As far as the education of children is concerned I think they should be taught not the little virtues but the great ones. Not thrift but generosity and an indifference to money; not caution but courage and a contempt for danger; nor shrewdness but frankness and a love of truth; not tact but love for one's neighbor and self-denial; not a desire for success but a desire to be and to know.

Usually we do just the opposite; we rush to teach them a respect for the little virtues, on which we build our whole system of education. In doing this we are choosing the easiest way, because the little virtues do not involve any actual dangers, indeed they provide shelter from Fortune's blows. We do not bother to teach the great virtues, though we love them and want our children to have them; but we nourish the hope that they will spontaneously appear in their consciousness some day in the future, we think of them as being part of our instinctive nature, while the others, the little virtues, seem to be the result of reflection and calculation and so we think that they absolutely must be taught.

In reality the difference is only an apparent one. The little virtues also arise from our deepest instincts, from a defensive instinct; but in them reason speaks, holds forth, displays its arguments as the brilliant advocate of self-preservation. The great virtues well up from an instinct in which reason does not speak, an instinct that seems to be difficult to name. And the best of us is in that silent instinct, and not in our defensive instinct which harangues, holds forth and displays its arguments with reasons voice. Education is only a certain relationship which we establish between ourselves and our children, a certain climate in which feelings, instincts and thoughts can flourish. Now I believe that a climate which is completely pervaded by a respect for the little virtues will, insensibly, lead to cynicism or to a fear of life. In themselves the little virtues have nothing to do with cynicism or a fear of life, but taken together, and without the great virtues, they produce an atmosphere that leads to these consequences. Not that the little virtues are in themselves contemptible; but their value is of a complementary and not of a substantial kind; they cannot stand by themselves without the others, and by themselves and without the others they provide but meagre fare for human nature. By looking around himself a man can find out how to use the little virtues - moderately and when they are necessary - he can drink them.
in from the air, because the little virtues are of a kind that is common among men. But one cannot breathe in the great virtues from the surrounding air, and they should be the basis of our relationship with our children, the first foundation of their education. Besides, the great can also contain the little, but by the laws of nature there is no way that the little can contain the great.

In our relationships with our children it is no use our trying to remember and imitate the way our parents acted with us. The time of our youth and childhood was not one of little virtues; it was a time of strong and sonorous words that little by little lost all their substance.

The present is a time of cold, submissive words beneath which a desire for reassertion is perhaps coming to the surface. But it is a timid desire that is afraid of ridicule. And so we hide behind caution and shrewdness. Our parents knew neither caution nor shrewdness and they didn’t know the fear of ridicule either: they were illogical and incoherent but they never realized this; they constantly contradicted themselves but they never allowed anyone to contradict them. They were authoritarian towards us in a way that we are quite incapable of being. Strong in their principles, which they believed to be indestructible, they reigned over us with absolute power. They deafened us with their thunderous words: a dialogue was impossible because as soon as they suspected that they were wrong they ordered us to be quiet: they beat their fists on the table and made the room shake. We remember that gesture but we cannot copy it. We can fly into a rage and howl like wolves, but deep in our wolves howl there lies a hysterical sob, the hoarse bleating of a lamb.

And so we have no authority; we have no weapons. Authority in us would be a hypocrisy and a sham. We are too aware of our own weakness, too melancholy and insecure, too conscious of our illogicality and incoherence, too conscious of our faults; we have looked within ourselves for too long and seen too many things there. And so as we don’t have authority we must invent another kind of relationship. In these days, when a dialogue between parents and their children has become possible - possible though always difficult, always complicated by mutual prejudices, bashfulness, inhibitions - it is necessary that in this dialogue we show ourselves for what we are, imperfect, in the hope that our children will not resemble us but be stronger and better than us. As we are moved in one way or another by the problem of money, the first little virtue that it enters our heads to teach our children is thrift. We give them a money box and explain to them what a fine thing it is to save money instead of spending it, so that after a few months there will be lots of money, a nice little hoard of it; and how good it is not to give in to the wish to spend money so that in the end we can buy something really special. We remember that when we were children we were given a similar money box; but we forget that money, and a liking for saving it, were much less horrible and disgusting things when we were
children than they are today; because the more time passes the more disgusting money becomes. And so the money box is our first mistake. We have installed a little virtue into our system of education.

