

REVIEW & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

FOR

ISAAC WATTS'

THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE MIND

PART I

BY ROBYN VAN ECK

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Review & Discussion Questions for Isaac Watts' *The Improvement of the Mind*,
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by Robyn van Eck

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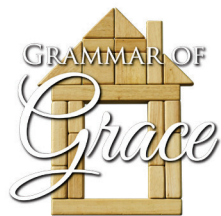
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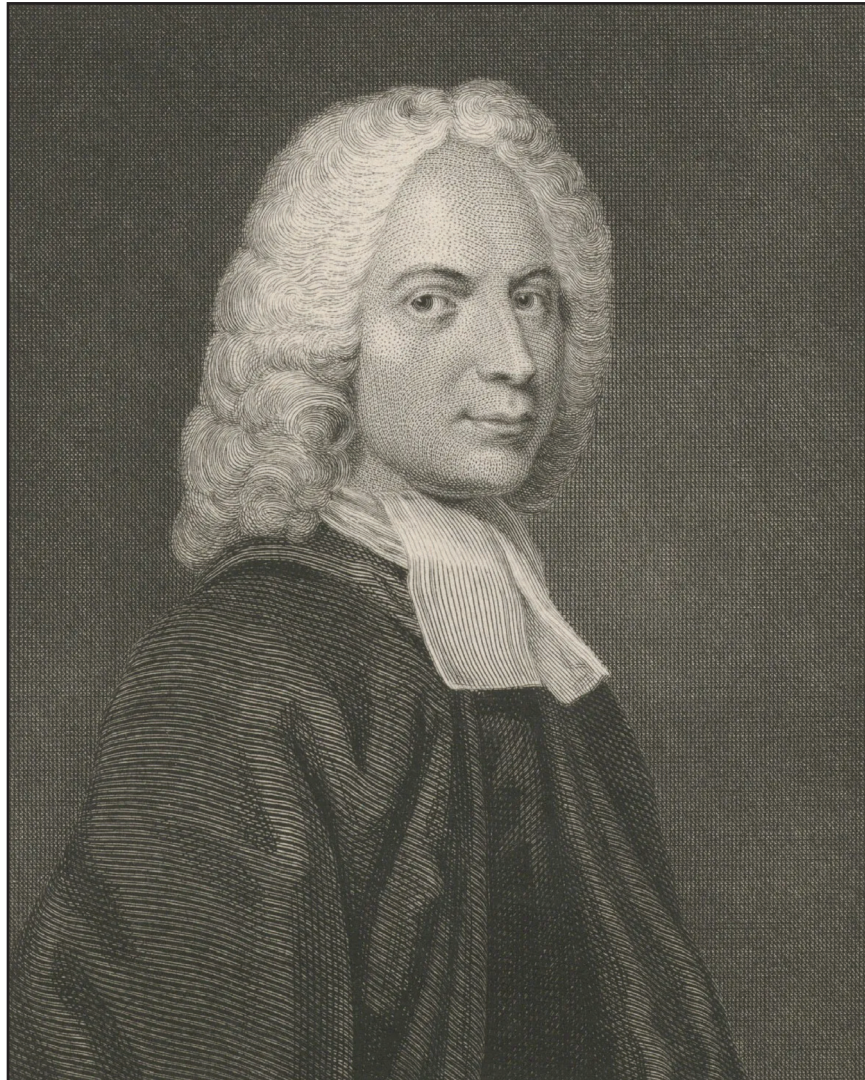
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Isaac Watts (1674–1748), father of English hymnody, pastor, scholar, and author of the standard logic text used at Oxford, Harvard, etc. for 200 years.

PURPOSE.

Pagans learn to speak well so that they can lie better. They often don't know it, but their purpose is to be faithful servants of their father the devil. When they study speech & debate, they are aiming to lie better, to sow confusion, and to earn the praise of man. This is, perhaps, most famously known in the art of Greek sophistry.

On the other hand, Christians study speech & debate, first, to learn how to discern truth from lies, and second, to communicate well so they can help others to discern truth from lies.

Sadly, modern speech & debate training is based on the philosophies of Greek sophistry, as designed by John Dewey and the other humanists who created the modern education system. Modern Christian speech & debate grew out of humanist speech & debate philosophies—not out of the centuries-old grand tradition of Christian speech & debate—and is in sore need of a strong dose of Christian worldview.

Historic Christian speech & debate, prior to the era of John Dewey, focused on training students to discern truth, first and foremost, and only once a student was well-equipped to discern errors in good-sounding arguments, and well-trained in biblical understanding, were they taught the higher art of rhetoric (or speaking well).

But the modern approach teaches students, with little-to-no understanding, to communicate in a persuasive manner, to the end that both the student and his audience are convinced by good-sounding arguments, however false.

