

Eötvös Loránd University
Faculty of Humanities

THESES OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

Márton Lóránt Korányi

Science, religion and politics in the philosophy of Francis Bacon

Doctoral School of Philosophy

Dr. Tamás Ullmann DSc

Modern Philosophy Doctoral Program

Dr. Gábor Boros DSc

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Supervisor:

Dr. Gábor Boros DSc

Budapest, 2019

We set for ourselves in the present dissertation the purpose: to interpret the relations of science, religion and politics from the perspective of the Baconian interpretation of the Fall. The coherence of this project is founded on the concept of *instauratio*, which may mean both the establishment and the re-establishment of something. Starting from the concept of *instauratio* the final objective of the Baconian philosophy is the restoration of the harmony between Man and Nature. According to the interpretation of Bacon the act of the Fall was a *moral* failure; Adam wanted to place himself in the place of God, by denying God's revealed will. Because of the Fall the possibilities of gaining knowledge became more limited and the powers of Nature also were reduced. The *instauratio* could be envisaged according to the model of the life of Adam in the Paradise, who had knowledge about the world surrounding him, and enjoyed the goods provided by Nature, while respected the limits of morality.

In the first part of the dissertation we consider the relationship of science and theology and attempt to outline a thoroughgoing conceptual framework for a unified interpretation. In the second part we attempt to present the political science of Bacon, distinguishing from each other the periods before and after of the large-scale advancement of science. In the third part we analyse the Baconian utopia titled *The New Atlantis*, a work which gets more and more attention in the recent scientific research, and the interpreters of Bacon try to read from this work the esoteric political teaching of Bacon. Finally, we deal with the thoughts of Bacon about history, to make clearer his conception about the time in general and the future of science.

1. Science and Theology

In the first part of the dissertation we outline the history of the concept of „*idolum*“, with regard both of its philosophical and theological context. From the side of the history of philosophy we examine the works of Plato and Lucretius, to see what sort of equivalents they use for the word *idolum*, and how they fit it into their philosophical systems. From these considerations we draw the conclusion, that the meaning of the word 'idolum' was related primarily to sensual perception and knowledge, and within it to the concept of 'sight', and its philosophical relevance is mainly epistemological. Starting from a theological perspective, founded on the analysis of Tibor Fabiny, we got to the conclusion, that while in the Catholic tradition the experience of God had been connected characteristically to the „sight“, this tendency in the Protestantism – by the appearance of Luther – was turned around, and the *ear* became regarded as the genuine sense-organ of the Christian man. We correlate this tendency

with the appearance of the iconoclastic movements and make an excursus into the thoughts of Calvin regarding idolatry.

In the next chapter we outline the theological framework of the philosophy of Bacon, and we found that - although on the basis of *Valerius Terminus* and the *Advancement of Learning* it seems that for Bacon the religion and the philosophy of nature should have been two autonomous realm, independent from each other – other writings of him (for example the essay on atheism) support a not-so-severe division between them. Then we present the specific features of the pre-Fall human condition on the basis of the writing titled *Confession of Faith* and highlight the thought that God breaks the laws of Nature with miracles only from the perspective of redemption – but there is no need for divine improvement of these laws, and this makes free the Christian philosopher for elaborating of a philosophy of Nature.

Then we examine the idols of mind in the context of the *Novum Organum*, keeping in mind the theological aspects of the thought of Bacon, outlined above. Bacon set against the idols of human mind with the ideas of the divine mind; while he identifies the former ones with the vain and arbitrary concepts, he regards the latter as the genuinely observable features of the things. In the first part of the *Novum Organum* he distinguishes four distinct kinds of idols and gives guidance for us how to avoid them. We establish, that the idols of the tribe are those which present the greatest challenge, for they attack the mind from inside, thus they are threatening the mind with a final and hopeless scepticism. But we got to the conclusion, that these idols may be eliminated at the end, because the human mind has a pure part, which could be separated from the tainted one. The appearance of the idols in the human mind are due to the consequences of the original Sin, thus one objective of the project of *instauratio* is to make the mind independent of them. One possible way of this is that we acknowledge our human limitations, and temporarily suspend our judgments on some matters, but the very application of the inductive method in science also may result in the progressive exclusion of the idols. We get further to the conclusion, that Bacon, through the discussion of the idols considers not only the epistemological considerations, but uses biblical metaphors too, which demand moral purity from the scientist.