That innocent-looking money box made of earthenware, in the shape of a pear or an apple, stays month after month in our children's room and they become used to its presence; they become used to the money saved inside it, money which in the dark and in secret grows like a seed in the womb of the earth; they like the money, at first innocently, as we like anything - plants and little animals for example - that grows because we take care of it; and all the time they long for that expensive something they saw in a shop window and which they will be able to buy, as we have explained to them, with the money they have saved up. When at last the money box is smashed and the money is spent, the children feel lonely and disappointed; there is no longer any money in their room, saved in the belly of the apple, and there isn't even the rosy apple any more; instead there is something longed for from a shop window, something whose importance and price we have made a great fuss about, but which, now that it is in their room, seems dull and plain and ordinary after so much waiting and so much money. The children do not blame money for this disappointment, but the object they have bought; because the money they have lost keeps all its alluring promise in their memories. The children ask for a new money box and for more money to save, and they give their thoughts and attention to money in a way that is harmful to them. They prefer money to things. It is not bad that they have suffered a disappointment; it is bad that they feel lonely without the company of money. We should not teach them to save, we should accustom them to spending money. We should often give children a little money, small sums of no importance, and encourage them to spend it immediately and as they wish, to follow some momentary whim; the children will buy some small rubbishy toy which they will immediately forget as they will immediately forget money spent so quickly and thoughtlessly, and for
which they have no liking. When they find the little rubbly toy - which will soon break - in their hands they will be a bit disappointed but they will quickly forget the disappointment, the rubbly toy and the money; in fact they will associate money with something momentary and silly, and they will think that money is silly, as it is right that they should think whilst they are children.

It is right that in the first years of their life children should live in ignorance of what money is. Sometimes this is impossible, if we are very poor; and sometimes it is difficult because we are very rich. All the same when we are very poor and money is strictly a matter of daily survival, a question of life or death, then it turns itself before the baby's eyes into food, coal or blankets so quickly that it is unable to harm his spirit. But if we are so-so, neither rich nor poor, it is not difficult to let a child live during its infancy unaware of what money is and unconcerned about it. And yet it is necessary, not too soon and not too late, to shatter this ignorance; and if we have economic difficulties it is necessary that our children, not too soon and not too late, become aware of this, just is it is right that they will at a certain point share our worries with us, the reasons for our happiness, our plans and everything that concerns the family's life together. And we should get them used to considering the family's money as something that belongs to us and to them equally, and not to us rather than to them; or on the other hand we can encourage them to be moderate and careful with the money they spend, and in this way the encouragement to be thrifty is no longer respect for a little virtue, it is not an abstract encouragement to respect something which is in itself not worth our respect, like money, rather it is a way of reminding the children that there isn't a lot of money in the house; it encourages them to think of themselves as adult and responsible for something that involves us as much as them, not something particularly beautiful or pleasant but serious, because it is connected with our daily needs. But not too soon and not too late, the secret of education lies in choosing the right time to do things.

Being moderate with oneself and generous with others; this is what is meant by having a just relationship with money, by being free as far as money is concerned.