In order to understand a Christian approach to speech & debate, and improve our students' minds for all of life generally, let us study the methods of the Reformers and Puritans, as laid out by the masterful teacher, Dr. Isaac Watts. Yes, the *Joy to the World* Isaac Watts.

His writing is clear, perspicuous, delightful. He writes with such brilliance that the reader will think he knew it all, all along! But guard against that thought—though Watts makes these ideas seem so reasonable, so right, so simple... yet we would not have thought of many of them, had he not taken the time to point them out to us.

And remember that to write so well that the reader sees the perfect wisdom of the idea in so few words, takes great skill and care in writing. The easier it is to read, the harder it was to write.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE.

In a speech & debate club, students and their debate coach alike should purchase a copy of *The Improvement of the Mind*, by Isaac Watts; and each student should purchase a composition book or other notebook, to use as his philosophy notebook. In the homeschool, student and parent should follow these same instructions.

Assuming the speech & debate club meets every other week during the regular school-year, there will be 15 Readings assigned, coming out to around 1 page of reading daily. If your club meets weekly, use the “Optional: Reading Assignments for 30 Weekly Meetings” on page 5. In the homeschool, set aside a “meeting time” for this study. Ideally, recruit another homeschooler or two to join you in this study, to add more interest to the discussions. *N.B.* The numbering of the Rules, etc. in your edition of *The Improvement of the Mind* may be slightly different from that in this Review & Discussion guide, owing to variations in the different editions.

DAILY AT HOME

Both coach and students should read the assigned chapters or sections prior to the class meeting. (Grown-ups, it was so much work for me to find time to do this, but every week, I was so thankful that I had, and today I am very thankful for all of the insights I learned by reading this book! It does not take very much time, but you *will* have to make it happen. It's worth it!! For your students, and for yourself.)

Each student should take notes in his philosophy notebook, to help him impress on his mind Watts' instructions. The coach may wish to add notes to the margins of this discussion guide as particular passages stand out to him.

CLUB MEETINGS

When the debate club meets, the debate coach should open class with review of the students' Watts Reading, using this Guide as a help. You want the students thinking biblically throughout the rest of the debate club meeting, so I recommend working on the students' *Improvement of the Mind* assignment at the start of each meeting. In our club, we typically spend about an hour in this discussion time, at the start of each meeting.

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

There will certainly be spiritual warfare when you engage in this study, so be prepared to be tempted not to do this homework, to skip the review & discussion time, to suspect the students are not thrilled with this study, etc. Our enemy, that old serpent, wants our children trained in Greek sophistry and modern humanism, but we are not unaware of his schemes, nor of his tricks. I encourage you to pray, be diligent, and put this first. If all your debate club accomplishes in a year is reading Watts' *The Improvement of the Mind* with understanding, and further meditating on these principles in group discussion, you will have accomplished more to prepare these students for lives of effective service for Christ than a club that has a winning season in competition, apart from these principles.

FINAL WORD.

A lot of the answers to the discussion questions are either direct or nearly-direct quotations from Watts. Please excuse where quotation marks were left out, and go under the assumption that any wise or good answer was from Watts, and that any error was the work of yours truly.

May this guide be a blessing to you and your students!

Robyn van Eck

PREFACE, PART I.

Why did Watts write this book? Especially for young people, that they might be protected against evil & false philosophies, and that they “would seek the cultivation of their own understandings early in life.” That young people might be guarded against poor reasoning, and be able to be more effective in their work, by using right reasoning.

When/how did he write this book? Over the course of 20 years, as he thought of ideas that would be helpful.

Why does Watts beg pardon for this book? Because it is written in inconsistent style, and there may be repetition or even seeming contradiction.

Why didn’t Watts revise and edit the book into a consistent whole? Because he can feel his old age, and does not believe there would be time left to complete the task.

To whom should the reader assume the harshest rebukes of the book are intended? “The sneering or daring writers of the age against religion, and against the Christian scheme, who seem to have left reason, or decency, or both, behind them, in some of their writings.” **Whom, do you suppose, he had in mind?** (Hint: Written in 1741.)

- “Enlightenment” Philosophers. (As Joe Morecraft says, Endarkenment, really!)
- Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679)
- René Descartes (1596–1650)
- John Locke, in some of his ideas, not all (1632–1704)
- Voltaire (1694–1778)
- Other writers of that time, whose names did not pass into lasting renown

PREFACE, PART II.

Why does the publisher say that no introduction is needed to recommend this book? Because Isaac Watts’s name alone is all the recommendation that is needed.

What are reliquiæ? Remains of the dead, or relics. So Dr. Watts’s book, *Reliquiæ Juveniles*, in English, is a collection he published of things he wrote in his younger years. The full title, as published in 1734, is, *Reliquiæ Juveniles: Miscellaneous Thoughts in Prose and Verse, on Natural, Moral, and Divine Subjects; Written chiefly in Younger Years.* By I. Watts, D.D.

