The Way of Caution: Elenchus in Bacon's *Essays*

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It is idle to expect any great advancement in science from the superinducing and engrafting of new things upon old. We must begin anew from the very foundations, unless we would revolve forever in a circle with mean and contemptible progress.

—Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*

Bacon employs three literary modes or strategies of what he would call Tradition (i.e., transitive knowledge) in his prose: the Expository or Didactic, the Parabolic, and the Dialectic. The first of these modes is, of course, the conventional method of teaching. Much of Bacon's larger works, including *The Advancement of Learning* and most of the *New Organon*, consists of orderly sequences of investigations and definitions. Tradition here is straightforward, because Bacon's language is explicitly referential and pragmatic.

The Parabolic mode consists of any literary effort in which the literary form is designed consciously to conceal (at least partly) the content of meaning beneath an initially acceptable literal level of meaning. Since the degree of concealment can vary enormously, interpretation is often tricky: "Parables have been used in two ways, and (which is strange) for contradictory purposes; For they serve to disguise and veil the meaning, and they serve also to clear and throw light upon it."¹ Thus, all hieroglyphic forms, such as emblem, aphorism, similitude, and fable, add the pleasure of discovery to the satisfaction of knowledge gained, in that the form must be "opened" to be complete. The literal husk conceals a kernel of essential communication; knowledge cannot simply pass like a bubble from one mind to another; rather, it must emerge from the respondent's active involvement, a combined action of imagination and intellect. Bacon himself states that knowledge should be delivered "as a thread to be spun on" (*Advancement*, 124).

The enigmatical method of parabolic Tradition masquerades as a protective screen for esoteric knowledge, but it actually serves to furnish a

reward for solving puzzles. Bacon explains that the assumed disguise is really a kind of challenge: "The pretence whereof is, to remove the vulgar capacities from being admitted to the secrets of knowledges, and to reserve them to selected auditors, or wits of such sharpness as can pierce the veil" (*Advancement*, 124-5). In the earlier works, when Bacon is busy developing his program of inductive science, he regards the Parabolic mode with suspicion, although later (especially in *The Wisdom of the Ancients*) he employs it because it encourages individual discovery.² "Discoveries are as it were new creations" (*Novum Organum*, 300). Bacon frequently refers to Solomon, the scriptural exemplar of wisdom, as the model discoverer, emphasizing what that great king chose to celebrate: "The glory of God is to conceal a thing; the glory of a king is to seek it out" (*Novum Organum*, 300).

The Dialectic mode is not so easily defined. The task is immediately complicated by the fact that in the seventeenth century the term "dialectic" was understood to refer to the art of classifying information in spoken or written discourse.³ Ramus, for instance, considered it practically synonymous with "logic": "Dialectic is the art of discussing well and is also called logic."⁴ The particular use of this art was pedagogical, and it was turned to the discovery of probable explanations; Bacon's adversaries, the schoolmen, were dialecticians in this sense. The similarity of this dialectic to its sister art, rhetoric, rests in the common standard of success—a plausible, convincing effect.

However, the process of seeking definitions ought to be accompanied by a parallel process of rejecting insufficient or fallacious material. Melancthon thus included both elements in his definition of dialectic as "the art or way of teaching correctly, perspicuously, and in an orderly fashion, which is achieved by correctly defining, dividing, linking true statements, and unravelling and refuting inconsistent or false ones."⁵ The last part of this definition is particularly important if we are to consider dialectic as more than a mere subcategory of rhetoric. Dialectic is a mode of *inquiry*. The model is Socratic discourse, the starting point of which is a negative, antithetical movement, designed to attack those stubborn opinions which impede the progress toward wisdom. Certainly Bacon's end is radically different—Socrates directed his respondents toward an inward discovery of immanent, potential truth, while Bacon secularizes and inverts the Socratic process, preferring external evidences. Nonetheless, at least one major component of Bacon's method draws on the Socratic method.

