

BETWEEN RENAISSANCE AND MODERNITY: BACON'S *ADVANCEMENT OF LEARNING*

Robert ARNĂUTU*

Cele două cărți ale lui Francis Bacon despre excelența și progresul cunoașterii divine și umane, traducere, note și comentarii Dana Jalobeanu și Grigore Vida, studiu introductiv de Dana Jalobeanu (București: Editura Humanitas, colecția „Paradigme“, 2012) ISBN 978-973-50-3744-4, pp.502

The Two Bookes of Francis Bacon of the Proficience and Advancement of Learning, published for the first time in 1605, is one of the first works belonging to what is known as modern philosophy. It is the first important work of philosophy of Francis Bacon, written in the form of a letter to King James of England and Scotland and expanded in a Latin edition in 1623, *De augmentis scientiarum*. About this book one can affirm what Bacon said about the technical inventions of his time: it has “changed the whole face and state of things throughout the world”¹. Thus, this first Romanian edition of the *Advancement of Learning*, artfully and accurately translated by Dana Jalobeanu and Grigore Vida, is truly praiseworthy, by facilitating and revealing to the Romanian reader some of the major transformations of modern thought entailed in Bacon's philosophy.

Through his writings Bacon wants to establish a “New Philosophy” that would recreate, through a systematic investigation of the natural world, the prelapsarian dominion of man over nature. The success of his grandiose plan is evident from the fact that he is considered one of the fathers of modern science, the initiator of the experimental inductive method (often called the Baconian method), and the creator of empiricism. The *Advancement of Learning* is a first step out of a six stage project, the *Instauratio magna*, designed to create a completely new philosophy.

The work is in six Parts:

1. The Divisions of the Sciences.
2. The New Organon; or Directions concerning the Interpretation of Nature.
3. The Phenomena of the Universe; or a Natural and Experimental History for the foundation of Philosophy.
4. The Ladder of the Intellect.
5. The Forerunners; or Anticipations of the New Philosophy.
6. The New Philosophy; or Active Science.²

The first part maps out the domains of knowledge, criticizing the errors and arguing for collaboration, progressiveness, perfectibility, and invention in the sciences. In the second part, the *Novum organum*, Bacon introduces his new scientific methodology. The third part consists in a comprehensive record of all empirical data

* New Europe College, Plantelor 21str., Bucharest, e-mail: robertarnautu1979@gmail.com

concerning both nature and artificial things, obtained by meticulous experiments. These “histories”, together with the methods of invention and discovery discussed in the fourth part, are the basic elements of the “New Philosophy”. The fifth part, as Bacon affirms, is “for temporary use only, pending the completion of the rest; like interest payable from time to time until the principal be forthcoming.”²³ Only the sixth part will complete the active science or the operative philosophy. Bacon mentions repeatedly that his aim is to institute a new philosophy, a new science that would produce new things and marvelous works: “I am principally in pursuit of works and the active department of the sciences.”²⁴

Bacon begins his plan by analyzing, in the First Book of the *Advancement of Learning*, the arguments for and against the pursuit of sciences, arguing for the need of augmenting and propagating learning and knowledge. The Second Book presents the new division of all knowledge with insightful comments about history, poetry, and philosophy – the three great domains of human knowledge –, metaphysics and physics, magic and mechanics, medicine and theology, the idols of the mind and the city of God, etc.

Although the *Advancement of Learning* is a beautiful and clear text, intelligible for a wide and diverse audience (“Notă asupra traducerii”, p. 44), the work includes a hidden, marvelous, and eclectic world. The *Advancement of Learning* contains *in nuce* all the major themes of Bacon's philosophy and it is impregnated with a significant number of historical facts, classical and biblical references, religious and political polemics. This overwhelmingly dense writing, attesting the wit and erudition of its author, would have been almost undecipherable for the contemporary reader without the insightful opening study and those over one thousand explicative notes. The present edition provides not only a Romanian translation of Bacon's work, but also the context and the intellectual constellation surrounding it. The critical references accompanying the translation offer the necessary tools for both a comprehensive understanding and further academic research. The translators confirm that the current edition is research-oriented as the notes intend to emphasize the Baconian issues still debated in philosophy and history of ideas (p. 43). Of great value in guiding the understanding of this inaugural text of Early Modern philosophy is Dana Jalobeanu's “Introduction” (pp. 11-40) which explains the main themes of the book, shows the importance and the posterity of Bacon's ideas, and places the work in its philosophical, literary, and historical context. In addition, the text is accompanied by some other research tools as a chronology (pp. 47-51), a vast bibliography (pp. 455-477), an *index nominum* (pp. 479-488) and an *index rerum* (pp. 493-502). The present edition represents an indispensable tool for any Romanian scholar working in philosophy, history of science and history of ideas as it makes available an important work of a genuine thinker that had a major influence on Western civilization in the last four hundred years.

Acknowledgements. Research for this paper has been supported by CNCS grant no. PN-II-ID-PCE-2011-3-0998: *Models of Producing and Disseminating Knowledge in Early Modern Europe: The Cartesian Framework*.

References

- ¹ Bacon, F., *Novum organum* I, CXXIX, *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. J. Spedding, R. L. Ellis, and D. D. Heath (London: Longman, 1857-1874), (SEH hereafter), (14 vols.), vol. IV, 114.
- ² Bacon, F., *Distributio operis*, SEH IV 22.
- ³ Bacon, F., *Distributio operis*, SEH IV 31.
- ⁴ Bacon, F., *Distributio operis*, SEH IV 29.