If the printers thought it necessary to add a line or two for illustration of a passage, how was it generally added? As a footnote.

Was this book known to the world before it was published? Yes, indeed! “It may perhaps be expected we should make some apology for delaying the publishing of this book so long after the author’s death; a book that has been so much expected and so earnestly desired, as appears by several letters found in the Doctor’s study, from eminent persons and learned societies.”

What is the printers’ thought about this book? That it is admirably suited to improve the minds of men, especially of the rising generation, and to promote universal goodness.

What is their hope for this book? That it may be attended with a blessing from on high.

INTRODUCTION.

What is the title of the Introduction? Directions for the Attainment of useful Knowledge.

Should a man strive to know everything? No, this “is utterly impossible; yet all person are under some obligation to improve their own understanding.”

What happens to the mind that is neglected, or lies without cultivation? “Universal ignorance or infinite errors will overspread the mind.”

Watts speak of “the sciences”. What are “the sciences”? *Science* comes from *sciēns*, or *knowing*. The sciences are fields that seek the furtherance of knowledge—whether Theology, Philosophy, Natural Philosophy, etc.

(Note that this does not include practical application of science developed by these innovative thinkers; this would not include engineering, architecture, software development, and other “technology” careers that are labeled “science” careers today. Science, as the word meant in Watts’ day, referred to men who devoted their lives to pursuing wisdom in philosophical thought and understanding.)

How many men will have careers in “the sciences”? Few. **What other men will be interested in the Improvement of the Mind?** Men placed in an exalted rank that allows them time and opportunity to cultivate their reason; and also “the lower orders of men” cannot “acquire a just degree of skill” in their particular callings “without thinking and reasoning about them!” If we remember the Preface Part I, Watts also included the ladies. In short, all are called to the table.

How often should people employ their reasoning powers? “Upon a thousand occasions” at “every hour of life!”

“Now that which should always be practised, must at some time be learnt.”

What is the most important matter each person must consider? “Every son and daughter of Adam has a most important concern in the affairs of a life to come, and therefore it is a matter of the highest moment, for every one to understand, to judge, and to reason right about the things of religion.” (*Religion* meant true worship of the only actual God; false religions were not included in talk about religion, until the moderns came around with their program of re-defining words.)

When do we have time for the sciences (for Philosophy)? First, it is vital that we make time. But Watt points out that each person is sure to have time already available to him for the improvement of his mind, as well: daily intervals of time, pauses from labor, and the one day in seven allotted to all in the Christian world.

What things do men usually do with their time, rather than apply their minds? They apply themselves, with zeal, to “trifles and amusements.” As sports, movies, social media, etc.

Does Watts say the Improvement of the Mind is an excellent study for some? No, he asserts that it is a necessary **duty** for all.

What does Watts include under the heading of science, or improvement of the mind?

- to improve one’s understanding
- to inform one’s judgment
- to treasure up useful knowledge
- to acquire the skill of good reasoning

What are the bad consequences of not giving attention to the improvement of our minds? “By acting without thought or reason, we dishonor the God that made us reasonable creatures. [W]e often become injurious to our neighbours, kindred, or friends. ... [W]e bring sin and misery upon ourselves: for we are accountable to God, our judge, for every part of our irregular and mistaken conduct, where he hath given us sufficient advantages to guard against those mistakes.”

CHAPTER I: GENERAL RULES FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF KNOWLEDGE.

What stood out to you the most from this Reading?

What is this chapter about? (See title.)

To whom is this chapter chiefly addressed? Footnote: “those whom their fortune or their station require to addict themselves to the peculiar improvement of their minds in greater degrees of knowledge.” **What does “addict” mean, in this sentence?** Webster: *To apply one’s self habitually; to devote time and attention by customary or constant practice; sometimes in a good sense.*

Rule I. What is Rule I? Fix firmly in your mind that it is very, very important to have good judgment and right reasoning.

What are some ways Watts suggests we can do that? Review past instances of misconduct in your life, and consider how much trouble and woe you would have avoided had you had good judgment from your early years.

Rule II. What is Rule II? Consider the weaknesses, frailties, and mistakes of human nature, whence arise “an infinite variety of dangers to which we are exposed in our judgment of things.”

- from our having animal bodies, “and subjected to many inconveniences thereby.”
- derived from our original apostacy and fall (in Adam).
- because of our unruly passions, emotions, etc.
- because many truths seem difficult to us.
- because falsehood looks attractive to us.