Bacon's great debt to the Platonic Socrates is in his adoption of the *Elenchus*, the systematic reduction of false knowledge. Bacon seeks to replace both false information and the fallacious methods of attaining this so-called knowledge. He maintains that the forms of logic employed by the

schoolmen are excessively self-justifying: syllogistical arguments owe their structure and their outcome not to any verifiable connection to the subject at hand, but to codified logic, the very set of conceptual tools initially designed as aids to discovery. Logic has become a kind of decorum, and the "invention of arguments" has supplanted true discovery. Because syllogistic logic establishes purely verbal premises, it depends for whatever truth it contains upon what is known already. Bacon's writings abound with censures of those who succumb to the temptation of easy victory, such as the syllogism can afford: "Some in their discourse desire rather commendation of wit, in being able to hold all arguments, than of judgment, in discerning what is true, as if it were a praise to know what might be said, and not what should be thought" ("Of Discourse," 775). Bacon considered such established methods of discourse to be part and parcel of the Idols that block the way of progressive certainty.

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The Doctrine of Idols is to the interpretation of Nature what the Doctrine of the Refutation of Sophisms is to common Logic.⁶

There are three ways of overcoming Idols. The ideal method, of course, is to start out right—that is, to *begin* by applying the inductive method: "The formation of ideas and axioms by true induction is no doubt the proper remedy to be applied for the keeping off and clearing away of idols." Should it already be too late for preventive measures, however, attempting to understand and name the idols is the next best thing: "The formation of ideas and axioms by true induction is no doubt the proper remedy to be applied for the keeping off and clearing away of idols. To point them out, however, is of great use" (*Novum Organum*, 164).

The third option is more complex; it is the antithetical movement of dialectic, the *elenchus*. The original Socratic discourse (of which *elenchus* is a part) is essentially ironic. Pretending to complete ignorance, Socrates addressed his respondents, questioning them about received notions of virtue and wisdom that they prided themselves on knowing. He had an uncanny eye for fallacious reasoning, and undermined arguments on their own terms until they collapsed under the weight of their own absurdity. Richard Robinson defines the process:

"Elenchus" in the wider sense means examining a person with regard to a statement he has made, by putting to him questions calling for further statements, in the hope that they will determine the meaning and truth-value of his first statement. . . . The whole essence of the *elenchus* lies in making visible to the answerer the link between certain of his actual beliefs and the contradictory of his present thesis. This link must be visible to the questioner before the process begins.⁷

Because of its attritional nature, elenchus has often been criticized as a purely negative tactic; nonetheless, the ultimate purpose of elenchus is usually constructive. Robinson explains how this operates for Socrates:

Of two ignorant persons . . . the one who knows that he is ignorant is better off than the one who supposes that he knows; and that is because the one has, and the other has not, a drive within him that may lead to real knowledge. The elenchus changes ignorant men from the state of falsely supposing that they know to the state of recognizing that they do not know; and this is an important step along the road to knowledge, because the recognition that we do not know at once arouses the desire to know, and thus supplies the motive that was lacking before. Philosophy begins in wonder, and the assertion here made is that elenchus supplies the wonder.⁸

Socrates, then, used the elenchus to produce a catharsis of humility, a purgation of false knowledge, and a desire for true knowledge. Such a process, which simultaneously demolishes old opinions and their methodologies, and stimulates the wonder that drives philosophical inquiry, must have been immeasurably attractive to Bacon. It is clearly an ideal weapon in the battle against the Idols, in that it works explicitly against inherent contradictions in fallacious opinion. Indeed, Bacon's commitment to elenctic tactics is everywhere apparent, and he discusses his use and advocacy of elenchus on numerous occasions:

I begin the inquiry nearer the source than men have done heretofore, submitting to examination those things which the common logic takes on trust. ("The Plan of the Work", *The Great Instauration*, 250)

The "common logic" is used too often to bolster up the opinions of those who suppose they know. Bacon insists that the old must be cleared away to make room for the new:

And therefore that art of Logic coming (as I said) too late to the rescue, and no way able to set matters right again, has had the effect of fixing errors rather than disclosing the truth. There remains but one course for the recovery of a healthy and sound condition; namely, that the entire work of the understanding be commenced afresh, and the mind itself be from the very outset not left to take its own course, but guided at every step, and the business to be done as if by machinery. (Preface, *Novum Organum*, 256)

To commence afresh, it would seem, requires a sweeping change:

The entrance into the kingdom of man, founded on the sciences, being not much other than the entrance into the kingdom of heaven, whereunto none may enter except as a little child. (*Novum Organum*, 274)

Bacon's program of preparatory negative guidance involves both elenctic means and dialectical end. His most complete acknowledgement of elenchus comes in the section of *The Advancement of Learning* that deals with the Art of Judgment. After he has questioned the value of syllogistic, he notes that Judgment may be divided into two parts, the first of which he calls "the way of direction," including analytic logic and exposition. The second part, "the way of caution," is elenchus; it will be useful to quote Bacon's account at length:

The second method of doctrine was introduced for expedite use and assurance sake; discovering the more subtle forms of sophisms and illaqueations with their redargutions, which is that which is termed *elenches*. For although in the more gross sorts of fallacies it happeneth (as Seneca maketh the comparison well) as in juggling feats, which, though we know not how they are done, yet we know well it is not as it seemeth to be; yet the more subtle sort of them doth not only put a man beside his answer, but doth many times abuse his judgment.

