Of Studies by Francis Bacon

The title “Of Studies” means the collective studies that a person does in his life. The main idea of “Of Studies” by Francis Bacon is the benefits of reading. Reading helps the readers to cope up with diverse situations. Reading also enhances readers’ intellect and cures restraints of the mind.

The essay provides the right method to read different branches of knowledge and discusses their benefits. In short, the theme of the essay “Of Studies” is how studies benefit a reader’s life enormously in different ways.

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Three Important Uses of Studies

At the outset, Francis Bacon says that the three useful purposes of studies are delight, ornament, and ability.

The first useful purpose is reading delights the reader. In one’s private space, reading is useful as it provides great pleasure. For instance, if a reader enjoys fiction like Paulo Coelho’s The Alchemist, then it would delight him.

By plunging into the world of Santiago, the reader meets many characters such as the King of Salem, the crystal merchant, the English man, his beloved Fatima, and the Alchemist. The novel also delights the reader as Santiago proceeds in his quest for treasure from Andalusia to the hearts of Egypt, the pyramids.

Therefore, irrespective of personal preferences, reading not only compensates for boredom, but also gives great pleasure to the reader.

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The second purpose is studies add ornament to discourse. When a well-read person engages in a written or spoken discussion, reading helps the person to exhibit his knowledge in a much better way than an average person.

For instance, in Bacon’s essays such as Of Truth and Of Love, we see the usage of Latin phrases. This shows Bacon is good at Latin and he uses Latin as an ornament in his essays.

Studies also improve one’s ability of judgment and arrangement of things. One can be an expert at something even without studies, but there lies a distinction between an expert and a learned man.

Bacon says that an expert can execute his plan, and even judge a situation but a learned man can better perform in giving advice, making plans, and managing things. The efficiency of a learned man is better than an expert.

The effect of excessive reading

These are the three ways of studies through which studies serve a reader. However, too much in everything is bad and reading is no exception to that.

Bacon states that reading excessively leads to laziness. From the physiological point of view, reading is a sedentary task and when a reader sits for long, the immobility of the body would lead to lethargy.

Similarly, using decorated words and knowledge excessively in discourse is does the opposite. Too much use of ornaments would project a learned man as ostentatious. Bacon also states that making judgments based on bookish knowledge is the humor of a scholar.

Consideration and application of the learning without understanding the practical world is a fault. A reader must be able to draw the distinct line between the book and the real world while judging.

Bacon here emphasizes ‘too much’ in each situation. Therefore, equilibrium must be maintained between studying and other activities, between ornament and argument, and between theory and practical.

Bacon repeats his principal argument that reading does hone human nature and experience perfects it. Bacon draws an analogy between natural plants and the natural abilities of a person.

We cut the plants, which could grow in any direction, for aesthetic purposes and overall improvement of the tree. Similarly, the natural abilities of a man need to be nurtured by studies.

Studies enhance the knowledge of the reader but that remain unfulfilled until the person gains experience related to the subject of study. That means knowledge and experience make reading complete.

Views of Studies

Studies benefit a reader in diverse ways. However, not all men admire studies. For instance, shrewd people contempt studies as they perceive studies don’t help people.

The shrewd men, in most cases, cope with different situations of life with no studies. Therefore, for them, studies are of no use.

On the contrary, simple men admire studies. The simple men, who are not voracious readers but aware of the benefits of reading, are awestruck to see a man filled with knowledge.

Apart from them, wise men take the best out of their studies as wise men know how to use the knowledge from books in real life.

Books don’t tell readers about the pragmatic aspects of knowledge. The ability to implement knowledge is wisdom that is gained through observation.

Bacon emphasizes that having bookish knowledge is not enough. Theoretical knowledge is completed only when it is used in real life.

Real Method of Studies

To get the most out of books, Francis Bacon suggests the method one should follow while reading.

Bacon suggests one should not read to prove others wrong because, with this motive, the reader looks for the points which can be used as arguments. The reader might be right, but in the process, the reader loses what the book has to offer.

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In Of Studies by Francis Bacon we have the theme of education, knowledge and balance. Taken from his The Essays collection the reader realises from the beginning of the essay that Bacon believes that studying has three benefits. Firstly some people study for delight or personal use. To humour themselves while at the same time not imposing their knowledge on others. Secondly others study for ornament meaning that their pleasure is in discourse. To share their knowledge with others. Which may leave some critics to suggest that due to mankind’s vanity those who study for ornament may be in reality very boring or self-absorbed. The third benefit of study is for ability. That being to use one studies practically to solve problems and perhaps to promote the individual in a more practical way than those who study for ornament. Bacon also argues that to spend too much time in study is sloth or lazy. Nobody will really benefit from the individual who spends all their time studying without any other outlet. Bacon also believes that three types of men exist when it comes to the matter of study. Crafty men condemn study because the simple fact is they will be caught out by someone who is more learned than them. Simple men admire studies as they know that studies will lead to a development of intelligence and wise men will use studies to their advantage (both personal and in business).

When it comes to studying or reading in particular Bacon also believes that it is more important for a man (or woman) to weigh and consider what they read rather than to necessarily believe or take for granted what has been read. Similarly do not read just for the sake of discourse as society may like a well-read person. However they may not necessarily like the ideas of the person. When it comes to reading a person should also only read what is needed. They should not waste their time reading entire books if there is no need for it. The reading of a book till its conclusion should be left to specialists who need the information. For the majority of people a little reading on something will suffice. Too much knowledge is not to be welcomed by Bacon. One can learn more from a chapter in a book than having any need to read the entire book. Particularly if one’s reasoning is that discourse is the goal. A person will only end up confusing others should they wish to discuss an idea with others when others may have not read the entire book. Similarly with those who like to talk to others about their knowledge. It is an effort to follow an individual when one has not engaged with the subject matter and the individual is enthused. For their own self-worth and vanity.

Bacon also argues that ‘reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man.’ Therefore should a man write a little he will need to have a great memory in order to memorize all that he has not written and should the individual converse little he will need to have a present wit in order to fill up the inevitable gaps in his abilities to share knowledge. And if a man only reads a little he will need cunning to seem to know what he does not know. In reality there has to be a balance or those who consider themselves learned may be judged by others to be foolish and as such may find themselves ignored by society. A goal that no man would cherish. For to be ignored or isolated from society ensures any knowledge that has been acquired will not be passed on. Leaving the individual to have no recourse but to continue studying or acquiring knowledge in private and alone.

If anything Bacon may be suggesting in the essay that anybody can learn it’s just a simple matter of having the right balance and knowing what to learn. It is pointless leaning something that is known by few if one wants to engage in conversations with others. Yet knowing the information may be a delight to the individual and this in itself may suffice. Knowing that they know something that few know. This may sooth an individual’s ego sufficiently. Again it is better to seek a productive and balanced approach when it comes to studying. Any type of study has its benefits but it is most productive when put into action. An educated man will live a more enjoyable life should he put into practice what he has learnt rather than using his knowledge as a tool to amuse himself and others. If anything Bacon may be suggesting that using education as a delight or an ornament is in fact a waste of an education.