

However, the principal thing must always be to let one's observations precede one's ideas, and not the reverse as is usually and unfortunately the case; which may be likened to a child coming into the world with its feet foremost, or a rhyme begun before thinking of its reason. While the child's mind has made a very few observations one inculcates it with ideas and opinions, which are, strictly speaking, prejudices. His observations and experience are developed through this ready-made apparatus instead of his ideas being developed out of his own observations. In viewing the world one sees many things from many sides, consequently this is not such a short or quick way of learning as that which makes use of abstract ideas, and quickly comes to a decision about everything; therefore preconceived ideas will not be rectified until late, or it may be they are never rectified. For, when a man's view contradicts his ideas, he will reject at the outset what it renders evident as one-sided, nay, he will deny it and shut his eyes to it, so that his preconceived ideas may remain unaffected. And so it happens that many men go through life full of oddities, caprices, fancies, and prejudices, until they finally become fixed ideas. He has never attempted to abstract fundamental ideas from his own observations and experience, because he has got everything ready-made from other people; and it is for this very reason that he and countless others are so insipid and shallow. Instead of such a system, the natural system of education should be employed in educating children. No idea should be impregnated but what has come through the medium of observations, or at any rate been verified by them. A child would have fewer ideas, but they would be well-grounded and correct. It would learn to measure things

according to its own standard and not according to another's. It would then never acquire a thousand whims and prejudices which must be eradicated by the greater part of subsequent experience and education. Its mind would henceforth be accustomed to thoroughness and clearness; the child would rely on its own judgment, and be free from prejudices. And, in general, children should not get to know life, in any aspect whatever, from the copy before they have learnt it from the original. Instead, therefore, of hastening to place mere books in their hands, one should make them gradually acquainted with things and the circumstances of human life, and above everything one should take care to guide them to a clear grasp of reality, and to teach them to obtain their ideas directly from the real world, and to form them in keeping with it--but not to get them from elsewhere, as from books, fables, or what others have said--and then later to make use of such ready-made ideas in real life. The result will be that their heads are full of chimeras and that some will have a wrong comprehension of things, and others will fruitlessly endeavour to remodel the world according to those chimeras, and so get on to wrong paths both in theory and practice. For it is incredible how much harm is done by false notions which have been implanted early in life, only to develop later on into prejudices; the later education which we get from the world and real life must be employed in eradicating these early ideas. And this is why, as is related by Diogenes Laertius, Antisthenes gave the following answer:

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(_Interrogatus quatenam esset disciplina maxime necessaria, Mala, inquit, dediscere_.)