This part concerning *elenches* is excellently handled by Aristotle in precept, but more excellently handled by Plato in example; not only in the persons of the Sophists, but even in Socrates himself, who, professing to affirm nothing, but to infirm that which was affirmed by another, hath exactly expressed all the forms of objection, fallace, and redargution. And although we have said that the use of this doctrine is for redargution, yet it is manifest the degenerate and corrupt use is for caption and contradiction, which passeth for a great faculty, and no doubt is of very great advantage . . .

But yet further, this doctrine of *elenches* hath a more ample latitude and extent than is perceived; namely, unto divers parts of knowledge; whereof some are laboured and others omitted. For first, I conceive (though it may seem at first somewhat strange) that that part which is variably referred, sometimes to logic, sometimes to metaphysic, touching the common adjuncts of essences, is but an *elenche*. For the great sophism of all sophisms being equivocation or ambiguity of words or phrase, specially of such words as are most general and intervene in every inquiry, it seemeth to me that the true and fruitful use (leaving vain subtilties and speculations) of the inquiry of majority, minority, priority, posteriority, identity, diversity, possibility, act, totality, parts, existence, privation, and the like, are but wise cautions against ambiguities of speech. So again the distribution of things into certain tribes, which we call categories or predicaments, are but cautions against the confusion of definitions and divisions. (*Advancement*, 117-118)

Elenchus may be carried out with little or no apparent connection with a parallel positive movement; even Socrates has been misunderstood to imply that knowledge is not actually attainable. Bacon is clearly concerned that his readers should not similarly mistake his intention when he uses elenchus to expose ambiguous and confused language. He is careful to point out that the suspension of judgment he encourages in his readers and followers is not *Acatalepsia*, "a denial of the capacity of the mind to comprehend Truth," but *Eucatalepsia*, a "provision for understanding

truly" by means of induction (*Novum Organum*, 299).

Bacon's dialectic moves *through* the antithetical reduction of elenchus toward a positive synthesis. He is confident that the purgation of Idols will result in the recognition of the superiority of induction, and in significant advances in learning and in the conditions of daily existence. There can be no doubt that he believed in the ameliorative power of his philosophy. He projects a happy conclusion after the elimination of the Idols, celebrating the new age which will follow the *comus* marking the integration of man and universe:

All that can be done is to . . . lay it down once for all as a fixed and established maxim that the intellect is not qualified to judge except by means of induction, and induction in its legitimate form. This doctrine then of the expurgation of the intellect to qualify it for dealing with the truth is comprised in three refutations: the refutations of the Philosophies; the refutation of the Demonstrations; and the refutation of the Natural Human Reason. The explanation of which things, and of the true relation between the nature of things and the nature of the mind, is as the strewing and decoration of the bridal chamber of the Mind and the Universe, the Divine Goodness assisting; out of which marriage let us hope (and this be the prayer of the bridal song) that there may spring helps to man, and a line and race of inventions that may in some degree subdue and overcome the necessities of humanity. ("Plan of the Work," *The Great Instauration*, 251)

Bacon's grand scheme is laid out in all its breathtaking optimism. It is surely of the utmost significance that Bacon assigns such an important place to the three refutations, here emphatically linked to the preparations for the visionary marriage of mind and universe.

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The *Essays or Counsels* combine all three modes of literary presentation, but they are fundamentally dialectical, and particularly elenctic. That is, they involve all three of the refutations, and operate upon the reader very much like aphorisms, which (Bacon explains) represent "a knowledge broken," that invite "men to inquire further." Bacon contrasts this with logical systems, which "carrying the show of a total, do secure men, as if they were at furthest" (*Advancement*, 125).