What are some ways Watts suggests we can do that? “Read with greediness those authors that treat of the doctrine of prejudices, prepossessions, and springs of error, on purpose to make your soul watchful on all sides, that it suffer itself, as far as possible, to be imposed by none of them.”

Rule III. What is Rule III? Come up with methods for making yourself consider deeply and regularly how very lacking in good judgment you are, because you need to think about it a lot, not just a little.

What are some ways Watts suggests we can do that? Watts has four suggestions:

1. Think about all of the fields of learning out there, and think about how few of them you know much of anything about. [Theology, philosophy, morals, & metaphysics; chemistry, biology, astronomy, engineering; Latin, Greek, Hebrew,

- Arabic, French; the literature of these different languages; Puritan writings; history—of how many different places, in how many different ages; etc., etc.]
2. Consider the field of knowledge (“science”) you know the most about, and think about how little you know of that field!
 3. Think about unsolved questions from mathematics (specifically geometry) “on purpose, to give you a more sensible impression of the poverty of your understanding, and the imperfection of your knowledge. ... This will teach you what a vain thing it is to fancy that you know all things, and will instruct you to think modestly of your present attainments, when every dust of the earth, and every inch of empty space, surmounts your understanding, and triumphs over your presumption.”

→ Great quote: “Arithmo had been bred up to accounts all his life, and thought himself a complete master of numbers. But when he was pushed hard to give the square root of the number 2, he tried at it, and laboured long in millesimal fractions, till he confessed there was no end of the enquiry; and yet he learned so much modesty by this perplexing question, that he was afraid to say that it was an impossible thing. It is some good degree of improvement, when we are afraid to be positive.” [For Arithmo’s name, see note on Rule IV, below.]
 4. Read about men who had “vast treasures of knowledge.” Seek to meet and talk with men like that in your life. Let those encounters make you humble, but also inspire you to try to be like them!!

What final warning does Watts give, with respect to Rule III? If you learn a few little things, you tend to start to think you are wise; but if you think yourself wise, you are building an impassable barrier to keep you out from more knowledge. “You will lie down and indulge idleness, and rest yourself contented in the midst of deep and shameful ignorance.” [The modern education system is *designed* to do this to students!]

What does the Latin mean? *Multi ad scientiam pervēnissent sī se illud(?) pervēnisse nōn putāssent.*

Many would have reached to knowledge if they had not supposed they had already reached it. (something like that?!)

Rule IV. What is Rule IV? Everything they taught us in public school, about the IQ being important, was a total lie from Hell. “A bright genius, a ready wit, and good parts... with out labour and study, will never make a man of knowledge and wisdom.” When men like that grow old, “when they had lost their vivacity of animal nature and youth, they became stupid and sottish even to contempt and ridicule.”

Lucidas & Scintillo, and other names like that, to come in the book, are fictional *types*, not actual people Watts was referencing. The names are based on Latin words meaning

the sort of person each it, just like the way Bunyan names his characters in *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Therefore, dear students, Lucidas' name means *what?* *Bright, shining*. And Scintillo's name means *what?* *Spark*.

Rule V. What is Rule V? Also understand that reading a lot, and even having a great memory, does not make you a man of understanding.

What does the Latin mean?

— Ego nec studium sine divite venā,
Nec rude quid prosit, video, ingenium: alterius sic
Altera poscit opem res, et conjurat amice.

*And I do not look at a subject except it be by a rich heart,
And I do not look at that which is useful except it be by an unfinished one:
in this way
One thing demands the other be rich, and plots by means of a friend.*

→ Great quote: "It is meditation and studious thought, it is the exercise of your own reason and judgment upon all you read, that gives good sense even to the best genius, and affords your understanding the truest improvement." [This is why I believe all of the "easy-reading", "page-turner" books are *so deeply harmful to children and adults!!!!!!* From my own experience, and years of study on this. Those books train students (and adults) to read without thinking, thus training them not to think when they read a book that is worthy of contemplation. And since we do *all* of our thinking in *words*, it trains us *not to be able even to think at all* at a complex level, but only in simple ideas, bouncing from one to the next without care. They are poison to your reasoning ability.]

Does Watts say, then, that reading a lot and memorizing lots, are bad? Certainly not.

Rule VI. What is Rule VI? Do not imagine "that a life of learning is a life of laziness and ease; dare not give up yourself to any of the learned professions, unless you are resolved to labour hard at study, and can make it your delight, and the joy of your life." [How contrary this teaching is to most debate clubs, which train students, even if they have not studied their subject well, to speak with confidence, and to attempt to win the argument with sheer fakery of good-sounding argumentation!]

What does the Latin mean?

— Labor ipse voluptas.

My desire (joy, pleasure) is work itself.

Who are Sobrino and Languinos? Sober, who is not given to much wine and worldly pleasure, but dines very richly in a spiritual sense, or in the sense of the mind, but

growing his understanding. And Languid, who chose to be a scholar because he was lazy, and thus is lazy about studying, and is contemptible by all.