In the following chapter we highlight some more important thoughts from the second part of the *Novum Organum*. We establish, that the essence of the Baconian doctrine of the Forms is the *ex analogia universi* knowledge of the things, the way to reach this is to exclude from our experience (ordered in a scheme) the specific features of the individual cases, and thus we acquire universally valid knowledge. Thus, we get from the physical explanations – which map the material and efficient causal connection in the Universe to the metaphysical

explanations of the Forms. But these Forms are not entities existing independently from the physical Universe, but they themselves are parts of the Universe, thus we may compare them mostly to the natural laws.

Summing up the moral of the previous chapter, and founding our conclusions on the interpretations of Paulo Rossi and Antonio Pérez-Ramos, we see the ultimate purpose of the Baconian inductive scientific method in the acquiring of true knowledge, and reject those interpretations, which owe to Bacon some sort of utilitarian outlook. Although Bacon regarded indeed the achieving of a knowledge useful for practical purposes as the most important purpose of the science, but this doesn't imply, that he renounced the cognition of the real properties of the things in the Universe. The concept of knowledge of the English philosopher originated mostly in the magical, mystical tradition of the Renaissance, in which model of handicrafts and physical work had become increasingly important, thus the science and technique got closer to each other. And the very fact, that the items of true knowledge are at the same time useful ones, promoting the comfort, the betterment of human life, is due to the perfection of the divine creation.

In the further course we try to „come around” the problem: what was Bacons opinion about the ultimate purpose of the science, and how he saw possible the interconnection of the different branches of science. We invoke for this task the idea of *philosophia prima*, which Bacon regarded as the common trunk of the different branches of the tree of knowledge, as the „meeting point” of the divine knowledge, of human knowledge and of the philosophy of nature. In the course of our analysis we highlight the difference between *philosophia prima* and metaphysics and compare the approach of Bacon with the one of Descartes. At the end of the chapter we got to the conclusion, that – although they envisage the renovation of science from different perspectives, there were much more similarity between them, thus we shouldn't account for the former as the „Man of the Past”, and for the latter as the „modern”, progressive thinker, setting forth real scientific results.

Finally, we state about biblical hermeneutics, that Bacon conceived the interpretation of the sacred texts primarily not as the task of the philosopher, for he held the theologians as the most appropriate experts of this. Then we reach – analysing the possibilities of natural theology – to the conclusion, that – according to Bacon – we may recognize by the means of rational arguments only the mere existence of God, but we couldn't know the divine nature by the means of mere human reason. Thus his position is similar to that of Hobbes, but he deals with the question of who could claim the right of the proper interpretation of the Bible in a much more deep and bold way, and finally he got this privilege exclusively to the sovereign

(the king), excluding from it even the theologians too. At the end of the chapter we introduce some thoughts of Leijenhorst, who tied the concept of metaphysics independent of theology to the Protestant thinkers of the 16-17. century, classifying among them Bacon too, who distinguished the *philosophia prima* from natural theology.

2. Moral and political philosophy

In the second part of the dissertation we deal firstly with the political philosophy of Bacon, which he divides into two parts: he calls the one “Exemplar or Platform of Good”, and the second “Regiment or Culture of the Mind”. About the second we state, that Bacon proclaims the absolute superiority of the *vita activa* vis-à-vis the *vita contemplativa*, and he held as the most noble life the life devoted to the public good. We got to the further conclusion, that the moral philosophy in the reading of Bacon isn’t separated sharply from the political philosophy: for, while the purpose of the former is to make the individual human beings – as the parts of the human society – to be able to live together, the purpose of the latter is the practical realization of the construction of a society. Thus, moral philosophy should be regarded as a preparation of political philosophy. On the second part, called the “cultivation of soul”, Bacon highlights, that our possibilities for influencing the course of events are limited, but we have fully exploited our margin within this framework. He emphasizes as a guiding thread the importance of individual experience, observations, and the learning from the works of great historians; these together could help us to rule our irrational affects and impulses. And he held as the most important factor the virtue of “caritas”, which has more worth than any sort of moral philosophy and provides us a truer guidance than sophist wisdom. Thus, the moral philosophy remains the *ancilla* of the theology, because the virtue of the *caritas* – summing up all the other virtues – is not some sort of philosophical foundation but has its origin in Christian religion.

