

1

ESSAYS OF FRANCIS BACON

STRUCTURE

- Learning Objectives
- Introduction
- Of Death
- Of Adversity
- Of Marriage and Single Life
- Of Superstitions
- Of Studies
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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to understand :

1. The essays of Francis Bacon, such as:
 - Of Death
 - Of Adversity
 - Of Marriage and Single life
 - Of Superstitions
 - Of Studies

INTRODUCTION

Francis Bacon, 1st Viscount Saint Alban, KG (22 January 1561-9 April 1626) was an English philosopher, statesman, scientist, lawyer, jurist and author. He served both as Attorney General and Lord Chancellor of England. Although his political career ended in ignominy, he remained extremely influential through his works, especially as a metaphysical advocate and a practitioner of the scientific method and as a colonist in the scientific revolution too.

Bacon has been called the father of experientialism. His works established and popularized inducible methodologies for scientific inquiry, often called the Baconian method or simply, the scientific

method. His demand for a planned procedure of investigating all things natural marked a new turn in the oratorical and doctrine framework for science, much of which still surrounds conceptions of proper methodology today. His dedication probably led to his death, bringing him into a rare historical group of scientists who were killed by their own experiments.

Bacon was denominated in 1603, created Baron Verulam in 1618, and Viscount St Alban in 1621; as he died without heirs both aristocrats became defunct upon his death. He famously died of pneumonia contracted while studying the effects of freezing on the preservation of meat.

OF DEATH

Men fear death, as children fear to go in the dark; and as that natural fear in children gets increased with tales, so does the other. Certainly, the contemplation of death, as the wages of sin, and passage to another world, is holy and religious; but the fear of it, as a tribute due continuous to, is weak. Yet in religious meditations, there is sometimes mixture of narcissism, and of superstition. You shall read, in some of the friars' books of embarrassment, that a man should think for himself, what the pain is, if he has but his finger's end pressed, or tortured, and thereby imagine, what the pains of death are like, when the whole body is corrupted, and dissolved; when many times death passes, with less pain than the torment of a limb; for the most indispensable parts, are not the quickest of sense. And by him that alleged only as a philosopher, and natural man, it was well said, *Pompa mortis magis ferret, quam mors ipsa*. Groans, and paroxysm, and a discolored face, and friends weeping, and blacks, and funeral, and the like, show death terrible. It is worthy the observing, that there is no passion in the mind of man, so weak, but it mates, and masters, the fear of death; and therefore, death is no such terrible enemy, when a man hath so many attendants about him, that can win the hostilities of him. Revenge exultations over death; love slights it; honor aspireth to it; grief flieth to it; fear preoccupateth it; derail, we read, after Ortho the emperor had slain himself, pity (which is the supplest of affections) arouse many to die, out of mere compassion to their efficacieres, and as the truest sort of followers denial, Seneca adds niceness and sufficiency: *Cogita quamdiu eadem feceris; mori velle, non tantum fortis aut miser, sed etiam fastidius potest*. A man would die, though he were neither valorous, nor miserable, only upon a weariness to do the same thing so oft, over and over. It is no less worthy, to observe, how little alteration in good spirits, the approaches of death make; for

they appear to be the same men, till the last instant. Augustus Caesar died in a compliment; Livia, conjugii nostri memor, vive et vale. Tiberius in deceit; as Tacitus saith of him, Jam Tiberium vires et corpus, non dissimulation, deserebant. Vespasian in a witticism, sitting upon the stool; Ut puto deus fio. Galba with a sentence; Feri, si ex re sit populi Romani; holding forth his neck. Septimius Severus in freight; Adeste is quid mihi restat agendum, and the like. Certainly the Stoics bestowed too much cost upon death, and by their great preparations, made it appear more fearful. Better saith he, qui finem vitae extremum inter munera ponat nature. It is as natural to die, as to be born; as a little infant; perhaps, the one is as painful, as the other. He that dies in an solemn pursuit is like one that is wounded in hot blood; who, for the time, scarce feels the hurt; and therefore with a mind fixed, and bent upon somewhat that is good, doth avert the dolours of death. But, above all, believe it, the sweetest introit is, Nunc dimittis; when a man hath obtained worthy ends and expectations. Death hath this also; that it opens the gate to good fame, and extinguish envy. - Extinctus amabitur idem.

