruelty”(Ovid, 1999,2,9).

After dealing with wrath, Funger goes on to talk about envy and slander. To begin with, he reminds us of a few definitions from classical scholars, for example: “As iron is eaten away by rust, envious are consumed by their own passion”, quoting from Antisthenes. No less eloquent was Solomon, the wisest of all men, when he calls it “the rottenness of bones”. Alexander made it clear that envy was nothing more than butchering oneself, and Horace says that “the envious person grows lean with the fatness of their neighbours”.

Slander follows envy: speaking ill of others behind their backs says more about the slanderer. Although someone may be cautious and prudent, it is difficult to avert slanderous criticism when it spreads secretly from mouth to mouth. It is possible to escape from enemies, from a fire, or from an earthquake, but there is no escape from slander.

Funger thinks that slander feeds on gossip, which slander itself concocts and always tries to destroy the harmony among men. He recommends “that teachers try as much as they can to discourage young men, who are always fickle, from slandering, which is like an illness of virtue”, (...) compelling them to “silence or to keeping quiet, as this will instil fear and stupefaction at such a very young age”(Funger,1584,59).

Funger states categorically that the pupils of the Muses should avoid inebriation. He cites Apuleius, who says literally: “A wise man once said the first glass quenches the thirst, the second makes merry, the third kindles desire, the fourth madness”(Funger,1584,60). He goes through the list of arguments provided by the classical scholars on the perverse effects of excessive drinking on one's health, that “it dulls the mind, which is intended to reflect the image of God” (Funger, 1584, 62).

Citing Prudentius, Funger points out that desire is “the gateway to death, the disease of humanity” (Funger, 1584, 63). Our scholar portrays the strong tendencies of the human being in this tremendous and unreserved manner. Gluttony makes men insecure and weak, wasting time with frivolous stories or with dice or card games; they are inclined to lechery and dishonest acts. Pleasure is like a multi-headed serpent, which draws us away from God, and transforms us into savage beasts through a surprising metamorphosis (Funger, 1584, 63).

Young men say: “we'll do penitence when we are older”. And older men argue: “what need do we have to end our days in sadness or hasten our destiny”. In a nutshell, no one worries about leading a good life or having good habits.

To avoid lechery, he recommends that pupils always have something to do, be it reading, writing, or thinking, so that the devil never finds them idle.

Johann Funger refers to avarice by citing several scholars, which they call “slavery to idols” (Paul), “metropolis of all evil” (Diogenes) or “a cruel tyrant” (Chrysostom)”(Funger,1584,66). “Therefore, you, pupil, should try always to convince yourself that there is nothing more reproachable than to measure our needs not according to the laws of nature but according to the limits of our impulses”(Funger,1584,66) Regarding generosity, Funger’s teachings can be summed up in two verses from the Bible:

“Give bread to the hungry, then when you call out to God, you will be answered”, Solomon(Proverbs 21,13).
Who so stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard

“He who, closes his ear to the cry of the poor, will himself call out and not be answered”, St. Paul (Second Epistle to the Corinthians 9:6). He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Funger describes ambition as:“seeking praise by feigning virtue, creating enemies, robbing us of freedom, pushing us towards injustice, and is rife with anxiety and capriciousness, as Cicero describes it. Any small rumour or gossip alarms him, he scrutinizes the expressions and the eyes of all, and he seeks to stand out above the rest. If something does not go according to his expectations, he immediately has a panic attack as though it were the end of the world. He always tries to get close to the sun that warms the most; he is affable and is always watching out for the stares of others”(Funger,1584,69).

Many famous Greek and Roman generals started wars and military campaigns without any other reason than the thirst for glory. “Authentic renown comes from virtue, not from aggrandizement; from God, not from men. That is why neither force nor fame nor blood nor wealth, which both good and bad men may possess, can surpass true glory”(Funger,1584,69).

In the next chapter Johann Funger deals with pride. Although he cites some examples from the classics, he supports all his teachings on humility from the Bible, reminding us that God condemns the proud and bestows his grace on the humble.

On the pupils’ habit of lying, Funger points out that there are many types of lies: one of them is to cover up one’s own sins and he reminds us what the book of Ecclesiastes says: “A lying tongue kills the soul”(Funger,1584,72).

Funger also refers to using the name of God in vain. From the beginning, it is of utmost important for the pupil to be careful not to swear in the name of God, in an abusive or inconsiderate way, to give more credence to his words, which is common among charlatans and buffoons. It is not a small insult to swear in vain at any time or place, as swearing in God’s name should not be the result of a whim or desire, but out of necessity (Funger, 1584, 74).

Another shortcoming to eradicate is flattery. Funger teaches that it is evident we all must avoid flattery as much as possible so that we do not dishonour ourselves in the desire to praise someone, although it is not so evident that flattery does not require elaborate discourse. We should present only a few arguments, so that it will not seem we are lacking them, and attack the roots of this terrible disease (Funger, 1584, 76).

According to Funger, it is necessary for pupils to learn to respect the elderly. How much respect they should show their elders is evident not only in the divine commands but even in the works of pagans, where they are taught that they must rise in the presence of an elderly person (Funger,1584,78).

Regarding social events, Funger states that in a conversation there is nothing more attractive than ease of manner and a calm personality, the same as natural mental agility that remains hidden behind a kind of charm when speaking (Funger,1584,80). The writer includes a series of recommendations for good table manners (Funger1584, 82).

Funger ends his work with a general appeal to virtue that “consists of man knowing how to behave in any situation; virtue lies in the recognition of what is correct, worthwhile, honourable, good, bad, useless, degrading, reproachable” (Funger,1584,83). He deals specifically with the four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude (Funger, 1584, 83-84).

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