Rule VII. What is Rule VII? When you study, do not merely take joy in the things you're learning, but ever hope to discover new knowledge!

→ Great quote: "The present age, by the blessing of God on the ingenuity and diligence of men, has brought to light such truths in natural philosophy, and such discoveries in the heavens and the earth, as seemed to be beyond the reach of man. But may there not be Sir Isaac Newton's in every science?"

Read & explain the paragraph on the bottom of page 8:

"Nor should a student in divinity imagine that our age is arrived at a full understanding of every thing which can be known by the Scriptures. Every age since the Reformation hath thrown some further light on difficult texts and paragraphs of the Bible, which have been long-obscured by the early rise of antichrist: and since there are at present many difficulties and darkneses hanging about certain truths of Christian religion, and since several of these relate to important doctrines, such as the origin of sin, the fall of Adam, the person of Christ, the blessed Trinity, and the decrees of God, &c. which do still embarrass the minds of honest and inquiring readers, and which make work for noisy controversy; it is certain there are several things in the Bible yet unknown, and not sufficiently explained; and it is certain that there is some way to solve these difficulties, and to reconcile these seeming contradictions. And why may not a sincere searcher of truth in the present age, by labour, diligence, study, and prayer, with the best use of his reasoning powers, find out the proper solution of those knots and perplexities which have hitherto been unsolved, and which have afforded matter for angry quarrelling? Happy is every man who shall be favoured of Heaven, to give a helping hand towards the introduction of the blessed age of light and love."

- [This was the historic interpretation that the Reformers and Puritans held to:] Antichrist is the Roman Catholic organization, and there are men acting as antichrists in every generation, in the universal thinking of Christians from Martin Luther onward (until about 100 years ago).
- *embarrass*—means *to tangle up*.
- "the blessed age of light & love"—again, up until about 100 years ago, Christians all believed that because Christ Himself dwells within His children, and we have His completed Word, that all of these Holy Spirit-filled people will be ever spreading the Gospel to more and more poor souls dwelling in ignorance, and that the world will become better, as more people carrying within them the Holy Spirit Himself and being sanctified by Him are living and *doing* in this world.

Rule VIII. What is Rule VIII? Don't judge a book by its cover! (Or back cover, or endorsement, or first few pages!) And don't pretend to understand things you have not studied deeply for yourself; be content to quote whomever you learned about it from.

Rule IX. What is Rule IX? Every day, ask yourself, "What did you learn today?" [Write it down in your journal, perhaps the very one you're using for this class!] "Let no day, if possible, pass away without some intellectual gain."

What does the Latin mean?

Nulla dies sine lineā.

Let no day pass without one line at least.

Bonus Points: That is an excellent (and short!) poem to memorize, by Isaac Watts!

Nor let soft slumber close your eyes.
Before you've recollected thrice
The train of action through the day :
Where have my feet chose out their way ?
What have I learnt, where-e'er I've been,
From all I've heard, from all I've seen ?
What know I more that's worth the knowing ?
What have I done that's worth the doing?
What have I sought that I should shun ?
What duty have I left undone ?
Or into what new follies run ?
These self-inquiries are the road
That leads to virtue, and to God.

Rule X. What is Rule X? "Maintain a constant watch at all times against a dogmatical spirit."

What examples does Watt give of inconveniences attending a dogmatical spirit? [This is another error indoctrinated into the minds of the poor victims of modern education... which has, sadly, made it also a characteristic of most churches today...!]

1. Shuts your own ear and mind to any further learning on the subject. "You will... grown obstinate against the force of the clearest argument." [I can't help but think of a conversation with some flat-earther friends—who, although my husband brought to bear the fact that one can clearly see the Sun, half-above, and half-below the horizon, twice a day—obstinately insisted that the Sun never rises or sets, but merely circles 'round and 'round above our heads.] (Vortexes are supposed places on earth where there is more spiritual energy, where one can grow closer to God—it's a pagan idea that some professing Christians picked up and tried to mix with biblical Christianity.)
2. Makes you be (and sound to others) arrogant.

Rule XI. What is Rule XI? When you find that you've been in error, retract your former statements. Admit your mistakes.

Rule XII. What is Rule XII? Don't be like this:

1. Someone with a fanciful temper of mind is someone who forms opinions of things, and then lets his fancies (ideas, imaginations) rule his thoughts.
2. A humourist conducts himself by his own inclination, who gratifies his own humors.

Rule XIII. What is Rule XIII? Do not treat important things lightly. [This is *very* common today, even in the church, where people mock people who are serious about seeking the Lord, or stories in the Bible which are not humorous—*VeggieTales* being a prime example.] “Do not indulge a spirit of ridicule.” [Think of what the Bible says about mockers!!]