Summary

There is a general whim that men fear Death. According to Bacon, Death is a passage to another world, which is considered to be holy and religious. It is inescapable for all grates, paroxysm, discolored faces, friends weeping and obsequies are the things that show Death is terrible. A man will die, though he is valorous and miserable. For an instance, the great Ceasar also faced his death and he died with commendation. Hence death is worthy and it is an escape from the miseries of the world. Bacon concludes his essay, by saying that, Death opens the gate to good fame.

OF ADVERSITY

It was a high speech of Seneca (after the manner of the phlegmatic), that the good things, which belong to prosperity, are to be wished; but the good things, that belong to crunch, are to be admired. Bona rerum secundarum optabilia; adversarum mirabilia. Certainly if miracles be the command over nature, they appear most in crunch. It is yet a higher speech of his, than the other (much too high for a infidel). It is true greatness, to have in one the infirmity of a man, and the security of a God. Vere magnum habere fragilitatem hominis, securitatem Dei. This would have done better in poesy, where transcendences are more allowed. And the poets indeed have been busy with it; for it is in effect the thing, which figured in that strange fiction of the ancient poets,

which seem not to be without mystery; nay, and to have some approach to the state of a Christian; that Hercules, when he went to unshackle Prometheus (by whom human nature is represented), sailed the length of the great ocean, in an earthen pot or pitcher; lively describing Christian resolution, that sail in the frail bark of the flesh, through the waves of the world. But to speak in a mean, the virtue of prosperity, is temperance; the virtue of crunch, is courage; which in morals is the more heroical virtue. Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Attestation; crunch is the blessing of the New; which carried the greater execration, and the clearer revelation of God's favor. Yet even in the Old Attestation, if you listen to David's harp, you shall hear as many hearse-like airs as carols; and the pencil of the Holy Ghost prompted labored more in describing the malady's of Job, than the euphoria of Solomon. Prosperity is not without many fears and distastes; and adversity is not without comforts and hopes. We see in needle-works and embroideries, it is more pleasing to have a lively work, upon a sad and dignified ground, than to have a dark and melancholy work, upon a lightsome ground: judge therefore of the pleasure of the heart, by the pleasure of the eye. Certainly virtue is like precious odors, most aromatic when they are infuriated, or crushed: for prosperity doth best discover vice, but adversity executes best discover virtue.

Summary

In his essay "Of crunch", Bacon brings out the difference between crunch and Prosperity. According to Bacon, the good things of prosperity are to be praised and the good things of adversity are to be admired. Miracles in nature appear only in crunch. Hence it is considered to be great and security of God. The righteousness of prosperity is temporary and the virtue of crunch is permanent, which also instills heroical virtue. Prosperity has many fears and distastes and adversity holds comforts and hopes in the life of man.

OF MARRIAGE AND SINGLE LIFE

He that prompted wife and children hath given hostages to fortune; for they are hindrances to great enterprises, either of virtue or mischief. Certainly the best works, and of greatest merit for the public, have proceeded from the unmarried or childless men; which both in affection and means, have married and furnished the public. Yet it were great reason that those that have children, should have greatest care of future times; unto which they know they must transmit their dearest collaterals. Some there are, who though they lead a single life, yet their thoughts do end with themselves, and account future times insouciant denial.

it's difficult to decide whether marriage is a good or a bad idea. Bad marriages, however, he suggests can be analyzed more easily by their effects upon the women in them.

Reflection on 'Of Marriage and Single Life'

As we all know, Francis Bacon, the chief figure of the English Renaissance, is very famous as an English statesman, essayist, and philosopher of science so his essay on. Of Marriage and Single Life is one of his most well-known essays, which analyzes and compares marriage with single life in different aspects, such as characters, public service and personal qualities. While, there seems to be not so comprehensive from people's standpoint today.

Bacon's basic opinion is that marriage is good to both an individual and the society. His analysis is taken step-by-step. At first, a single man believes that a man with a wife and children, who are impediment to both great courses and little inconsequential, is the slave of fortune. Especially some miser men think children are the bills of charges and will reduce their riches. And foremost reason is that to be single is to be free, while wife and children are the bonds to his freedom. Moreover, a single life has some good aspects. "Unmarried men are best friends, best masters, and best servants." But single life could also make a man indifferent, superficial and corrupt for judges and magistrates, coward for soldiers without hostilities power and tenacity. Marriage makes a man more responsible, tender, enthusiastic and warm-hearted. Finally, Bacon pointed out that "wives are young men's mistresses, companions for middle age, and old men's nurses". Even though a wife marries a bad husband, marriage offers a good chance for husbands to correct themselves.

