

## **A Study of Francis Bacon as an Essayist with Profound Knowledge and His Contributions**

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### **Abstract**

This paper is a scholarly estimate of the eminent essayist Francis Bacon who is well known as a man of words for the profound knowledge and wisdom he has crafted in all his essays. His unique style is clear, simple, effective, and flexible in dealing with complex and ordinary thoughts. Bacon's writing style remains aphoristic; his pronouncements are terse, concise, and sensitive. His ability to express ideas in short, condensed words with a proverbial ring is seldom exceeded. This article is an attempt to highlight his memorable contributions that were almost a moral guide to humanity at his age.

**Keywords:** aphorism, intellectual, philosophy, political, knowledge

### **Introduction**

Francis Bacon is rightly called the English Essay Father. Despite many other essayists, the essays of Bacon were published as a medium-length composition with characteristics such as brevity, freedom, informality, and personal element. He is famous as a man of letters for his prose style. His essays bear the hallmark of his extensive learning, diverse experiences, and careful observation of men and things. His two objectives in life were material success and service to humanity. He had clear intentions, prudential actions, and intelligent thinking.

Bacon was, without a doubt, one of the most remarkable men of his time, the age that produced Shakespeare and the Elizabethan dramatists. He made a change and contribution to the field of knowledge, which is still recognized today. He wrote 58 essays on political, moral, domestic, and religious subjects. In all his writings, Bacon consistently maintained the position of a severe and mature teacher and adviser. He had the soundest intellectual abilities and the strongest conviction in the field of study. If Shakespeare's contribution was too imaginative creation, Bacon's contribution was a too philosophical inquiry into both philosophy and science. His awareness of his extraordinary abilities stirred him to ambitions in the political field, where greatness was considered to lie at that time.

Like the French philosopher and writer Montaigne, Bacon wrote essays. He took the form of the essay from the French master and manipulated it to suit his high gravity and stately manner. Bacon needs to possess Montaigne's lively humor or charming informality. Bacon called his essays 'dispersed meditations' and 'short sketches.' Emphasizing the informational nature of his writing, Bacon says that his essays are 'civil and moral counsels.'

The use of analogies, similar devices, metaphors, and the like enhances the imaginative quality of his prose. They are drawn from classical history, the Bible, astronomy and science, history, and philosophy. He uses quotations and references as well. Baconian wisdom is universal and practical. Some of his essays like 'Of Travel', 'Of Marriage and Single Life', 'Of Friendship', etc., suggest his concern with concrete life. Articles like 'Of Truth', 'Of Ambition', 'Of Beauty', etc., deal with the external passions of humans. Bacon appears in his essays as a moral philosopher, a political thinker, a science voter, a critic of irrational religious practices, and a thoroughly practical man of the world.

### **Bacon's Works and Contribution to Knowledge**

Bacon is the true son of the Reformation. The beginning of modern literature is the 16th century. There were many changes in people's minds and attitudes at this time. He went to the University of Cambridge and found that academics and teachers followed traditional study methods. He believed this method was based on hearsay and speculation. He believed in the technique of an experimental study followed even today in science. Bacon realized that science required to progress in the correct conception of the end and goal of science and a method with correct defects of the day and emphasized empirical study rather than speculation. He was among the few who declared that God intended knowledge to benefit humanity. He was considered the modern "Aristotle" for his theories and practice of contemporary education and research. Bacon's interest was also in philosophy and religion. He delighted in the world of philosophers, moralists, critics, and arbitrators. From this broad reading, he drew material for his thoughts expressed in his essays. His knowledge embraced everything known, noted, and observed, which is why it is considered classic in the English language. He was a classic due to his excellent observation of human nature and commentary on them.

Dr. Samuel Johnson defined Bacon's work as "a loose sally of the mind, an irregular, undigested piece, not a regular and orderly composition," indicating it as an incomplete thesis on a subject. Bacon accepted this as he considered it poorly arranged thoughts on a particular topic, calling it 'dispersed meditation' indeed.

The first edition consisted of only ten essays, but the final edition now is 58 essays as by that time, Bacon was famously known for his life events as Lord Chancellor. Initially, his style is characterized by brief sentences with complex meanings and heavy thoughts. Later, as he gave path to his imagination, the sentences flooded with the flow of words and ideas richer and more varied. Bacon emphasized the priority of the subject rather than the mood or treatment compared with Charles Lamb and Montaigne. Though his style is unique, he clarified that the essay delves only into the issue rather than the author. His approach is profound, distant, and stately.

The essays also portrayed Bacon's predominant interests in politics and morals. His morality was more notable than that of his contemporaries. Some pieces were dispassionate and insensitive to the relationship he deals with in the practical sense. Undoubtedly, essays with complex thoughts and easy flow can only be written by Bacon in his period. Though his works are in simple language, they must be read passionately so that our minds can grasp the concept and ideas. Some of the best English prose is applauded only for emotive passages or rich oratory, but Bacon's style is "style for all season."