In the second chapter we try to present the political philosophy of Bacon along the essays *Of Fortune* and *Of the True Greatness of Kingdoms and Estates*. Both subjects were very important, and much discussed in the age of the philosopher, thus the thoughts expounded in the essays could be easily fitted in the context of contemporary philosophy. About the possibilities of the control of Fortuna we state, that Bacon emphasizes the importance of action, although – in accordance with his moral philosophy – he also keeps in mind, that we wouldn’t be able to influence all the factors determining our fate. Besides this we highlight the appreciation of the sphere of self-interest, due to the gaining ground of a new

kind of humanism, based on the increasingly widespread “tacitist” attitudes of the age. One of the results of this tendency was, that the topic of *dissimulatio* came to the fore in this age, and Bacon also expressed his opinion about this concept in many places in his works. In the dissertation, relating our findings to the relevant thoughts of Machiavelli and the Italian historian and philosopher Guicciardini, we got to the conclusion, that Bacon’s position is similar rather to that of the latter author, because he himself also saw the most important virtue of the “good king” in the adaptability to changing circumstances, and – contrary to Machiavelli, who thought sham as an indispensable weapon in almost all areas of political life – he thought that sham could lead to the desired end only in exceptional cases. The other very important topic in the political philosophy of Bacon is the extension of the borders of the state, this also was a popular topic among the thinkers of the age. In that case his standpoint also could be contextualized properly: he saw the key to the success in the wars rather in the toughness and moral of the soldiers, than in the material goods and appropriate equipment, thus he agreed rather with Machiavelli, than with Botero and Lipsius. Bacon held the permanent expansion as the main task of the state, which required successful wars. We also have established, that he conceived the regular wars as inherently positive, because the wars serve better the survival and stability of the state as the undisturbed peacetime, leading to the enervation of the citizens.

After all these considerations we examine the problem, whether Bacon’s inductive method could be useful in the realm of politics too? Could we reach by the help of observations ordered in tablets, modelled on natural science, to the principles of ethics and politics? We got to the dissertation to the conclusion, that, although systematizing of our experiences may be useful in political decision-making, but this is far from that sort of universally applicable knowledge, which should be derived from the inductive examining of Nature. Then, referring to the myth of Orpheus too, we establish in our argument, that the politics is in Bacon’s system secondary to the philosophy of nature, and its role became prominent only rather when the former led to failure, and people attempt to acquire eternity by individual merits and fame. Thus, it seems, only science may provide a way out of the age of the series of wars, because only science would be able to unite people and eliminate the conflicts of interests resulting from the scarcity of material goods. Thus, at the end of the chapter we take in account the perspective of science too, distinguishing two different philosophical stages of the formation of a human community. In the level of realities of Bacon’s age the aspirations for Good is limited by the arrangement of the different states and the differentiated interests originated in this, and we, as political subjects should serve the

good of that political community, which we – as citizens – are the parts of, while there is an ideal stage, on which science may create such a community of interests among people, the members of which wouldn't be forced to get into conflict time-to-time to each other.

3. The New Atlantis

In this part of the dissertation first we turn to the different interpretations of *The New Atlantis*, then we attempt a detailed analysis of this work, to make a standpoint in the most important questions of interpretation. The main reason for this process is that there were born quite diverging interpretations of the book: from one perspective the interpreters see The New Atlantis's message as a fulfilment of true religion and of true science, complementing each other; from another one they read it as the ultimate triumph of natural philosophy over the theology. In the course of analysis, we got to the final conclusion, that – although it seems that the science really has created peace and well-being in the imagined island - some elements of the plot imply that this state easily turned into its opposite.