'Of Marriage and Single Life' is very convincing especially in that period context. To be a classic means to be a challengeable one. Personally, I have some doubtful points about this essay.

First, it aims at men to persuade them to marry rather than keep single. But how about women? At that time, women were at a low position and they seemed to have no right to choose their own lives to single or married. As for Bacon's preference—marriage, which involves two sides both men and women, women also plays an important part in marriage. So I prefer the author to offer much more convincing ideas about the marriage for women.

Second, at present, singleness as a life-style is increasingly recognized by young people and their parents. But as a classic, which

passed down generations to generations, 'Of Marriage and Single Life' seems to be out of date. Some people don't regard getting married as necessarily better than remaining single, especially in developed countries and areas. However, this essay reflects and works at that certain period. Maybe that is enough.

At last, "Wives are young men's mistress, companions for middle age, and old men's nurses, so as a man may have a quarrel to marry when he will" seems a bit biased. Of course, I don't think men are superior to women, but I cannot disagree with his viewpoint here. Maybe it is better for us to think that what he really means is that they are companions for each other.

To sum up, 'Of Marriage and Single Life' has its quintessence about the attitude toward life. Different people have different opinions at different times, and we should look at the essay from our own stances.

OF SUPERSTITIONS

It were better to have no opinion of God at all, than such an opinion, as is blamable of him. For the one is unbelief, the other is rules; and certainly superstition is the admonition of the Deity. Plutarch saith well to that purpose: Surely (saith he) I had rather a great deal, men should say, there was no such man at all, as Plutarch, than that they should say, that there was one Plutarch that would eat his children as soon as they were born; as the poets speak of Saturn. And as the slurs is greater towards God, so the danger is greater towards men. Scepticism leaves a man to sense, to philosophy, to natural devotion, to laws, to reputation; all which may be guides to an outward moral virtue, though religion were not; but superstition dismounts all these, and assembled an absolute monarchy, in the minds of men. Therefore theism did never bewilder states; for it makes men wary of themselves, as looking no further: and we see the times inclined to scepticism (as the time of Augustus Caesar) were civil times. But superstition prompted been the confusion of many states, and bringeth in a new exceptional mobile, that ravisheth all the spheres of government. The master of superstition is the people; and in all superstition, wise men follow fools; and arguments are fitted to practice, in a reversed order. It was gravely said by some of the abbots in the Council of Trent, where the doctrine of the Schoolmen stripped great undulate, that the Schoolmen were like astronomers, which did sham aberrant and epicycles, and such engines of orbs, to save the phenomena; though they knew there were no such things; and in like manner, that the Schoolmen had framed a number of adroit and convoluted dictums, and

theorems, to save the practice of the church. The causes of superstition are: pleasing and sensual rites and ceremonies; excess of outward and canting holiness; over great acclaim of traditions, which cannot but load the church; the man oeuvre of prelates, for their own ambition and lucre; the favoring too much of good intentions, which openeth the gate to conceits and novelties; the taking an aim at divine matters, by human, which cannot but breed mixture of imaginations: and, lastly, bestial times, especially joined with cataclysms and disasters. Superstition, without a veil, is a awry thing; for, as it addeth disproportion to an ape, to be so like a man, so the resemblance similitude of superstition to religion, makes it the more away. And abominable meat corrupt to little worms, so good forms and orders corrupt, into a number of trifling observances. There is a superstition in avoiding superstition, when men think to do best, if they go furthest from the superstition, formerly received; therefore care would be had that (as it fareth in ill ejecting) the good be not taken away with the bad; which commonly is done, when the people is the reformer.

Summary

Superstitions are the accusation of God. Plutarch says that poets talk of Saturn as one who eats his children as soon as they are born. Atheism leaves a man to feel, to think and it is a guide to an outward moral virtue. Superstitions are impediments in the life of a man to think freely, They have created confusion in many states and enrapture all spheres of Governments. The master of superstition is the people and in superstitious beliefs wise men follow fools. All arguments are fitted to practice in a reversed order. Petty observances of superstitious beliefs lead to corrupt good forms and orders. Hence, Bacon concludes the essay, by saying that, the reformation in the minds of people is necessary