And there is no doubt that it is less difficult to educate a child so that he has such a sense of proportion, such a freedom, in a family in which money is earned and immediately spent, in which it flows like clear spring water and practically does not exist as money. Things become complicated where money exists and exists heavily, where it is a leaden stagnant pool that stinks and gives off vapours. The children are soon aware of the presence of this money in the family, this hidden power which no one ever mentions openly but to which the parents refer by means of complicated and mysterious names when they are talking among themselves with a leaden stillness in their eyes and a
bitter curl to their lips; money which is not simply kept in a desk drawer but which accumulates who
knows where and which can at any moment be sucked back into the earth, disappearing for ever and
swallowing up both house and family. In families like this the children are constantly told to spend
money grudgingly, every day the mother tells them to be careful and thrifty as she gives them a few
coins for their tram fare; in their mother's gaze there is that leaden preoccupation and on her forehead
there is that deep wrinkle which appears whenever
money is discussed; there is the obscure fear that all the
money will dissolve into nothing and that even those few
coins might signify the first dust of a mortal and sudden
collapse. The children in families like this often go to
school in threadbare clothes and worn-out shoes and
they have to pine for a long time, and sometimes in vain,
for a bicycle or a camera, things which some of their
friends who are certainly poorer than they are have had
for quite a while. And then when they are given the
bicycle they want the present is accompanied by severe
orders not to damage it, not to lend such a magnificent
object - which has cost a great deal of money - to anyone.
In such a house admonitions to save money are constant
and insistent - school books are usually bought second-hand, and exercise books at a cheap
supermarket. This happens partly because the rich are often mean, and because they think they are
poor, but above all because mothers in rich families are - more or less subconsciously - afraid of the
consequences of money and try to protect their children by surrounding them with the lie of simple
habits, even making them grow accustomed to little instances of privation. But there is no worse error
than to make a child live in such a contradiction; everywhere in the house money talks its
unmistakable language; it is there in the china, in the furniture, in the heavy silverware, it is there in
the comfortable journeys, in the luxurious summer holidays, in the doorman's greeting, in the
servants' rituals; it is there in his parents' conversation, it is the wrinkle on his father's forehead, the
leaden perplexity in his mother's gaze; money is everywhere, untouchable perhaps because it is so
fragile, it is something he is not allowed to joke about, a sombre god to whom he can only turn in a
whisper, and to honor this god, so as not to disturb its mournful immobility, he has to wear last year's
overcoat that has got too small, learn his lessons from books that are in tatters and falling to pieces,
and amuse himself with a country bumpkin's bicycle. If we are rich and want to educate our children
so that they have simple habits it must in that case be made very clear that all the money saved by
following such simple habits is to be spent, without any hint of meanness, on other people. Such
habits mean only that they are not greed or fear but a simplicity that has - in the midst of wealth - been
freely chosen. A child from a rich family will not learn moderation because they have made him wear
old clothes, or because they have made him eat a green apple for tea, or because they deny him a
bicycle he has wanted for a long time;
such moderation in the midst of wealth is pure fiction, and fictions always lead to bad habits. In this
way he will only learn to be greedy and afraid of money. If we deny him a bicycle which he wants and
which we could buy him we only prevent him from having something that it is reasonable a boy
should have, we only make his childhood less happy in the name of an abstract principle and without
any real justification. And we are tacitly saying to him that money is better than a bicycle; on the
contrary he should learn that a bicycle is always better than money. The true defense against wealth is
not a fear of wealth - of its fragility and of the vicious consequences that it can bring - the true defense
against wealth is an indifference to money. There is no better way to teach a child this indifference
than to give him money to spend when there is money - because then he will learn to part with it
without worrying about it or regretting it. But, it will be said, then the child will be used to having
money and will not be able to do without it; if tomorrow he is not rich, what is he to do? But it is
easier not to have money once we have learnt to spend it, once we have learnt how quickly it runs
through our hands, and it is easier to learn to do without money when we are thoroughly familiar with
it than when we have paid it the homage of our reverence and fear throughout our childhood, than
when we have sensed its presence all around us and not been allowed to raise our eyes and look it in
the face.
As soon as our children begin to go to school we promise them money as a reward if they do well in
their lessons. This is a mistake. In this way we mix money - which is an ignoble thing - with learning
and the pleasures of knowledge, which are admirable and worthy things. The money we give our
children should be given for no reason; it should be given indifferently so that they will learn to receive
it indifferently, but it should be given not so that they learn to love it, but so that they learn not to love
it, so that they realize its true nature and its inability to satisfy our truest desires, which are those of the
spirit. When we elevate money into a prize, a goal, an object to be striven for, we give it a position, an
importance, a nobility, which it should not have in our children's eyes. We implicitly affirm the
principle - a false one - that money is the crowning reward for work, its ultimate objective. Money
should be thought of as a wage for work, not its ultimate objective but its wage - that is, its legitimate
recognition; and it is clear that the scholastic work of children cannot have a wage. It is a small
mistake - but a mistake - to offer our children money in return for domestic services, for doing little chores. It is a mistake because we are not our children’s employers; the family's money is as much theirs as it is ours; those little services and chores should be done without reward, as a voluntary sharing in the family's life. And in general I think we should be very cautious about promising and providing rewards and punishments.