### **Remarkable Essays of Truth**

Bacon quotes from Michael Lord Montaigne: "A man who lies is brave to God and a coward toward man."

Bacon begins this serious topic concerning the Bible in the trial of Jesus, where Pilate says: "What is truth?" skipping the answer to the question. This is because, in general, absolute truth is not pleasing, and people never welcome any fixed opinion. Truth is not easy to find, and at the same time, people never make an effort to find them. Thus, Bacon calls it the 'original sin' where men always tend only to lie and are not interested in the truth.

Bacon says that truth may not be pleasing, but it is rare, like a diamond, compared to other precious stones and pearls shining bright in the daylight. He compares it to poetry, which is pleasing but with imagination on flow. A good poem contains truth and the poet's imagination and lies that sink into the heart, making us fall in love with the poetry. If a man can see the truth from every perspective then the mistakes he commits are reduced, increasing his quality of compassion and pity. Apart from religious or philosophical truth, he states that truth and honesty make a man honorable, but a mixture of falsehood is needed for business. Fact, without any doubt, is highly praised; a mix of fiction and lies is typical among men because we are weak and prone to sin.

### **Of Revenge**

Bacon quotes the famous King Solomon from the Bible who remarks: "It is the glory of a man to pass by an offense."

This is one of his earlier essays of Bacon which is crisp on his thoughts about private and public revenge. As he lived close to the middle ages, this was his observation of the men around him. Revenge is a wild justice where one attempts to punish the guilty irrespective of the law. As what is done can never be undone, taking revenge is never going to make any change. Bacon accepts the damage caused by self-love. Likewise, he is prepared to say that revenge is justifiable without legal recourse. The Bible preaches one to forgive their enemies but not the friends who hurt us, says Bacon. So he prefers to neglect them, for they had hurt us a long way.

One, who meditates revenge, keeps evil fresh in his memory, preventing him from healing. Political acts of vengeance are historical and purely based on greed, like the assassination of Julius Caesar and Henry III. Private revenge is due to the hatred or unjust neglect of society. Bacon does not approve that revenge is acceptable as a lawyer himself. So, he prefers people choose forgiveness as a tool to prove them honorable. In this essay, Bacon's sync of ideas is in an older fashion but presented neatly.

### **Of Parents and Children**

Bacon, in this essay, calls the children as both boon and bane. He says that children are the mere justification for the parents' survival, giving them delight and hope. They are also considered to be the hurdles in the prospering life of the parent. Parents try hard and bear with all the misfortunes and sufferings caused by them. Those who aren't blessed with children strive to express their ideals with nobler deeds.

In each paragraph, Bacon advises the parents on various aspects, treating the children equally and being liberal in financing them. Parents sometimes create a rivalry between siblings due to their partial affection. He also says that parents should ensure their children are placed rightly in a job at the right time. Parents should never compel their children to follow their dream and instead encourage them to pursue their passion. He believes the youngest sons are fortunate since they have no greater expectations than the elder kids. Bacon's prudential advice is to let children choose what is best; custom will make it agreeable and easy.

### **Of Marriage and Single Life**

Bacon begins the essay with the advantages of a single's life but finishes with the importance of marriage. A married man is held back from enjoyment and freedom, which an unmarried man rejoices. He is bound to responsibilities, unlike the unmarried man. He considers available men to be benefactors of humanity. He says they are selfish and never want to take up responsibilities. Bacon states they are best in many aspects but not as good citizens. He believes charity begins at home just when a man holds responsibility as a husband and a father.

Bacon states that married men are more trustworthy than unmarried men because they prove to be cruel as there are no strings attached. He advocates that husbands should never express jealousy as wives never welcome this quality to share their love. He warns jealous husbands to be prepared to lose the kindness and loyalty of their wives. He highly appreciates the wives who carry out their duties with love and care to their husbands. Even if their husbands are wrong, they overlook and justify their actions. Hence it is essential to be married and take up responsibilities to be loved.

### **In this essay Of Nobility**

, Bacon reminds us of the kind of society he lived in Europe and England. It was a time of political rivalry, and commoners had to make much effort to obtain knighted nobility. Bacon himself was knighted as Sir Francis Bacon in 1603 by King James III. In those days, they inter-married only with the noble families to maintain their dignity for generations. Nobility thus played a vital role in his age.

Bacon dealt with the nobility of human character and nobility itself as a state. Lack of sovereignty in an absolute rule leads to tyranny, which may result in losing a ruler's position. Descended nobles from ancient families are honored for their survival instinct caused, politically and financially. These nobles are idle and do not promote the welfare of the country by enriching it. They cause envy among the commoners but are accepted and honored

by the nobles. Bacon considered these nobles as interpreters of the planning and regulations of the king to the people.