→ Great quote: “Whatsoever evil habit we indulge in practice, it will insensibly obtain a power over our understanding, and betray us into many errors.”

What does the Latin mean?

ignis fatuus

foolish fire

Rule XIV. What is Rule XIV? “Ever maintain a virtuous and pious frame of spirit: for an indulgence of vicious inclinations debases the understanding, and perverts the judgment.”

What specific examples of sins does Watts explain will ruin your intellect?

- whoredom
- wine
- new wine
- sensuality
- indulgence to appetite
- indulgence to passion
- mistakes tending toward the lusts of the flesh

→ Great quote: “It is the virtuous man who is in a fair way to wisdom.”

“God gives to those that are good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy.”
Eccles. 2:26

→ Great quote: “Piety towards God, as well as sobriety and virtue, are necessary qualifications to make a truly wise and judicious man. He that abandons religion must act in such a contradiction to his own conscience and best judgment, that he abuses and spoils the faculty itself. It is thus

in the nature of things, and it is thus by the righteous judgment of God; even the pretended sages among the heathens, who did not like to retain God in their knowledge, they were given up to a reprobate mind, an undistinguishing or injudicious mind, so that they judged inconsistently, and practised mere absurdeities, Rom. 1:28.

“And it is the character of the slaves of antichrist, 2 Thess. 2:10, &c. that those ‘who receive not the love of the truth were exposed to the power of diabolical sleights and lying wonders.’ When divine revelation shines and blazes in the face of men with glorious evidence, and they wink their eyes against it, the god of this world is suffered to blink them, even in the most obvious, common, and sensible things. The great God of Heaven, for this cause sends them strong delusions, that they should believe a lie; and the nonsense of transubstantiation in the popish world, is a most glaring accomplishment of this prophecy, beyond even what could have been thought of or expected among creatures who pretend to reason.”

[“Religion” means *Christianity*. Before modern-speak, the word “religion” did not include cults and pagan idolatry, but only true religion—biblical Christianity.]

Rule XV. What is Rule XV? “Watch against the pride of your own reason, and a vain conceit of your own intellectual powers, with the neglect of the divine aid and blessing. ... Those who trust to their own understandings entirely, are pronounced fools in the word of God.”

→ Great quote: “Those who, with a neglect of religion and dependence on God, apply themselves to search out every article in the things of God by the mere dint of the own reason, have been suffered to run into wild excesses of foolery, and strange extravagance of opinions.”

Rule XVI. What is Rule XVI? Daily pray to God and entreat Him for wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. (Watts refers to Jas. 1 here.)

→ Great quote: “Think with yourself how easily and how insensibly, by one turn of thought, he can lead you into a large scene of useful ideas: he can teach you to lay hold on a clue which may guide your thoughts with safety and ease through all the difficulties of an intricate subject. Think how easily the Author of your beings can direct your motions by his providence, so that the glance of an eye, or a word striking the ear, or a sudden turn of the fancy, shall conduct you to a train of happy sentiments. By his secret and supreme method of government, he can draw you to read such a treatise, or converse with such a person, who may give you more light into some deep subject in an hour, than you could obtain by a month of your own solitary labour.”

→ Great quote: “The Author of our rational powers can involve them in darkness when he pleases, by a sudden distemper; or he can abandon

them to wander into dark and foolish opinions, when they are filled with a vain conceit of their own light. He expects to be acknowledged in the common affairs of life; and he does as certainly expect it in the superior operations of the mind, and in the search of knowledge and truth.

What does the Latin mean?

A Jove Principium Musae

From Jupiter is the beginning of learning/studies.

→ Great quote: "Bishop Saunderson says, that study without prayer is atheism, as well as that prayer without study is presumption."

→ Great quote: "Let industry and devotion join together, and you need not doubt the happy success."

Read Pr. 2:2.

CHAPTER II: OBSERVATION, READING, INSTRUCTION BY LECTURES, CONVERSATION, AND STUDY, COMPARED.

What stood out to you the most from this Reading?

What are the 5 means whereby the mind is improved in the knowledge of things?

Observation, reading, instruction by lectures, conversation, and meditation. **What does meditation mean?** In Watts' word, "study." Thinking rationally and deeply, really contemplating things. (*Not* emptying your mind or focusing on one "focal point", and *not thinking*; that is the opposite of meditation!!!!)

Means I. What is the general definition or description of observation? "[T]he notice we take of all occurrences in human life." **What are some examples of things that we know by observation?** "That fire will burn, that the sun gives light, that a horse eats grass, that an acorn produces an oak, that man is a being capable of reasoning and discourse, that our judgment is weak, that our mistakes are many, that our sorrows are great, that our bodies dies and are carried to the grave, and that one generation succeeds another."