Because life rarely has its rewards and punishments; usually sacrifices have no reward, and often evil deeds go unpunished, at times they are even richly rewarded with success and money. Therefore it is best that our children should know from infancy that good is not rewarded and that evil goes unpunished; yet they must love good and hate evil, and it is not possible to give any logical explanation for this. We usually give a quite unwarranted importance to our children's scholastic performance. And this is nothing but a respect for the little virtue 'success'. It should be enough for us that they do not lag too far behind the others, that they do not fail their exams; but we are not content with this; we want success from them, we want them to satisfy our pride. If they do badly at school or simply not as well as we would wish, we immediately raise a barrier of nagging dissatisfaction between us and them; when we speak to them we assume the sulky, whining tone of someone complaining about an insult. And then our children become bored and distance themselves from us. Or we support them in their complaints that the teachers have not understood them and we pose as victims with them. And every day we correct their homework, and study their lessons with them. In fact school should be from the beginning the first battle which a child fights for himself, without us; from the beginning it should be clear that this is his battlefield and that we can give him only very slight and occasional help there. And if he suffers from injustice there or is misunderstood it is necessary to let him see that there is nothing strange about this, because in life we have to expect to be constantly misunderstood and misinterpreted, and to be victims of injustice; and the only thing that matters is that we do not commit injustices ourselves. We share the successes and failures of our children because we love them, but just as much and in the same way that they, little by little as they grow up, share our successes and failures, our joys and
anxieties. It is not true that they have a duty to do well at school for our sake and to give the best of their skills to studying.

Once we have started them in their lessons, their duty is simply to go forward. If they wish to spend the best of their skills on things outside school - collecting Coleoptera or learning Turkish - that is their business and we have no right to reproach them, or to show that our pride has been hurt or that we feel dissatisfied with them. If at the moment the best of their skills do not seem to be applied to anything, then we do not have the right to shout at them very much in that case either, who knows, perhaps what seems laziness to us is really a kind of daydreaming and thoughtfulness that will bear fruit tomorrow. If it seems they are wasting the best of their energies and skills lying on the sofa reading ridiculous novels or charging around a football pitch, then again we cannot know whether this is really a waste of energy and skill or whether tomorrow this too will bear fruit in some way that we have not yet suspected. Because there are an infinite number of possibilities open to the spirit. But we, the parents, must not let ourselves be seized by a terror of failure. Our remonstrances must be like a squall of wind or a sudden storm - violent, but quickly forgotten - and not anything that could upset the nature of our relationship with our children, that could muddy its clarity and peace. We are there to console our children if they are hurt by failure; we are there to give them courage if they are humiliated by failure. We are also there to bring them down a peg or two when success has made them too pleased with themselves. We are there to reduce school to its narrow, humble limits; it is not something that can mortgage their future, it is simply a display of offered tools, from which it is perhaps possible to choose one which will be useful tomorrow. What we must remember above all in the education of our children is that their love of life should never weaken. This love can take different forms, and sometimes a listless, solitary, bashful child is not lacking in a love of life, he is not overwhelmed by a fear of life, he is simply in a state of expectancy, intent on preparing himself for his vocation. And what is a human being’s vocation but the highest expression of his love of life? And so we must wait, next to him, while his vocation awakens and takes shape.

