

## NOTES FOR BACON SESSION (7/27 and 7/28)

In my sessions on Bacon I would like to put him and his thought into the context of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century revolt against Aristotelianism. Below is a listing of the scanned texts that are available on this website. Most of them are background, and I don't expect you to read them, but they are there, in case you are curious. ***The only thing that I will expect you to read is the Bacon excerpts; all the rest are completely optional.*** In this note I will outline what I will do in the two sessions on Bacon, and indicate how the readings relate.

I will begin with some background on the problem of novelty in the early seventeenth century, as background to Bacon. In my essay, "Defending Aristotle..." I talk about a case in Paris in 1624, where novelty was a central issue. The Morin *Refutation* is a diatribe against novelty connected with that event. (I give you my translation of an excerpt; if anyone is curious to see the full text in French, I can pass it along.) A more balanced assessment of the innovators (*novateurs, novatores*) in philosophy is found in the Sorel essay from 1655. I have translated part of his essay, but also posted the full essay (in French), so you can see the variety of characters (including Descartes) included among the "innovators." I have also included an essay of mine, "Telesio among the Novatores," which talks about the figure often considered the father of modern philosophy in the early seventeenth century: Bernardino Telesio. Telesio was particularly important to Bacon, something I discuss in the essay. I have also included an excerpt from Telesio's writings, translated into English. The translation (not by me) is dreadful, just to warn you.

And now, on to Bacon himself. I want to begin by considering Bacon's own attitude toward antiquity and toward the *novatores*: though he is generally listed among the *novatores* by his contemporaries, his own attitude is decidedly ambivalent. Relevant here is the *Wisdom of the Ancients*, particularly the preface, the very short excerpt from the *Cogitata et visa*, and the *Great Instauration*. (Hint: look up the Latin word "Instauratio.") In the *Great Instauration* I also want to talk about the larger project Bacon is undertaking, which is outlined in detail there.

Then I want to talk about Bacon's famous method, as outlined in the opening 20 aphorisms of book two of the *Novum organum*. What I want to emphasize there is the way in which the method he presents is deeply imbedded in his view of what nature is like: it is not at all a theory-neutral procedure for generating knowledge. We will explore the underlying view of nature that shapes the project, and the view of nature that comes out of the "first vintage" of the method: the account of the form of heat. Bacon concludes that the form of heat is motion. This has been interpreted as an anticipation of the kinetic-molecular theory of heat. It is not. We will explore what Bacon means by "motion" in this context, which will turn out to be exceedingly strange. In this connection I have posted an interesting essay by Guido Giglioni as well as some optional readings from Cardano and Gilbert relating to motion, which put Bacon's views into some context. Though Bacon is a "modern," a "novator," to be sure, ambivalent though he may be, he is also very much a thinker of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century.

Daniel Garber

## READINGS

Bacon, *Wisdom of the Ancients*, excerpts

Bacon, *Cogitata et visa*, excerpts

Bacon, *Great Instauration*

Bacon, *Novum organum*, book II, §§1-20 and 48.

\*Cardano, *De subtilitate*, excerpts, in English

\*Garber, Daniel, “Defending Aristotle/Defending Society in Early 17<sup>th</sup> Century France”

\*Garber, Daniel, “Telesio among the Novatores”

\*Gigliani, Guido, “Mastering the Appetites of Matter. Francis Bacon’s *Sylva Sylvarum*”

\*Gilbert, William, *De magnete*, excerpts, in English

\*Morin, Jean-Baptiste, *Refutation of the erroneous theses...*, excerpts, in English

\*Sorel, Charles, “Summary of the strangest opinions of the modern innovators in Philosophy,” excerpts, in English

\*Sorel, Charles, “Le sommaire des opinions les plus estranges des novateurs Modernes en la Philosophie,” complete, in French

\*Telesio, Bernardino, *De natura rerum...*, excerpts, in English.

Starred (\*) entries are completely optional reading.