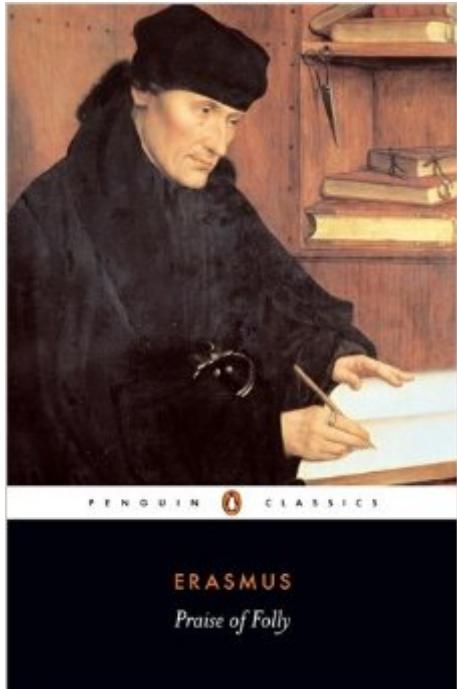


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Praise Of Folly (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Erasmus ranges from light-hearted jibes to vehement denunciation of the theologians and churchmen, monastic life and the condition of the Church, and then seriously expounds the virtues of the Christian way of life. This work is one of the best satirical classics of the Renaissance. It was very widely read in Erasmus's lifetime and even today reads amusingly and instructively, having lost none of its fire and very little of its relevance. The sharp criticism provoked by it was answered by Erasmus in his Letter to Martin Dorp, the theologian, which is included here.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In 1509 Erasmus wrote Praise of Folly for the amusement of his learned friend Thomas More (author of Utopia). He wrote in the character of Folly, daughter of Money and Youthfulness. Folly declaims on the foibles of mankind-- sometimes in a light and humorous vein and sometimes taking careful and deadly aim at beliefs and abuses of the time. One of the wonderful things about reading historical satire is that you get a sense both of the specificity of the time it was written in as well as of the general and enduring idiocies of mankind. Praise of Folly is a great book because it is equal parts familiar (railing about the pedantic nature of scholars) and exotic (discussing the interaction of church and heretics). The book is published together with the Letter to Martin Dorp, defending Praise of Folly to Dorp against charges of being insulting to theologians in general. The Radice translation is clear, and blessedly puts the notes at the bottom of each page, making them readable.

The book also comes with a context-providing introduction and bibliography.

Searching for happiness is a full-time job for me and it seems that almost 500 years ago--Erasmus wrote this book in 1511--others were looking for it too. They called it The Good Life ("summum bonum") then, and the ship of fools that were searching for it had completely booked its passage. Today, it's the same. Erasmus doesn't let up. He catalogs every type of fool, every kind of folly, and has room to spare. Reading this funny, I mean, profound book, has given me a new respect for those idiotic life decisions I have made. Looking back over the grand scheme of it all...yikes! I can't believe I did that, said that, acted like that! I highly recommend this satire for teachers, politicians, priests, professors, administrators, managers, Rotarians, poets, grave diggers, and anyone else tempted toward hypocrisy (and if you think you aren't tempted, I mean you most of all). Reading this book can make you human again. And that is the first step toward the good life.

I stumbled upon Erasmus while reading Durant's Reformation volume of the Story of Civilization, and later while reading Johnson's History of Christianity. Both authors were rightly impressed with the great influence he had on the Christian world prior to and during the time of the reformation. I had previously known that Luther and Calvin were the major players in the reformation but hadn't realized that so many characters prepared for it and also tried to temper the violent outcomes. Erasmus stood out for me as an intriguing person that I wanted to learn more about. As a result, I purchased this book to get a sample of his writings. This book of just over 300 pages contains as its major work "The Praise of Folly". This satirical gem has Folly incarnated as a type of a classical goddess discussing the virtues of folly and using various classical and everyday examples to justify why folly is such a good thing. Fortunately, the compiler has footnotes to explain the classical references to those not familiar with most of them; this helped me a lot. There follows the brilliant anti-war piece entitled "The Complaint of Peace", where peace is embodied and complains of how he is abused and neglected. Then follows two forewords to his groundbreaking Latin translation of the Greek New Testament, explaining why he did this. I hadn't realized how intense the opposition was. After that we have the hilarious "Julius Excluded from Heaven"; an imagined conversation between Pope Julius and St. Peter at heaven's gate. I can see why it was initially published anonymously. The next section includes four of his Colloquies; very well written and bringing out some good points. Three letters are also included including one defending his Praise of Folly, another describing his travels, and another to a high ranking Bishop. The final section includes six essays of varying interest discussing Erasmus. I loved Erasmus' writing style and though the

compilation a very good introduction to his writing. Adam's translation was very clear. I highly recommend this book to anyone wanting to learn more of Erasmus and sample his writing.

A full-front blast against the stupidities of us arrogant humans, with a crazy satirical sense of humor. Erasmus reminds us that we have no freakin' idea why we are here and who we are, so we better be humble and respect each other. "In Praise of Folly" was written during a horse travel from Rome to London, as a gift to Erasmus' close friend Thomas More, who was to die under the axe by orders of his former boss Henry VIII, exactly the kind of lunatic Erasmus pokes fun at in this book. Erasmus strips naked the vanities of politicians, intellectuals, theologians, poets, monks, priests, Popes, magicians, etc. but the most surprising thing about this book first published in 1511 is its relevance to today's world. It even seems more relevant to our times than to his times!! Think about the celebrity system, when people read about soap-opera "actors'" opinions on God, politics and the environment, etc. Very funny, very honest, very brave. Just imagine, in those times, stating the stupidity and sinfulness of the Pope no less. Erasmus wrote an extremely refreshing, smart, witty and wise book. If more people read it, the world would be a little less insufferable and more enjoyable. Please don't pay any attention to its age or to its classical references. The marrow of the book is just what you need to relax and see the world like it really is. In case you've ever read a self-help or "excellence" book, you'll never do it again: you'll be laughing your brain out at how shallow and stupid they are. Read it now.

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