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# Understanding Truth in Of Truth, an Essay by Francis Bacon

## Francis Bacon of Truth

In his essay 'Of Truth', Francis Bacon appreciates truth and wishes people to speak it. He begins the essay with a Biblical Allusion in which Pontius Pilate (who occupied an important position in Emperor Tiberius' court) asks Jesus "what is truth" and then promptly walks away without waiting to hear a reply – this reflects humans in general who avoid truth and find it difficult to imbibe. Instead of seeking truth, people prefer resorting to falsehood and lies; prefer ambiguity to reality.

He goes back to ancient Greek philosophers who would lose themselves in trying to understand why it is people tell lies. Some of them propped that there was not only one absolute truth – accepting that there can be only one truth is like accepting bondage on free will. Hence, they said there can be multiple truths. However, these thinkers have ceased to exist and modern thinkers are of the opinion that if there is not one truth then any of us can create our own truths. Such a world would be full of chaos and anarchy – without any order.

Undoubtedly, people do make sincere attempts to discover the truth. However, if they succeed, they regret it and find the burden of truth too much to bear. Hence, they abandon the pursuit of truth and drift towards lies, even if they know lies are degrading. The world of lies is dark, but people develop a fascination towards it at the expense of truth.

Some later Greek philosophers tried to understand why it is that men chose to lie. Under certain circumstances it is understood why lies are told – in poetry, distortion of the truth adds to the beauty of poems. In business, merchants and traders resort to falsehood to attract buyers for the sake of business. What they wanted to know is why do common folk resort to lies even when they know its unsavoury circumstances.

Truth depicts everything very honestly and transparently. Bacon compares it to daylight, it to daylight, all put in the open with no room for deception, unlike likes which are like candlelight glowing in the dark illuminating only what they want to show. Truth is like a pearl which shines bright and pure in the day while lies are like diamonds/carbuncles which glow artificially, even at night and can make deceptive appearances. A combination of lies and truth have the capacity to please man more than only lie or only truth. Bacon suggests the utility of such a combination. If everything is portrayed in their true colours, with no superficial praise or illusions, society will

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appear dreary and undesirable. Vanity and aggrandizement induce creativity and intellectual stimulation. While showering praise, some amount of unreal description of one's feats is needed, otherwise the praise will be bland and ineffective. "One of the fathers" called poetry wine of the devils because it catered to emotion and distorted reality, not the absolute truth. Plato said art is twice removed from reality – it is not dependable. Bacon says that the exaggerations and allusions of poetry do not usually affect readers, but in some cases the falsehood of such literature may get imbedded in the minds of readers and impair their senses – this could be an unfortunate consequence of reading poetry.

Lies, undoubtedly, deprave the mind. Truth, on the other hand, remains untarnished and absolute as always. Searching for truth requires a certain kind of conviction. We can only seek the truth when we believe in it. Then there is a lot of energy, passion and persistence required to seek it out. Truth symbolises the ultimate good of human nature.

When God created the world, he first gave the light of sense to mankind, so that human beings could see and sense the world around them. Then, he gave the power of reason, so that humans could reason what was good or bad in the things happening around them. As a result, humans received the power of enlightenment. After this, God radiated light, illuminating the disorderly world so that humans could be superior in knowledge and functioning to any other species. Finally, he focused his kindly light on human beings whom he favoured the most – his saints. There is an inner conscious man must follow- we cannot forget who we are, how we were made, and who we owe it to. It is a unique and humbling experience to stand on a beach and see the rocky sea, to stand high above in a castle and see the fight raging below; to stand away from negativity and not be a part of it. This should humble people and make them charitable. Man has the capacity to be like angels – kind, truthful, benevolent.

While dealing with mundane matters, it is difficult to always stick to the truth. To make business smoother, man mixes in lies to dealings. At the time, this seems to be a practical necessity, which may have success but at the end of it, is vile and degrading. It is like an alloy, when foreign elements are added to precious substances like gold or silver, to make it stronger. It succeeds to do so however, robs it of its lustre. Bacon compares lies to a snake which is always on its stomach because it is spineless and can't stand erect. This is why men like Montaigne declared falsehood to be universally degrading and loathsome.

When judgment day arrives, a person who has lied will have to face God and cannot hide, punishment is inevitable. Hence why choose the temporary satisfaction of lies when you know that God will see all. Francis Bacon concludes by saying that the way we are going, the Earth will slowly reach a state where faith no longer exists – we are forgetting our faith and God too will lose faith in us. Adam and Eve were told that the son of God would come to Earth and there would be the chance to achieve salvation. Now the way we're going, faith will no longer even

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