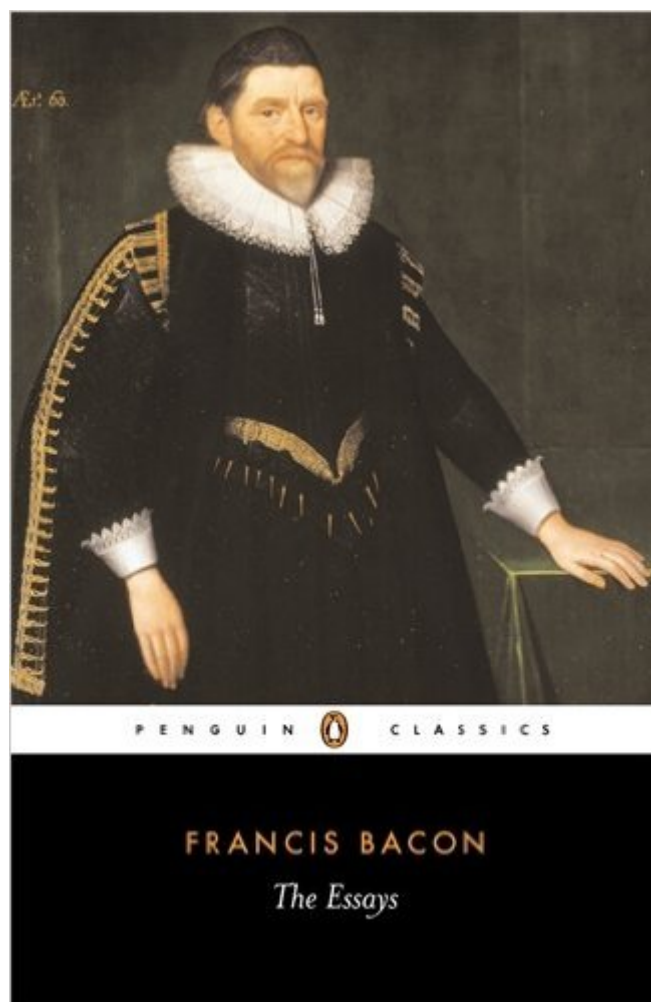


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The Essays (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

One of the major political figures of his time, Sir Francis Bacon served in the court of Elizabeth I and ultimately became Lord Chancellor under James I in 1617. A scholar, wit, lawyer and statesman, he wrote on politics, philosophy and science, declaring early in his career that 'I have taken all knowledge as my province'.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Will Durant's - The Story of Philosophy - Chapter on Francis Bacon. Bacons' finest literary product, the Essays (1597-1623), show him still torn between these two loves, for politics and for philosophy. In the "Essay of Honor and Reputation" he gives all the degrees of honor to political and military achievements, none to the literary or the philosophical. But in the essay "Of Truth" he writes : "The inquiry of truth, which is the love-making or wooing of it; the knowledge of truth, which is the praise of it ; and the belief of truth, which is the enjoying of it, is the sovereign good of human natures. In books "we converse with the wise, as in action with fools. That is, if we know how to select our books. "Some books are to be tasted," reads a famous passage (Essay #50), "others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested"; all these groups forming, no doubt, an infinitesimal portion of the oceans and cataracts of ink in which the world is daily bathed and poisoned and drowned. Surely the Essays must be numbered among the few books that deserve to be chewed and digested. Rarely shall you find so much meat, so admirably dressed and flavored, in

so small a dish. Bacon abhors padding, and disdains to waste a word; he offers us infinite riches in a little phrase; each of these essays gives in a page or two the distilled subtlety of a master mind on a major issue of life. It is difficult to say whether the matter or the manner more excels; for here is language as supreme in prose as Shakespeare's is in verse. Durants preference is for Essays 2, 7, 8, 11, 12, 16, 18, 20, 27, 29, 38, 39, 42, 46, 48, 50, 52, 54.-----Purchased this book Dec 2012. It was printed Sept 26, 2012 with 145 pgs. No introduction.

There is not much here to say that the other reviewers have not covered: Sir Francis was a truly sharp witted mind, and knew how to write good prose, and how to run his topics and resolutions home to the reader. As style goes, I personally go easily between Aristotle and Bacon in the same day, and often. To me I see much of Aristotle in Francis' works (as in his high-formal writing style), yet it seems he did not know Greek. Most of his quotations and analogies he draws from Latin writers (a large proportion seems to be Virgil and Tacitus; midst a handful of others strewn throughout). As far as Sir Francis' writing goes, theres little bad to say, and a lot of good. This is worth reading for any philosopher, or even anyone trying to get a good hold of formal prose. He might to some seem a tad difficult to read at first, but it shouldn't prove a real obstacle for anyone actually interested in the reading -- after you read just a couple of his essays, you will likely start to get used to his style quickly. I suggest looking in the Contents and just picking out a few that look like topics you couldn't deny interest - that will get you hooked, and into the style. As for the editor John Pitcher, there are many good things, but a certain terribly annoying quality that weighs as heavy as all the good in my opinion. For those who do not know Latin extensively (i.e., limited vocabulary and grammar, or none at all) the annotations are of course great and indispensable. Pitcher also generously untangles Francis' allusions and such, which are helpful also at times. But something that he (Pitcher) follows in other editors of Bacon's works, is complete asinine glossing of words in context which makes complete sense. And he does this extensively.

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