His behavior can be like that of a mole, or of a lizard that holds itself still and pretends to be dead but in reality it has detected the insect that is its prey and is watching its movements, and then suddenly springs forward. Next to him, but in silence and a little aloof from him, we must wait for this leap of his spirit. We should not demand anything; we should not ask or hope that he is a genius or an artist or a hero or a saint; and yet we must be ready for everything; our waiting and our patience must compass both the possibility of the highest and the most ordinary of fates.

A vocation, an ardent and exclusive passion for something in which there is no prospect of money, the consciousness of being able to do something better than others, and being able to love this thing more
than anything else - this is the only, the unique way in which a rich child can completely escape being conditioned by money, so that he is free of its claims; so that he feels neither the pride nor the shame of wealth when he is with others. He will not even be conscious of what clothes he is wearing, or of the clothes around him, and tomorrow he will be equal to any privation because the one hunger and thirst within him will be his own passion which will have devoured everything futile and provisional and divested him of every habit learnt in childhood, and which alone will rule his spirit. A vocation is man's one true wealth and salvation. What chance do we have of awakening and stimulating in our children the birth and development of a vocation? We do not have much; however there is one way open to us. The birth and development of a vocation needs space, space and silence, the free silence of space. Our relationship with our children should be a living exchange of thoughts and feelings, but it should also include deep areas of silence: it should be an intimate relationship but it must not violently intrude on their privacy; it should be a just balance between silence and words. We must be important to our children and yet not too important; they must like us a little, and yet not like us too much - so that it does not enter their heads to become identical to us, to copy us and the vocation we follow, to seek our likeness in the friends they choose throughout their lives. We must have a friendly relationship with them, and yet we must not be too friendly with them otherwise it will be difficult for them to have real friends with whom they can discuss things they do not mention to us. It is necessary that their search for friends, their love-life, their religious life, their search for a vocation, be surrounded by silence and shadows, so that they can develop separately from us. But then, it will be said, our intimacy with our children has been reduced to very little. But in our relationships with them all these things - their religious life, their intellectual life, their emotional life, their judgement of other human beings - should be included as it were in summary form; for them we should be a simple point of departure, we should offer them the springboard from which they make their leap. And we must be there to help them, if help should be necessary; they must realize that they do not belong to us, but that we belong to them, that we are always available, present in the next room, ready to answer every possible question and demand as far as we know how to.

And if we ourselves have a vocation, if we have not betrayed it, if over the years we have continued to love it, to serve it passionately, we are able to keep all sense of ownership out of our love for our children. But if on the other hand we do not have a vocation, or if we have abandoned it or betrayed it out of cynicism or a fear of life, or because of mistaken parental love, or because of some little virtue that exists within us, then we cling to our children as a shipwrecked mariner clings to a tree trunk; we eagerly demand that they give us back everything we have given them, that they be absolutely and inescapably what we wish them to be, that they get out of life everything we have missed; we end up
asking them for all the things which can only be given to us by our own vocation; we want them to be entirely our creation, as if having once created them we could continue to create them throughout their whole lives. We want them to be entirely our creation, as if we were not dealing with human beings but with products of the spirit. But if we have a vocation, if we have not denied or betrayed it, then we can let them develop quietly and away from us, surrounded by the shadows and space that the development of a vocation, the development of an existence, needs. This is perhaps the one real chance we have of giving them some kind of help in their search for a vocation - to have a vocation ourselves, to know it, to love it and serve it passionately; because love of life begets a love of life.