James Boevey, a successful London businessman, retired to the country at the age of thirty-two to pursue what he called "practicall philosophy." John Aubrey, who included him in his *Lives of Eminent Men* (1680), describes him as a "person of great temperance and deep thoughts, and a working head never idle." A widely travelled and cultured man, Boevey left behind a dozen chapbooks with essays on topics ranging from education to politics. Only one essay, *The Vindication of . . . Nicholas Machiavel*, has been published; the rest of his writings remain in manuscript. This study focuses on the chapbook containing Boevey's thoughts on education and attempts to place them into their historical context.

Although Boevey declared that he could find no suitable treatise on the subject and therefore felt obliged to write his own guidelines, he is clearly very much indebted to Renaissance humanists and echoes the precepts found in their pedagogical treatises. A comparison between Boevey's notes and the writings of Erasmus of Rotterdam, one of the most widely read humanists of the sixteenth century, will immediately confirm the traditional nature of his thought.

1On Boevey's life see A. Crawley-Boevey, *The Perverse Widow: Being Passages from the Life of Catharina, Wife of William Boevey . . . with Genealogical Notes on the Family and Others Connected Therewith* (London, 1898). James Boevey was first a "cashier," i.e., an accountant to a banker, then went into business for himself. After retiring he studied law, without, however, taking a degree.

2The essay (1692) was published in the *Harleian Miscellany*; see the edition by J. Malham (London, 1808) 10:183–84, or that by H. Savage (London, 1924), 8:424–26. Boevey's manuscripts are now in the Clark Library, Los Angeles. The chapbook discussed here, entitled "The Art of Education" and dated 1666, bears the shelf mark B673 A71. The references to Boevey in the following notes are to this chapbook. The page numbers refer to the hand-lettered pagination. I am grateful for the Clark fellowship which permitted me to study the notebooks in 2002 and to the friendly and competent support of the library staff.

3"We could heartily have wished such a worke had been accomplished by some abler pen; But since wee found this Art, an Inductive branch to our active Philosophy, And were not satisfied with that we mett withall, wee have sett upon the worke ourselves" (43).
Boevey begins his remarks with general comments on the importance of education. He believes that parents have a duty to educate their children, which is "grounded in nature" and fundamental to a well-ordered society. Similarly, Erasmus noted that "natural instinct" and biblical injunctions imposed this duty on parents. Since good education results in piety as well as in good citizenship, parents provide a service to God and to society. The well-educated child, Erasmus says, is a "source of pride and well-being to his parents, ... a son who will be a faithful protector of his family, a good husband to his wife, and a solid and useful citizen of his country." Boevey seems to echo Erasmus when he says, "Where [education is] rightly instituted, and well secured, Princes would have good Subjects, fathers good children, Wives good husbands, Masters Good Servants, God would bee sincerely served, and all things would be well with us."

In commenting on the nature-versus-nurture question, Boevey expresses great faith in the efficacy of education. He believes that "there is no nature soe fierce; no, not that, of wilde Beasts, but it may be tam'd." He therefore objects to people asserting that some children have an evil disposition and are incorrigible. Similarly, Erasmus rejects the claim that some children are naturally evil. "The evil is largely due to ourselves," he writes; "for it is we who corrupt young minds with evil before we expose them to the good." In his opinion, it is "a serious mistake ... to think that the character we are born with is all-determining." Like Boevey, Erasmus uses the commonplace of taming wild beasts: "We can teach elephants to walk a rope, bears to dance, and donkeys to perform amusing tricks. So is there anything we could not teach a human being?" Both men stress the need to begin the educational process at an early age. To reinforce this precept, Boevey adopts the same classical metaphor as Erasmus. "A Tree," he writes, "may be made streight, or transplanted safely and successfully, while it is young." Similarly Erasmus says, "Farmers watch that their saplings do not grow crooked or suffer any other kind of harm ... the sooner this is done, the more successful will be the results." Indeed, Boevey begins his notes on education with remarks on the most promising circumstances for the conception of a child. He advises prospective parents to prepare by eating and drinking moderately and "never Enter upon the Business of procreation, but with a serene mind, void of anxious thoughts." Erasmus likewise goes back to the very beginnings of human

---

4Boevey 3, Erasmus 301–2. References to Erasmus, unless otherwise specified, are to his essay De pueris instituendis (1528) in the translation in CWE 26, ed. K. Sowards (Toronto, 1985).
5Boevey 7, 9.
6Erasmus 311, 312, 317.