Great quote: "All those things which... we know in a direct manner, with scarce any exercise of our reflecting faculties, or our reasoning powers, may be included under the general name of observation." [Modern books interact only with our means of observation, not with our reasoning!!!]

Who is the Mr. Locke that Watts refers to in this section? John Locke, the "enlightenment" philosopher.

What subcategories of observation does Watts mention? Experience and experiment.

Means II. What is the general definition or description of reading? "Reading is that means or method of knowledge whereby we acquaint ourselves with what other men have written, or published to the world in their writings. These arts of reading and writing are of infinite advantage: for by them we are made partakers of the sentiments, observations, reasonings, and improvements of all the learned world, in the most remote nations, and in former ages almost from the beginning of mankind."

Means III. What is the general definition or description of instruction by lectures?

"Public or private lectures are such verbal instructions as are given by a teacher while the learners attend in silence. This is the way of learning religion from the pulpit; or of philosophy or theology from the professor's chair; or of mathematics, by a teacher showing us various theorems or problems, i. e. speculations or practices by demonstration and operation, with all the instruments of art necessary to those operations."

Means IV. What is the general definition or description of conversation? "Conversation is another method of improving our minds wherein, by mutual discourse and inquiry,

we learn the sentiments of others, as well as communicate our sentiments to others, in the same manner. Sometimes indeed, though both parties speak by turns, yet the advantage is only on one side, as when a teacher and a learner meet and discourse together: but frequently the profit is mutual. Under this head of conversation we may also rank disputes (debates) of the various kinds.”

Means V. What is the general definition or description of meditation or study? “Meditation or study includes all those exercises of the mind, whereby we render all the former methods useful for our increase in true knowledge and wisdom.”

What things can we accomplish by meditation or study?

- Remembering what we thought about daily occurrences, our experiences, our observations.
- Drawing inferences.
- Establishing in our minds the general principles of knowledge.
- Comparing various ideas we derive from our senses, or from the thoughts of our souls, and join them in propositions.
- Memorizing.
- Judging the truth or falsehood, the strength or weakness, of what others speak or write.
- Searching and finding deep and difficult truths which before lay concealed in darkness.

Means I. What are the advantages of observation?

1. Lays the foundation of all knowledge.
→ includes sense and consciousness.
2. Knowledge is gotten firsthand.
→ that makes these ideas more vibrant, more real to us.
3. We can gain knowledge all day long, at every moment of our lives.
→ “...every moment of our existence we may be adding something to our intellectual treasures...”

Means II. What are the advantages of reading?

1. “We acquaint ourselves, in a very extensive manner, with the affairs, actions, and thoughts of the living and the dead, in the most remote nations, and most distant ages, and that with as much ease as though they lived in our own age and nation.”
→ Great quote: “...our knowledge is much more narrowed... if we confine ourselves merely to our own solitary reasonings, without much observation or reading...”

2. "...we transfer to ourselves the knowledge and improvements of the most learned men..."

→ Great quote: "...though many books have been written by weak and injudicious persons, the most of those books which have obtained great reputation in the world [I would say, in our pagan day in age, *which have stood the test of time*] are the products of great and wise men in their several ages and nations..."

3. "When we read good authors, we learn the best, the most laboured, and most refined sentiments, even of those wise and learned men..."

4. "...we may review what we have read..."

N.B. In Watts' day, they listened to lectures without taking notes, and if they wanted to take notes, they would "quickly retire and note down what remarkable we have found in those discourses."

→ Great quote: "And for the same reason, and for the want of retiring and writing, many a learned man has lost several useful meditations of his own, and could never recall them again."

Means III. What are the advantages of verbal instructions by public or private lectures?

1. More exciting, delightful, and entertaining than reading (if the teacher is wise, learned, and well-qualified).
2. Teacher can explain hard things, and can direct the students' reading efforts. Can boil down great amounts of information, which "perhaps would cost much labour and the perusal of many books to attain."

→ Teacher can teach you his own private thoughts, experiments, and observations, "which never were, and perhaps never will be published to the world, and yet may be very valuable and useful."

3. The teacher can demonstrate experiments in natural philosophy or mathematics, "before your eyes." He can point out the important bits in a diagram, live, so that it is much easier to understand than when using only a diagram in a book.

→ Good point: "A living teacher, therefore, is a most necessary help in these studies."

→ Good point: "I might add also that even where the subject of discourse is moral, logical, or rhetorical, etc., and which does not directly come under the notice of our senses, a tutor may explain his ideas by such familiar examples, and plain or simple similitudes, as seldom find place in books and writings."

4. If you don't understand, you can ask questions (at least afterward).

Means IV. What are the advantages of conversation (& debate)?