Stanley Fish points out that aphorisms, for Bacon, are "seeds" as words are for Plato: "Their function is heuristic rather than expressive or mimetic and part of an effort to bring men 'to the highest degree of happiness possible' by putting them in direct touch with reality."⁹ Fish goes on to argue that Bacon's dialectic is severely limited because it only prepares man for truth about, not above, the phenomenal world (p. 153). He concludes that the limitations implicit in Bacon's insistence upon fine distinctions as a path to empirical verification must be judged in the light of

other philosophers and poets, for whom the empirical is merely something to be transcended.

The error here is that Fish attempts to judge the success of Bacon's efforts by a standard that Bacon himself strove to render irrelevant. The higher truth for which Fish correctly notes that Plato, Augustine, and Donne all sought, is available only to those who subscribe to a traditional vision of cosmic order and unity. Bacon, on the other hand, after he has nodded toward the First Cause, turns toward the fragmented phenomenal world that he suspects is to be found after the concept of the cosmos originating in desire for order, not observation, has been shown to be an Idol, has been exposed and purged. Bacon's dialectic is designed for this purpose: "The human understanding is of its own nature prone to suppose the existence of more order in the world than it finds . . . The human understanding is no dry light, but receives an infusion from the will and affections; whence proceed sciences which may be called 'sciences as one would.' For what a man had rather be true he more readily believes" (*Novum Organum*, 265, 267).

It is Fish's contention that the effect of Bacon's *Essays* on the reader is largely superficial, because it does not effect the kind of mystical transcendence Fish (on his own hobbyhorse, or, to use the apposite terminology, with his perceptions coloured by his own Idols of the Cave) is accustomed to discover:

His words may be, as he terms them, seeds, living not so much in their reference as in their effects, but they will flower in other words rather than in a vision, and in words which do have the referential adequacy that is presently unavailable. For all their provisionality the *Essays* are finally objects; they . . . remain valuable as source material for future consultation, for they reflect quite accurately the partial (not irrelevant) understanding of the mind that fashioned them and of the minds that read them. (p. 154)

Bacon's "vision" necessarily differs from the other models Fish presents in *Self-Consuming Artifacts*, all of which involve a dialectic based on medieval cosmology. Bacon is *not* content to act as a spokesman for received attitudes, as Fish implies when he states that the *Essays* reflect the minds of both author and reader. To be sure, they do contain some immediately valuable insights—I have already noted that the modes are mixed, and the presence of the Dialectic by no means precludes the Expository mode. Bacon's objective is not to produce the final word, but to establish a "way." He repeatedly insists that although induction has provided true and certain results in certain areas, he has no universal theory to propose.

Despite such disclaimers, Bacon has at least an inkling of a universal theory that he expects the practitioner of induction will discover. Requisite

to the dialectic I have endeavoured to outline here is the conviction that with the application of the proper method, the necessary intellectual discipline, the respondent can make a similar discovery. That Bacon had such a faith in his philosophical tools is abundantly clear:

I am now therefore to speak touching Hope, especially as I am not a dealer in promises, and wish neither to force nor ensnare men's judgments, but to lead them by the hand with their good will. And though the strongest means of inspiring hope will be to bring men to particulars . . . nevertheless that every-thing may be done with gentleness, I will proceed with my plan of preparing men's minds, of which preparation to give hope is no unimportant part. For without it the rest tends rather to make men sad (by giving them a worse and a meaner opinion of things as they are than they now have, and making them more fully to feel and know the unhappiness of their own condition) than to induce any alacrity or to whet their industry in making trial. (*Novum Organum*, 287)

With this background, we can see why attempts to extract a coherent program of sententious content from Bacon's *Essays* are generally doomed to failure. Bacon tends to talk *around* the nominal subjects, and, rather than coming to grips with abstract definitions, he surveys a variety of human attitudes toward the subject. These he discusses from behind a mask of objectivity, but he often ironically undercuts the received notions he ostensibly wants to describe. As refutations, the *Essays* are designed to approach the problem of ambiguity and confusion of definition and division, not by replacing earlier versions, but by applying the way of caution to "sciences as one would" to make way for the advancement of learning. Fish, therefore, is completely off the mark when he maintains that "the essays advocate nothing (except perhaps a certain openness and alertness of mind); they are descriptive, and description is ethically neutral, although, if it is accurate, it may contribute to the development of a true, that is, responsible, ethics" (p. 94). This evaluation is more than a little blunted. While the *Essays* may advocate very little *directly*, they are certainly not merely descriptive. Bacon simply does not describe the most readily discernible phenomena. The very selectivity of description is heavily weighted to produce varying degrees of elenctic response in the reader. Fish provides an important piece of evidence—although he does not follow the implication through—in Bacon's cancelled dedication to the 1612 edition: "My hope is that they may be as graynes of salte, that will rather give you an appetite, than offend you with satiety" (p. 78).

