

Of Truth

Francis Bacon

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Learning Outcomes

- Learn to write essays in aphoristic style i.e. how to express thoughts in condensed style .
- Learn about the development of essay in British Literature.
- Able to understand a moral question that plagues human mind as to what is truth.
- The result :The quest for truth, the love of truth and the belief in truth is the only free will of human nature.



OF TRUTH

FRANCIS BACON

What is an essay and its kinds

- An essay is a short piece of writing on a particular subject(Oxford Dictionary)
- An essay is a short formal piece of writing ...dealing with a single subject ("Essay" 2001)
- It is typically written to try to persuade the reader using selective research evidence("Essay 1997)
- Dr. Johnson defined the essay as, "a loose sally of the mind, an irregular, indigested piece, not a regular and orderly composition."

There are four types of essays

→Argumentative: Forming an opinion via research

Building an evidence

→Expository: Knowledge of a topic
Communicating information

→Narrative: Creative language use
presenting a compelling narrative

→Descriptive: Creative use of language

Describing sensory.

History and Development of Essay In British Literature

- The foundation of the essay can be traced to ancient Greece and Rome, though it did not flourish there.
- Michel de Montaigne(1533-1592,A Frenchman) was the first author-he used the term to characterize essays as “attempts” or “assai ”to put his thoughts into writing.
- The forerunners of the character writers like Thomas Nashe and Thomas Dekker can be described as the founder of the development of essay in England.
- Francis Bacon who is called “father of English essay ”realized that his essays will “come home to men’s business and bosoms”.

History and Development of Essay(con.)

- Ben Johnson wrote in a personal style in “Discoveries” as contrasted with impersonal style of Francis Bacon.
- Abraham Cowley essay “On Myself” is simple and sincere.

RESTORATION AGE (1660-1700) combines the contribution of

- John Dryden(Essay of Dramatic Poesy and Preface to the Fables)
- Sir William Temple(Of Gardening and Of Health and long life) and Lord Halifax (The character of a Timmer) wrote in masterly style and are full of political wisdom.

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF ESSAY(con.)

- EIGHTEENTH CENTURY(1701-1800) saw the rise of Journalism and Periodicals with the publications of *the Review* (1704) *The Tatler*(1709) and *The Spectator*(1711)
- Richard Steele and Joseph Addison combined middle style with delicate balance of irony and satire


The age of Queen Anne is also dedicated to the growth of periodicals

- Great essayist like Alexander Pope (1774) Jonathan Swift(1747) Henry Fielding(The Covent of Garden Journal) Dr. Johnson(the Gentlemen Magazine) Oliver Goldsmith(The Bee and The Citizen) gave essay writing extra ordinary power, boldness and originality.

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF ESSAY(con.)

- *Nineteenth Century* saw the rise of Critical Journals commonly called as Review such as The Edinburgh Review, The Quarterly Review, Blackwood's Magazine, and The London Magazine.
- Charles Lamb (1775) dominated the 19th century as the "Prince of English essay "by publishing *Essay on Elia*(1832) and *Last Essays of Elia*(1833)
- Sir Thomas Browne, William Hazlitt, Thomas De Quincey, Leigh Hunt essays are autobiographical in nature.

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF ESSAY(con.)

- Victorian age saw birth of a new genre, the historical essay.
- Thomas Babington(1800-59),Thomas Carlyle, Matthew Arnold, Henry Newman, John Ruskin, Walter Patter, R.L. Stevenson are some of the famous essayist.

- Twentieth century proved a fertile ground for the development of the essay.
- G.K Chesterton, E.V. Lucas, A.G.Gardiner, Robert Lynd, and Hilaire Belloc occupies a high place among the modern essayists.

FRANCIS BACON

- He has the credit of being the first among the line to write essay in British Literature.
- His essays have been translated into French, Latin, and Italian languages.
- The style reflects stateliness, profundity, condensed and lucid prose.
- The essays focus on morality with wit and tempers wit with morality.
- They are rich in matter and manner.
- They dominate in logical arguments, freshness of example, latinized vocabulary, wordily wisdom, and Renaissance enlightenment.
- Bacon introduced inductive methodology—testing and refining hypotheses by observing, measuring, and experimenting to know what is truth.

