



Essays

Francis Bacon

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Along with Shakespeare's works, Bacon's "Essays" is the supreme achievement of the English Renaissance. Philosopher, statesman, author, Bacon made all knowledge his province, and in the "Essays" is to be found more worldly wisdom than in any other book. "My essays come home, to men's business and bosoms." And Pope penned the epitaph, "If parts allure thee think how Bacon shined, The wisest, brightest, meanest of mankind." As terse as Emerson is expansive, Bacon's "Essays" are perhaps the most truly Classical (in spirit) prose in the English language. Fans of the Leo Strauss school should have a fieldday reading between the lines of the essays "On Atheism" and "On Superstition"; for the rest of us, nobody can come away from even one of these essays without gaining invaluable insights. Though Bacon is rightly heralded for the radical newness of his pragmatic methods, he is steeped in history--those mindful of Napoleon's dictum that history is the only true philosophy will certainly respond enthusiastically to Bacon's approach. From the post-Machiavellian insights of "Of Empire" to the pre-Enlightenment ethics of "Of Goodness and Goodness of Nature", one will find in reading Bacon's prose what the youth of Athens must have found in following Socrates: the presence of a benevolent, worldly-wise, supremely rational mind determined to show you the order of the world.

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