### **Of Ambition**

Initially, Bacon says that ambition gives strong motivation to a man unless it is frustrated, which leads to wickedness and evilness. An ambitious man is considered an asset provided with the opportunity and dangerous when frustrated. Ambitious men are pre-motivated and enthusiastic, making them a survivor in any circumstance; they make good soldiers. One troubled, ambitious court man can pull down the entire empire built in a few days. So, in this essay, Bacon discusses how a king should handle these ambitious men to maintain the balance in his power.

Bacon says a man with a single ambition is less dangerous than one who thrills to win over every aspect. Constant competition in politics and business leads to this industry situation. In this essay, Bacon attempts to make the readers understand and observe how to tackle such people, making them serve their country instead. He is an expert in assessing men and the solution to the problems they cause.

### **Of Riches**

Bacon surprises the readers at the beginning of the essay by linking virtue to riches and suggesting that only virtuous people can afford means. He quotes King Solomon from the Bible:

"Of great riches, there is no real use except in the distribution; the rest is conceit. So saith Solomon, Where much is, there are many consume it; and what hath the owner, but the sight of it with his eyes?"

Excess wealth can only bring worry to the one who possesses it rather than enjoying having it. It gives happiness only when it is spent on people in need. Bacon says that riches are often categorized as precious jewels and stones for they appear to be rare. He says those are useless when someone needs to be saved. Bacon advises, "Seek not to prod riches, but such as you can get by honest means, use carefully, distribute or give generously, and leave when you die contently."

A man with an inventive mind can work wonders. Bacon's style in this essay is smoother and longer, with various clauses, quotations, and allusions as examples. These add richness to Bacon's style.

### **Of Death**

Bacon explains his ideas on fear of death by using similes. He compares various phobias of men related to fear of death. He says that the accomplishments of death frighten more than death itself. People never care for valor; lovers, one who commits suicide, and one who wants revenge are those who never fear death. In this essay, he personifies Revenge, Love, Pity, Honor, and Grief. Neither valiant nor miserable man is not afraid of death because he is frustrated with society. "It is natural to die as to be borne: and to a little infant, perhaps the one is as painful as the other", says Bacon. Lethargic people suffer more at death. A dead man is praised by even those who envied him. A man should be at service to God, be noble, perform meritorious deeds, and pray to be set free from the bondage of life.

### **Bacon's Regard for Structure**

Bacon's interest in science and scientific accuracy significantly influenced the formation of his style. All his works, including the essays, show a solid organic unity of structure: with one subject leading to various ideas being explained and justified. Bacon's paragraphing is unlike the modern system; his many essays consisted of single-sentence paragraphs. This makes them lengthy, with complex ideas piled up together. The materials presented lead to an argument on each point as in the system of debate. The essence of Bacon's structure is the exclusion of all extraneous material. The logical division into several aspects and parts and the proportionate presentation of each is the method behind the design of Bacon's writing. Bacon is a master, he never allows himself any freedom to roam around the subject somewhat, interested in presenting mere truth.

### **Bacon's Use of Aphorism**

Bacon's style has been called 'aphoristic' since his works were based on aphorism, giving firmness and flexibility. These can be easily memorized and quoted, provided with wisdom on occasions and manners. He was especially interested in promoting inductive thinking. The simplest form of this inductive kind of reasoning is found in the Fables of Aesop, which ends with a moral. Bacon endowed his essays with profundity and intellectual authority as aphorisms. He provided exactly what the readers needed and possessed knowledge and wisdom. Examples of aphorisms:

- a) For a lie faces God and shrinks from man (Of truth)
- b) Revenge is a kind of wild justice. (Of Revenge)
- c) This is certain that a man that studieth of revenge keeps his wounds green, which otherwise heal and do well. (Of Revenge)

Bacon intentionally used the short, concise style to impress the reader forcibly and be memorable.

### **Conclusion**

Bacon's matter and method of presentation made him a classic. His style is unique because it cannot be categorized as Romantic or classic. His clear expression of material, mastery of words, and dominance of language created the prime interest in literature. Ben Jonson, being a master of English prose, places Bacon at the very top of all the stylists: "He seemed to me ever, by his work, one of the greatest men and the most worthy of admiration." De Quincey, in the Romantic Age, affirms the validity and truthfulness of Bacon's imagery. Hazlitt says, "His writings have the gravity of prose with the enthusiasm and vividness of poetry. His sayings have the effect of hypotheses and are striking and self-evident. His style is equally sharp, sweet flowing, concise, condensed and expansive, expressing volumes in a sentence, amplifying a single thought into rich, glowing, and delightful eloquence pages." Hence Bacon's contribution to English prose is priceless and unique in style. John Ruskin called his works the wisest words of Englishmen.

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