OF TRUTH

- Francis Bacon's 'Of Truth' was published in 1625.
- This essay is regarded as the great work about the thoughts of truth and expresses his philosophical views about truth in real world.
- Bacon paraphrased the opening lines of Book II of "On the Nature of Things" by Roman poet Titus Lucretius Carus.
- The utopian idea that truth can make this world a better place is exemplified as a teacher and not like a preacher. Truth whether as in statements that employ general abstract concepts to describe reality or meaning itself, is not concrete even though it is abstracted from concrete reality.
- Bacon opines that many people fail to acknowledge that there is a universal truth that exists beyond local moralities and ethics.
- Bacon begins with a question being asked as to 'what is truth?' in the Holy Bible by Pontius Pilate who had to bow down to Jews who wanted Lord Jesus to be crucified and a criminal Barnabas to be released. Pilate was dismissive of truth; God, on the other hand, created truth and personifies truth.

Of Truth(con.)

- The essay debates on the question that humans have a tendency deep in their psyche to tell a lie.
- But like truth ,lies too can be judged from qualitative grounds. The essayist extols the value of truth and critically explains that there are many people who do not place much value on truth, as they find lies more interesting. Bacon asserts that truth comes straight from God, so our relationship with truth brings humans closer to God.
- Plato didn't want poetry to be included in philosophical and ethical studies and in his building of an ideal society as it was based on falsehood or called poesy vinum daemonum [the wine of devils]
- On the other hand Aristotle said that poetry has creative imagination and different ways like: reason, emotion, perception, and language are employed to know the truth.
- “Truth may perhaps come to the price of a pearl that showeth best by day; but it will not rise to the price of a diamond or carbuncle, that showeth best in varied lights. A mixture of a lie doth ever add pleasure.” as Bacon writes.

Of Truth(con.)

- The strongest image that Bacon draws into an understanding of truth is that of 'light and darkness'.
- Bacon delineates the argument by writing that God brought light i.e Lord Jesus into this world so that by following the teaching of Jesus, men is able to move from darkness and distinguishes between truth and lie.
- The essay then pass from theological and philosophical truth to the truth of civil business. Bacon talks of subjective truth that is functional in social life.
- According to honor of man's nature, mixture of falsehood is like alloy in coin of gold and silver, which may make the metal work the better, but it also embraces it.

Of Truth (con.)

- Bacon quotes Montaigne who said while he inquired into the realms of reason as to why the word of the lie should be such a disgrace and such an odious charge.
- Montaigne comes to a conclusion that if a man lies, he may be brave towards the commandments of God who forbids to lie but he is coward before man.
- “For a lie faces God, and shrinks from man. The wickedness of falsehood and breach of faith cannot call to the judgments of God upon the generations of men: it being foretold that when Lord Jesus’ second coming is due, "He shall not find faith upon the earth.” For Lord Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. And truth shall set you free”.

Writing Techniques used in Of Studies

- The most notable feature of Bacon's essay is his aphoristic style. Aphorisms are straightforward statements that state a truth. Bacon in this essays writes in an aphoristic style making general statements.
- His essays are usually short, and condensed.
- Critical analysis of content would fill pages after pages. Each sentence of his essay contains multiple meanings and references. He combines wisdom with brevity and his short, pithy sayings have become useful expressions.
- The essay is remarkable for his preciseness.
- There is moderate use of Latinism. Ex: vinum daemonum [the wine of devils]
- Use of allusions. Economy of words is found in the essay.
- Use of imagery. Ex: of light/darkness, Snake/lie, alloy/gold and silver.

Summary Of Truth

- Summary of “Of Truth”
- Francis Bacon’s essay Of Truth is one of his more famous essays. The essay begins by making a genial observation: it mocks those who refuse to admit that there is objective truth that needs to be acknowledged by all.
- Bacon divides this essay into two parts . On side he investigates human psyche which is prone to have a natural bend to lie that yields no notable advantage. ‘Truth’ resembles light i.e. Jesus where as humans because of their many sins prefer to live in mental darkness of mind because lie gives short lived pleasure. Some people suffer from being compulsive liars that calls for dooms day. Bacon asserts that truth is the greatest good that a man can possess.
- Where does Truth come from and why it is so important? Bacon has the answer – he asserts that Truth comes from God and consequently it brings us close to God, and naturally truth provides us with greatest pleasure.
- This essay begins with the mentioning Pilate, a symbolic crucifier of Lord Jesus-killer to please the Jewish clergies.

