

BACON'S SUPPORT OF FAITH

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In the essays, "Of Atheism" and "Of Superstition", Francis Bacon presents a strong argument supporting the idea of faith. As is characteristic of most of Bacon's essays, he approaches each subject in the most scientific of methods, dealing first with the most basic ideas and following through logically into more complex thoughts. Bacon possesses the unique style of basing his essay on a certain view point, while in reality supporting the opposite view point. This is more easily seen in some of his other essays, such as "Of Adversity" and "Of Marriage and Single Life". The style itself is at first a confusing one, but as the reader pursues Bacon's passages he finds what could be considered radical thinking for the literature of the seventeenth century.

In "Of Atheism" Bacon discusses atheism in respect to man. He begins with the common, every day man, "It is true, that a little philosophy inclineth man's mind to atheism..." ere es a subtle hint that Bacon may believe that to be an atheist is to be of little knowledge. But, as the reader probes further, he becomes mora and more sure of Bacon's intentions. The writer he continuez by stating that people of any degree on intelligence will have faith in the last resort or that which they cannot explain. The statement, which is perhaps the strongest in the essay, quoted from The Scripture, leaves the reader no recourse but to believe! . "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no Dod"! : It is not said, "The fool hath thought is his heart". Bacon makes no mistake about affirming his belief that if you do not have a certain amount of faith, you are indeed a fool. The stress here is on the words, "said" and thought, strengthening his point that to think and use the mind is far more valuable than to spout at the mouth. He wraps up his section on man's relationship to atheism by stating that, "The contemplative atheist is rare". Stated bluntly and simply the reader is left with the feeling that to be an atheist is not to think.

Bacon proceeds to a higher level of discussion in reviewing atheism in respect to human nature: "They that deny a G-d destroy man's nobility, for certainly man is of kin to the beasts by his body; and if he be not of kin to G-d by his spirit, he is a base an ignoble creature". The image created here of the atheist, or non-believer, is one of the lowest level. All dignity of the human being is lost in this phrase and is further intensified by Bacon's comparison of man to a canine. He reflects that a dog would not be able to attain his highest goal without a G-d before him to motivate and stimulate him. (That G-d, of course, being man). By this comparison Bacon introduces the idea that in order for human nature and the human form to attain their highest level, man must have a motivating force is in front of and behind him, pushing and pulling him to his summit. That motivating force is in effect-faith. He concludes by stating that atheism prevents

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this growing and maturing process, "... it depriveth human nature of means to exalt its above human frailty" .

In his essay "Of Superstition" Bacon approaches his subject in much the same way as he does in "Of Atheism". That is, he uses the effect of suggesting that man is unworthy and unthinking creature if he supports the ideas of superstition. He begins stating, "It were better to have no opinion of G—d at all, than such an opinion as unworthy of him; for the one is belief, the other is contumely..."

The insinuation that being an atheist is to be insulting or degrading is the first Bacon's attempt to break down and destroy the basis of atheism. In continuing, implies that contumely is in fact dangerous. "And as the contumely is greater towards G—d, so the danger is greater towards men". Again, bringing the ideas to a higher level than just the individual man, Bacon strengthens his argument by introducing the idea of civilization and states, "But superstition hath been the confusion of many states... it ravisheth all the spheres of the government". From this statement one can only be led to believe that by following superstition it will eventually lead to the corruption of the state. Therefore, using logical reasoning following the opposite of superstition should lead to the improvement of the state; the opposite of superstition being faith. Bacon continues this line of thinking throughout the essay by referring negatively to superstition, as being deformed and as the abnormal reversal of "wise men following fools".

It is evident that in these two essays Bacon makes a strong argument in support of faith despite his rather reversed style.

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