Such an element is that the scholars of the House of Solomon deal with the manufacturing of weapons and instruments for legerdemain, which – if they get into inappropriate hands – may cause great harms for the community, and may even become the means of destruction or of the bamboozlement of the citizens. Thus, the increased power is coupled with increased responsibility, this fact is reflected in the strict rules, which govern the life of the scholars in the island, preventing them from “being off the track”. Religion also has an important role in the guarded life of the scholars, they draw self-moderation from this source. Thus, although the power possessed by the scientists of the House of Salomon, certainly is in good hands, but we can read from the text the dangers of getting the power into unauthorized hands; one of the best instance of this is, that the existence of some inventions are hidden even from the King! Furthermore, we can read from the text the entanglement of the ties of power, because although the island has a king, but the real holder of the state power is not the king, but a society of scientists. We also should establish from some elements of the story (the lakes of Adam and Eve, the feast of the family), that the moral perfection of Bensalem is rather an appearance, and the people couldn't really rise above their sinful desires. From all of this we got to the conclusion, that, although science really creates well-being in the island of Bensalem, we also can read from the work, that Bacon was aware from the possible shade-sides, dangers of the increased power.

4. Science and History

In the last part of our dissertation we undertake the exposition of the picture of Bacon given by the interpretations and philosophies of history inspired by the Enlightenment.

Firstly, we present the interpretations of the French Encyclopaedists, from this we draw the conclusion, that their picture of Bacon as their spiritual father didn't originate from the thoroughgoing study of his texts, but they rather highlight this or that Baconian thought or an element taken out of its context, which they use then for the exposition of their own thoughts. They saw in him foremostly a thinker who break with the former tradition, a thinker whose work – although with minor changes and adapted to the development of their own age – they should have continued. Furthermore, we find that the likely source of the utilitarian interpretation of Bacon, which became dominant in the later Bacon-scholarship, had been Diderot.

Then we briefly introduce the Adorno-Horkheimer interpretation of Bacon, which was centred about the thought of the “domination of Nature”. They opined in the *Dialectics of Enlightenment* that the science conceived in the spirit of the English philosopher had ousted everything from the explanation of the Nature, which was not to be grasped rationally or was not quantifiable. Then we quote the thoughts of Karl Löwith, outlined in the *Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschichte*, and we state that in the context of this work Bacon's philosophical work should be connected to the appearance of the idea of progress, and the faith in Man, as the demiurge of History also belongs to this idea. As a third type of interpretation we expose the analyses of Hans Blumenberg in his work entitled *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*. The author relating to the idea of the restoration of the state of Eden got to the conclusion, that this Baconian idea is oriented *not* toward the transcendent salvation in an afterlife, but toward a human happiness, to be realized in this world, thus its purposes were similar more to the magic tradition than to the Christian theology. Thus, according to Blumenberg, Bacon's “theology” was a disguised ideology of the domination of Nature; religion's only area of real influence is the morality; and the examination of Nature remained a fully autonomous realm in Bacon's worldview. Thus, the theological framework is a mere appearance at Bacon, Bacon really didn't deal with eternal salvation, but focused exclusively to the life in this world; and his view of history also was not linear, but much rather cyclical. Finally, we refer to the work of Schmidt-Biggemann entitled *Theodizee und Tatsachen* and we try to relate Schmidt-Biggemann's interpretation of the English philosopher (connected to this topic) to the argument of our work.

In the last chapter of the dissertation we get to the opinion that, although the aphorisms of the *Novum Organum* reflect a rather cyclical view of history, Bacon's belief in the development of science seems to break this picture. But we don't identify this belief with the rather one-sided utilitarian belief in the "progress", but rather with the perspective of the *The New Atlantis*, and the myth of Daidalos, which outlines a rather ambivalent picture of the science-determined future of mankind. From this we read that Bacon expected with an almost absolute certainty, that science will develop in the future with enormous steps – but he was not so certain, whether the people would have used these inventions only for good purposes. Thus, the development of science created a new boundary situation in history, because our increased power can bring destruction of such a scale that may cause irreversible harms for mankind, but, on the other hand this power may bring the time of enduring prosperity. The emergence of this great power thus breaks the cyclical course of human history. Bacon makes the theological relevance of history unanimous, when – referring to the prophecy of Daniel – connects the age of the increasing scientific knowledge with the fate. At the same time this doesn't mean, that the history itself would overwrite the history of salvation, and the events of the secular history in themselves would bring to the Earth the salvation or the damnation. Earthly events have only indicative concerning our eternal destiny. The success of the program of *instauratio* thus depends on whether we would be able to turn our increased power to good purposes. That is what is at stake in history.