Summary Of Truth(con.)

- Pontius Pilate it is said had interrogated Jesus before his crucifixion, Jesus proclaimed that “Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” (John 18:37). To this, Pilate had mockingly replied: “What is truth?” and thereafter washed his hands and left Jesus to address the Jewish clergy who were hell bent on getting Lord Jesus crucified even over a criminal Barabbas (v. 38).
- True there is no official record of Jesus’ reply to Pilate but Christians largely believe that Pilate had looked down upon Truth. Jesus does say this to his disciple Thomas, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).
- In order to save his neck from controversies Pilate was dismissive of truth.
- God, on the other hand, created truth and personifies truth. Bacon leads to the conclusion that truth is God. Does it not remind us of the Indian thought: Satyam Shivam Sundaram (Truth is God) or Mahatma Gandhi’s Autobiography, “My Experiments with Truth.” (Chapter 4 Truth Is God)

Summary Of Truth(con.)

- Bacon takes the essay back to the debate initiated by Plato: Poets told lies . Aristotle refuted this charge by saying that poetry is creative and hence imagination is the foundation. Poet has a right to use his/her creative directives based on emotive experiences. Aristotelian in argument, says poetic untruth is shadow lie but does agree on Universal law about truth.
- Bacon is wit personified when he brings the question of truth in the realm of real or practical life. His essay do come home to man's business as he gives example saying lying is found oft attractive and truth is painfully boring, so people would tell lie even when there is no benefit from it just like mixing alloy to gold and silver makes them smoothly transit into ornaments. Truth may perhaps come to the price of a pearl, that shows best by day; but it will not rise to the price of a diamond, or carbuncle, that shows best in varied lights.
- But as a philosopher and moralist he comes close to Plato and asserts that subject truth can be functional in social life but when it comes to universal concept of truth, it cannot be compromised. A liar cannot have salvation according to ten commandments written in Holy Bible.
- This essay sees a number of allusions which are used to drive the basic idea of the essay home. Bacon raises serious questions and pushes the readers to think. Apart from allusion, imagery of light and darkness, snake, alloy is used effectively. It is straight and simple in style, and does not digress. There is also a moderate use of Latinism in the essay.
- To conclude Bacon takes to the French essayist Montaigne who is of the view that “a lie faces God and shrinks from man” to reiterate his point. Untruth is equal to wickedness.

Select Glossary

- Remove “ETH” from the words for clear understanding: imposeth, examineth, showeth, passeth, breatheth, inspireth, cometh etc.
- Jestings: mocking, hilarious
- Giddiness: excited feelings, childlike happiness
- Discourse: debate, discussion
- Doth: third person singular of the present tense “do”
- Stately: elegant, attractive
- Flattering: make some look or seem better
- Melancholy: sadness that lasts for a long time
- Indisposition: unable to do, mild illness
- Sabbath: the day of week for rest and prayer. (Sunday for Christians and Saturday for Jews)
- Vantage :an advantage, commanding perspective
- Providence: divine guidance or care
- Theology: Study of religion
- Prettily: artful, clever
- Odious: hateful, gross, nasty.

Descriptive Questions

- Write a summary of the essay Of Truth.
- Write a note on prose style of Bacon in reference to Of Truth.

Quizzes

Learn More

- <https://sirbacon.org/>
- <https://www.francis-bacon.com/>
- <https://iep.utm.edu/francis-bacon/>
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Bacon_\(artist\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Bacon_(artist))
- <https://www.bartleby.com/3/1/1.html>
- <https://www.mkgandhi.org/autobio/autobio.htm>

REFERENCES

- Nordquist, Richard. "Of Truth, by Francis Bacon." ThoughtCo, Sep. 9, 2021, [thoughtco.com/of-truth-by-francis-bacon-1690073](https://www.thoughtco.com/of-truth-by-francis-bacon-1690073).
- John 3:16 New Revised Standard Version. Holy Bible
- [https://www.thoughtco.com/of-truth-by-francis-bacon-1690073#:~:text=%22Of%20Truth%22%20is%20the%20opening,and%20Moral%22%20\(1625\).](https://www.thoughtco.com/of-truth-by-francis-bacon-1690073#:~:text=%22Of%20Truth%22%20is%20the%20opening,and%20Moral%22%20(1625).)

THANKS