1. We can find out the speaker's meaning when it is unclear.
 → Fun quote: "Happy should we be, could we but converse with Moses, Isaiah, and St. Paul, and consult the prophets and apostles, when we meet with a difficult text; but that glorious conversation is reserved for the ages of future blessedness."
2. We may propose our doubts and objections, "and have them solved and answered at once."
3. We can also ask about "difficulties we meet with in books, and in our private studies."
4. "Conversation calls out into light what has been lodged in all the recesses and secret chambers of the soul: by occasional hints and incidents it brings old useful notions into remembrance..."
 → Great quote: "By mutual discourse, the soul is awakened and allured to bring forth its hoards of knowledge, and it learns how to render them most useful to mankind. A man of vast reading without conversation, is like a miser, who lives only to himself."
5. Great quote: "In free and friendly conversation, our intellectual powers are more animated, and our spirits act with a superior vigour in the quest, and pursuit of unknown truths. There is a sharpness and sagacity of thought that attends conversation, beyond what we find whilst we are shut up reading and musing in our retirements. Our souls may be serene in solitude, but not sparkling, though perhaps we are employed in reading the works of the brightest writers."
6. "In generous conversation, among ingenious and learned men, we have a great advantage of proposing our private opinions, and of bringing our own sentiments to the test, and learning in a more compendious and safer way what the world will judge of them, how mankind will receive them, what objections may be raised against them, what defects there are in our scheme, and how to correct our own mistakes..."
7. "...furnishes the student with the knowledge of men and the affairs of life, and reading furnishes him with book learning."
 → Great quote: "A man who dwells all his days among books, may have amassed together a vast heap of notions; but he may be a mere scholar, which is a contemptible sort of character in the world. A hermit, who has been shut up in his cell in a college, has contracted a sort of mould or rust upon his soul, and all his airs of behaviour have a certain awkwardness in them; but these awkward airs are worn away by degrees in company: the rust and the mould are filed and brushed off by polite conversation. The scholar now becomes a citizen or a gentleman, a

neighbour and a friend; he learns how to dress his sentiments in the fairest colours, as well as to set them in the strongest light. Thus he brings out his notions with honour; he makes some use of them in the world, and improves the theory by the practice."

Means V. What are the advantages of meditation or study? "Mere lectures, reading, and conversation, without thinking, are not sufficient to make a man of knowledge and wisdom. It is our own thought and reflection, study and meditation, must attend all the other methods of improvement, and perfect them."

1. "Though observation and instruction, reading and conversation, may furnish us with many ideas of men and things, yet it is our own meditation, and the labour of our own thoughts, that must form our judgment of things."

→ Great quote: "Reading and conversation may acquaint us with many truths, and with many arguments to support them; but it is our own study and reasoning that must determine whether these propositions are true, and whether these arguments are just and solid."

→ "...let this be a fixed point with us, that it is our own reflection and judgment must determine how far we should receive that which book or men inform us of, and how far they are worthy of our assent and credit."

2. "It is meditation and study that transfers and conveys the notions and sentiments of others to ourselves, so as to make them properly our own."

→ Great quote: "It is our own judgment upon them, as well as our memory of them, that makes them become our own property."

To what does he liken this? To eating food—when we form our own judgments of ideas, it is like digesting food, thereby making the cow, or apple, or milk, a part of us.

3. "By study and meditation we improve the hints that we have acquired by observation, conversation, and reading: we take more time in thinking, and by the labour of the mind we penetrate deeper into the themes of knowledge, and carry our thought sometimes much farther on many subjects than we ever met with, either in the books of the dead, or discourses of the living."

What are the dangers of pursuing some, while neglecting others, or these five means of gaining knowledge? "By a survey of these things we may justly conclude, that he who spends all his time in hearing lectures, or poring upon books, without observation, meditation, or converse, will have but a mere historical knowledge of learning, and be able only to tell what others have known or said on the subject: he that lets all his time flow away in conversation, without due observation, reading, or study, will gain but a slight and superficial knowledge, which will be in danger of vanishing with the voice of the speaker: and he that confines himself merely to his closet, and his own narrow observation of things, and is taught only by his own solitary thoughts, without instruction by

lectures, reading, or free conversation, will be in danger of a narrow spirit, a vain conceit of himself, and an unreasonable contempt of others; and after all, he will obtain but a very limited and imperfect view and knowledge of things, and he will seldom learn how to make that knowledge useful.

“These five methods of improvement should be pursued jointly, and go hand in hand, where our circumstances are so happy as to find opportunity and conveniency to enjoy them all: though I must give my opinion that two of them, viz. reading and meditation, should employ much more of our time than public lectures, or conversation and discourse. As for observation, we may be always acquiring knowledge that way, whether we are alone or in company.”