OF STUDIES

Studies serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability. Their chief use for delight is in privateness and retiring; for ornament, is in discourse; and for ability, is in the judgment, and disposition of business. For expert men can implement, and perhaps judge of particulars, one by one; but the general counsels, and the plots and marshalling of affairs, come best, from those that are learned. To spend too much time in studies is indolence; to use them too much for ornament, is affectation; to make judgment wholly by their rules, is the humor of a scholar. They perfect nature, and are perfected by experience: for natural abilities are like natural plants, that need

pruning, by study; and studies themselves, do give forth directions too much at large, except they be bounded in by experience. Crafty men condemn studies, simple men applaud them, and wise men use them; for they teach not their own use; but that is a wisdom without them, and above them, won by observation. Read not to refute and negate; nor to believe and take for granted; nor to find talk and discourse; but to weigh and consider. Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested; that is, some books are to be read only in parts; others to be read, but not curiously; and some few to be read wholly, and with assiduity and attention. Some books also may be read by subordinate, and decoction made of them by others; but that would be only in the less important arguments and the meaner sort of books, else distilled books are like common distilled waters, flashy things. Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man. And therefore, if a man write little, he need to have a great memory; if he confab little, he had need have a present cleverness: and if he read little, he had need have much devious, to seem to know, that he executes not. Histories make men wise; poets witty; the mathematics adroit; natural philosophy deep; moral grave; logic and eloquence able to contend. Abeunt studio, in mores. denial, there is no obstruction in the wit, but may be elaborated out by fit studies; like as diseases of the body, may have appropriate exercises. Bowling is good for the stone and reins; shooting for the lungs and breast; gentle walking for the stomach; riding for the head; and the like. So if a man's wit be wandering, let him study the mathematics; for in demonstrations, if his wit be called away never so little, he must begin again. If his wit be not apt to distinguish or find differences, let him study the Schoolmen; for they are cymini sectores. If he be not apt to beat over matters, and to call up one thing to prove and illustrate another, let him study 197 the lawyers' cases. So every defect of the mind may have a special receipt.

Summary

The purpose of this work is to analyze Sixteen Century Francis Bacon's essay "Of Studies" by summarizing its main points and the pertinence of its statements to this day. Francis Bacon was an English Philosopher and a writer best known as a founder of the modern verifiable tradition based on the rational analysis of data obtained by observation and experimentation of the physical world.

The main focus of Bacon's essay rests on explaining to the reader the importance of study knowledge in terms of its practical application towards the individual and its society.

actual understanding of Human Psychology. Concepts and ideas evolve at the same time as the Human condition changes in all social, scientific, political and economic aspects. By looking through the glass of time and comparing the past to the present we come to the realization of the universality and endurance of some concepts and the delicacy and impermanence of some others.

SUMMARY

Bacon did not propose an actual philosophy, but rather a method of developing philosophy. In his magnum opus, *Novum Organum*, he argued that although philosophy at the time used the deductive syllogism to explicate nature, the philosopher should instead proceed through inductive reasoning from fact to axiom to physical law. Before beginning this inference, the querist is to free his or her mind from certain false notions or tendencies which distort the truth.

Bacon elucidate his somewhat fragmentary ethical system in the seventh and eighth books of his *De augmentis scientiarum* (1623)—where he distinguished between duty to the community, an ethical matter, and duty to God, a religious matter.

KEY WORDS

1. **Death** : Death is the termination of the biological functions that sustain a living organism.
2. **Adversity** : A condition marked by misfortune, calamity, or distress.
3. **Superstition** : Superstition is a credulous belief or notion, not based on reason or knowledge.
4. **Knowledge** : To expertise, and skills acquired by a person through experience or education; the vague or practical understanding of a subject.
5. **Immortality** : Immortality (or eternal life) is the concept of living in a physical or spiritual form for an boundless length of time.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Describe the vision of Bacon on and about Death.
2. Differentiate the aspects conflicting between *crunch* and *Prosperity* through Bacon's Essay.

3. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of married life.
4. Write down the summary of the essay, "Of Superstition".
5. Explain the Views of Bacon's on knowledge' and in-depth studies.
6. Why do men fear for death?
7. Mention the things that show death terrible.
8. Write down the difference between prosperity and adversity.
9. What is the theme of the essay, "Of Marriage and Single Life"?
10. What is the main focus of the essay, "Of Studies"?

SUGGESTED READING

1. The Essays or Counsels civil and Morall—Sir Francis Bacon.
2. Works by Francis Bacon at Project Gutenberg.
3. Works by About Francis Bacon, from internet archive.