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A close reading of several *Essays*, beginning with the essay "Of Truth" (736), will demonstrate the negative operation of this elenctic stage of Bacon's educational dialectic.

"What is Truth?" said jesting Pilate, and would not stay for an answer." It is ironic that, of all times in Christian history, the incident with which this essay (ostensibly concerned with establishing the nature of truth) begins, was the most opportune moment for a man to receive a divine answer to the question. However, Pilate only jests as he puts the question; from the very outset it is man's equivocal attitude toward truth—not truth itself—that is the object of scrutiny. Bacon insinuates, rather obliquely, that even when the means of achieving an understanding of truth are at hand, man seems to be constitutionally predisposed to turn away from it. This turning away is stylistically emphasized by the violent conflict in syntactic emphasis the first sentence makes by opening with such a strong interrogative movement, only to abandon it immediately. Man imposes his desire on the picture he allows himself to see, and Bacon attributes this to "a natural and corrupt love of the lie itself." Pilate's jest is itself a repudiation of the ordered universe accessible through understanding of truth. He is so complacent in his vision that he mocks truth incarnate—yet how could he be expected to recognize truth when he saw it?

Bacon continues, observing that the world holds truth in poor esteem. It is a "naked and open daylight," perhaps a trifle banal or vulgar, coming only to "the price of a pearl." On the other hand, Bacon compliments the lie elaborately—it can be seen "daintily by candlelights" and is likened to a many-faceted diamond or carbuncle. But the implicit opposition here is between the naturally valuable and the artificially valuable, the pearl of great price and the meretricious attraction of the stone of "varied lights."

"A mixture of a lie doth ever add pleasure." This is indeed a very curious statement, delivered as it is in almost a "deadpan" tone. The full effect, however, is incremental, and can only be understood properly as part of the continuing affective pattern of the entire essay. It depends on the ironic inversion of what is truly valuable. Bacon has just commented on the common confusion of values; thus it should be clear that although a lie may bring pleasure, pleasure is a questionable goal in and of itself. The apparent benefits of falsehood are obliquely and subtly undercut, but not too subtly for the reader to catch.

The next sentence ironically suggests the function of the essay itself: "Doth any man doubt that if there were taken out of men's minds vain opinions, flattering hopes, false valuations, imaginations as one would, and the like, but it would leave the minds of a number of men poor shrunken things?" Bacon does not intend that this should be taken to apply to the mental faculties of mankind in general; the purgation he describes here is precisely what he wishes to effect in the cases of all who are blocked by Idols. Indeed, the list of things to be removed reads like a stock definition of Idols. Unfortunately, there remains in man the proclivity to puff himself up

with the flattering lie "that sinketh and settleth in," and that can be counter-acted only by inquiry, knowledge, and the frank acceptance of truth in clear demonstrations. Bacon follows this declaration with an appeal to the authority of Scripture to provide himself with a mandate for his empirical, inductive method: just as God first created matter and then light, so for man reason must follow sense, judgment must follow perception.

Bacon next lauds the great material benefits of possessing truth, cautiously tempering the advantage of the position by advocating charity. Then, with what might seem to be a prodigious leap (or *non-sequitur*), he is suddenly weighing the pragmatic benefits of honesty on the business world, and just as suddenly he introduces the argument of the fear of God as inducement to truth-telling. The essay ends with a resonant millenarian note.

What exactly has been said? Bacon has certainly not approached the nature of "truth" itself. Rather, while maintaining the mask of discussing truth, he endeavours to establish in the reader's consciousness the difficulty—or impossibility—of the task. The reader is caught up in the tension between the promise of the nominal subject and the commentary Bacon actually delivers. A study of truth that concerns itself primarily with lying should touch a sensitive area in the reader, implying as it does that man is often most familiar with truth obliquely, in his acquaintance with its opposite.

Behind Bacon's discussion of the human tendency to embrace falsehood lies the Doctrine of Idols. The essay "Of Truth," then, is designed to undermine self-complacency, and to bring about careful scrutiny of the issues at hand by applying "wise cautions against ambiguities of speech." There is no explicit positive ethical reference within the discussion, except the moral tag at the end. Still, once the elenctic effect has come about, the respondent (or reader) should turn to a new way of looking for truth, a new way of seeing the world.

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The essay "Of Death" (737) again concerns a variety of attitudes toward the titular subject. The essay opens with a simple analogy: fear of death is like a child's fear of the dark, and Bacon demonstrates the similarity of the growth of fear in both instances. With the second sentence, the essay divides neatly in half—Bacon draws a distinction between religious contemplation of death and the weak (albeit natural) fear of death. The latter element is drawn out in a vivid passage, which purports to *allay* the fear of death by "reasoning" that the pain of accidental injury may be harder to endure than many ways of dying. Bacon "argues" that it is the "outward shows" of death, rather than death itself, which engender fear. Nonetheless, it is only through these outward shows that man can know anything

about death before experiencing it first hand. Bacon notes that other passions—love, honour, grief, fear, pity, even fastidiousness—can outweigh the fear of death.

There follows a series of *loci classici*, essentially ways in which people have turned death to suit their own purposes. The sentences that come after this return to the “rational” arguments ostensibly designed to reconcile man to death: death is as natural as birth; both birth and death may be painful; the distraction provided by the contemplation of “somewhat that is good” may diminish pain.

Bacon’s final argument is an appeal to the traditional solace of making a good end: “But above all, believe it, the sweetest canticle is *nunc dimittis*; when a man hath obtained worthy ends.” In isolation, this sentence seems straightforward enough: well-dying is a fitting and welcome completion of well-living. But the way in which Bacon’s style conditions this meaning is significant. While the rest of the essay is devoted to suggestions and assertions concerned with reconciling the reader to death’s disadvantages in a general, abstract, coolly rational manner, the interjection, “believe it,” is sudden, personal, and has the effect of isolating the concluding sentence as a matter of faith or speculation, as opposed to reason. This effect works backwards into the ostensibly consolatory parts of the essay, implying that the self-consciously careful structures of reason are not genuine. They are certainly not convincing, and the reader is left with the feeling that, after all, reason is incapable of mastering the fear of death, and that only faith can help.

Finally, however, even the gravity of this observation is undercut by the closing comment that death is the gateway to fame and posterity. The faith that supersedes fear and other passions has itself been supplanted by the passionate ambition to survive in posterity. Reason, which has been given the upper hand in most of the essay, is ultimately debunked. The reader’s complacent faith in the competence of received wisdom and traditional logic to reason away fear of death has been undermined to the point of collapse.

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The essay “Of Studies” (797) opens with a neat treble structure, which leads the reader to expect a regular and pervasive pattern. Such patterns are favourite devices of Renaissance authors, and, indeed, the 1597 version of this essay consists in a string of observations, all neatly divided in three. In the later versions, however, despite the highly stylized form that initially invites attention, there is no discernible pattern, no systematic ordering of ascent or descent. Furthermore, the triplicity of form is highly irregular:

STUDIES SERVE FOR:

	<i>DELIGHT</i>	<i>ORNAMENT</i>	<i>ABILITY</i>
chief use:	privateness and retiring	discourse	judgment, disposi- tion of business
excess, abuse:	sloth (crafty men condemn it)	affectation (simple men admire it)	eccentric judgment (wise men use studies)
why read?	not to confute but to weigh and consider	not to take	not to find talk
books are to be:	tasted	swallowed	chewed and digested
or read:	partially reading makes a whole man	casually conference a ready man	wholly writing an exact man

It is already clear that this last triplet does not conform to the headings or divisions used previously; the next triplet introduces a peculiar negative inversion: without reading, a man must be cunning to seem to know what he does not/without conference, a man must have wit to seem to know what he does not/without writing, a man must have memory to seem to know what he does not.

The treble pattern, already confusing, is then deliberately broken by the introduction of a fourth term in the next stage: History makes men wise, poets witty / Mathematics makes wise men subtle / Natural Philosophy makes men deep, moral, and grave / Rhetoric and Logic make men able to contend.

The effect of this stylistic disjunction is mildly disconcerting, especially if the reader has attempted to follow the pattern of division initially set out. The problem of connecting pattern and significance is further complicated by Bacon's use of an elaborate metaphor at the close of the essay. Just as "studies go to form character," so do they have a therapeutic value. Bacon draws a parallel with the therapeutic effects of various physical exercises: "Bowling is good for the stone and reins; shooting for the lungs and breast; gentle walking for the stomach; riding for the head; and the like." Each one of these applications is really an *appropriation of use* from the thing itself. Bowling, for instance, is primarily a game, and the effects Bacon describes are surely accidental and secondary, nothing to do with bowling *qua* bowling. By logical extension back into the essay, the careful reader will note that *everything* Bacon discusses is likewise an appropriation of sec-

ondary effect, in isolation from the true nature of studies. After all, though Bacon never touches upon this point, studies involve primarily a search for truth. They are only secondarily a useful discipline for improvement of character.

The essay "Of Studies" makes use of its own complex form—highly artificial, with a structure implying significance but deliberately empty and misleading—to undercut stock assumptions about the social utility of learning. The whole effect is ironically, even viciously, underscored by the extension of the therapeutic analogy:

So if a man's wit be wandering, let him study the mathematics, for in demonstrations, if his wit be called away never so little, he must begin again. If his wit be not apt to distinguish or find differences, let him study the schoolmen, for they are *cymini sectores*. If he be not apt to beat over matters, and to call up one thing and prove and illustrate another, let him study the lawyer's cases. So every defect of the mind may have special receipt.

Bacon's readers may well find the light mockery of plodding mathematicians, hair-splitting schoolmen, ingenious lawyers, and their students somewhat amusing. Less welcome, perhaps, is the way in which Bacon implicitly turns the mockery against the readers themselves: Bacon's essay is itself a form of Study, and its readers are (to a certain extent) students. To what defect of the mind does Bacon address this receipt?

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Thus it can be seen that a close reading of the *Essays* forces us back to the question of whether Bacon is concerned with engendering Acatalepsia or Eucatalepsia in his reader. Despite the frequent appearance of individual bursts of clear didactic statement—eminently quotable apothegms—found throughout his prose, the *Essays* do not hold together as systematically didactic or expository means of tradition, whether we consider the collection as a whole or each essay separately.

Too often this has been attributed to the history of stylistic influence, or to Bacon's intention to project a tone of muted skepticism or worldly wisdom. Accordingly, there has been too little effort to reconcile the essayist with the systematic philosopher. Did a different Bacon write with the left hand than with the right? Everywhere outside the *Essays*, Bacon is firmly committed to outlining or developing clear, verifiable systems. Surely the omission of this characteristic quality in the *Essays* ought to be sufficient in itself to place students of Bacon's method on their guard.

Further exercises in close reading will corroborate what I have undertaken to demonstrate here. The strategy of the *Essays* is founded on the Doctrine of the Three Refutations. If the intellect is truly not qualified to judge except by means of induction, what are people to do with the vast

accumulation of mere prejudices, folk-tales, received opinions, "sciences as one would," and traditional logical demonstrations—all of which they have accepted as legitimate judgments? Bacon wishes to begin anew, to initiate a real progress. Elenchus serves to reduce "the great sophism of all sophisms," ambiguity, equivocation, and confusion of important terms. His dialectic begins when he launches the negative, elenctic movement of refutation, and directs his readers along the way of caution.

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Notes:

- 1 Preface, *The Wisdom of the Ancients*, in *The Philosophical Works of Francis Bacon*, reprinted from the translations and texts of Ellis and Spedding, ed. John Mackinnon Robertson (London and New York, 1905), p. 823. Further references to this edition will be noted parenthetically in the text.
- 2 See Paolo Rossi's account of Bacon's changing attitude toward the Parabolic mode, in *Francis Bacon: From Magic to Science*, tr. Sacha Rabinovich (London, 1968), especially Chapter III, "The Classical Fable."
- 3 See Walter J. Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), p. 42 *et passim*; cf. Lisa M. Jardine, *Francis Bacon: Discovery and the Art of Discourse* (Cambridge, 1974), p. 20.
- 4 *Dialectique* (1555), as quoted by Rossi, p. 63.
- 5 Jardine, p. 35.
- 6 Jardine, p. 83.
- 7 "Elenchus," in *The Philosophy of Socrates*, ed. Gregory Vlastos (New York, 1971), pp. 78, 89.
- 8 *Ibid.*, pp. 83-4.
- 9 Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts* (Berkeley, 1972), p. 88. Further references will be noted parenthetically in the text. My reading of Bacon owes something to Fish, in that the seeds of some of my arguments are present in his observations. We see much the same evidence, but draw very different conclusions.