

FRANCIS BACON (1561-1626)

1. Life.

- a. He was born in 1561 in London into a prominent and politically connected family and educated at home. His father was Lord Keeper of the Great Seal.
- b. He attended Trinity College, Cambridge at age 13. His education was conducted largely in Latin and followed the medieval curriculum. He trained to be a diplomat and then a lawyer.
- c. From 1576-79 (ages 15-18) he toured and worked in Europe.
- d. He was elected as a member of Parliament in 1581, 1584, 1586, 1588, 1593, 1597, 1601, 1604, and 1614.
- e. He became an outer barrister in 1582 and a legal advisor to Elizabeth I in 1597.
- f. James I knighted him in 1603 and made him Baron Verulam in 1618 and Viscount St. Alban in 1621. Bacon had no heirs and so both titles became extinct on his death.
- g. In 1604, Bacon married Alice Barnham.
- h. In 1607, he became Solicitor-General. In 1613, he he became Attorney General. In 1618, he became Lord Chancellor.
- i. His public career ended in disgrace in 1621. He was charged with 23 counts of corruption. Afterwards, he devoted himself to study and writing.
- j. Bacon was probably a Rosicrucian and Freemason.
- k. He died of pneumonia in 1626 at the age of 65.



2. Works.

- a. *Essays* (1597-1625)
- b. *The Advancement of Learning* (1605, 1623)
- c. *Novum Organon* (1620)
- d. *New Atlantis* (1623)

3. Views.

- a. Bacon stated that he had three goals: to uncover truth, to serve his country, and to serve his church.
- b. He advocated a middle way in all things, including between parliament and the crown and between Puritans, Anglicans, and Catholics. He spoke out against religious persecution. He opposed the splintering within Christianity, believing it would ultimately lead to atheism as the dominant worldview.
- c. He advocated for the union of England and Scotland and for the integration of Ireland into the union.
- d. He came to believe the methods and results of science as then practised were erroneous. He revered Aristotle but rejected Aristotelian philosophy.
- e. He aimed to review, classify, and methodise all knowledge.
- f. He believed philosophy and the natural world must be studied inductively.

- g. Information about God, however, such as God's nature, action, and purposes, can only come from special revelation.
- h. His idea of [idols of the mind](#) was an attempt to Christianise science while developing a new, reliable scientific method.
- i. Learning and knowledge all derive from the basis of inductive reasoning. All the knowledge that was necessary to fully understand a concept could be attained using induction. In order to get to the point of an inductive conclusion, one must consider the importance of observing the particulars (specific parts of nature). "Once these particulars have been gathered together, the interpretation of Nature proceeds by sorting them into a formal arrangement so that they may be presented to the understanding."
- j. Experimentation is essential to discovering the truths of Nature. When an experiment happens, parts of the tested hypothesis are started to be pieced together, forming a result and conclusion. Through this conclusion of particulars, an understanding of Nature can be formed. When that an understanding of Nature has been arrived at, an inductive conclusion can be drawn.
- k. We are to take a specific example from nature and expand that example into a general, substantial claim of nature. Once we understand the particulars in nature, we can come to more sure conclusions about the universals.
- l. All learning and knowledge must be drawn from inductive reasoning. He argued for the possibility of scientific knowledge based only upon inductive reasoning and careful observation of events in nature.
- m. Like the Rosicrucians, he called for a reformation of divine and human understanding and humanity's return to the "state before the Fall."

4. Legacy.

- a. He led the advancement of natural philosophy (as opposed to supernatural philosophy) and the scientific method.
- b. He has been called the "father of empiricism."
- c. He promoted scientific experimentation as a way to glorify God.
- d. He developed a system for cataloguing books under three categories – [history](#), [poetry](#), and [philosophy](#), which could be further divided into subjects and subheadings.
- e. During the [Restoration](#), Bacon was invoked as a guiding spirit of the [Royal Society](#) founded under Charles II in 1660.
- f. His ideas played a leading role in establishing the [British colonies in North America](#), especially in [Virginia](#), [the Carolinas](#) and [Newfoundland](#) in northeastern Canada.
- g. During the 18th-century [French Enlightenment](#), his approach to science became more influential than the dualism of his French contemporary Rene [Descartes](#). In 1733, [Voltaire](#) introduced him to French audiences as the "father" of the [scientific method](#).
- h. In the 19th century his emphasis on [induction](#) was revived and developed by [William Whewell](#), among others.
- i. "Bacon's influence in the modern world is so great that every man who rides in a train, sends a telegram, follows a [steam plough](#), sits in an easy chair, crosses the

channel or the Atlantic, eats a good dinner, enjoys a beautiful garden, or undergoes a painless surgical operation, owes him something.”¹

- j. “Bacon, [Locke](#) and [Newton](#). I consider them as the three greatest men that have ever lived, without any exception, and as having laid the foundation of those superstructures which have been raised in the Physical and Moral sciences.”²
- k. The historian [William Hepworth Dixon](#) referred to the Napoleonic Code as “the sole embodiment of Bacon’s thought.”
- l. [Harvey Wheeler](#) attributed to Bacon the the creation of the distinguishing features of the British [common law](#) system: using cases as repositories of evidence about the “unwritten law”; determining the relevance of precedents by exclusionary principles of evidence and logic; treating opposing legal briefs as adversarial hypotheses about the application of the “unwritten law” to a new set of facts. [Sir Matthew Hale](#) acknowledged him as the inventor of the process of discovering unwritten laws from the evidences of their applications. The method combined empiricism and inductivism in a new way that was to imprint its signature on many of the distinctive features of modern British society. He is considered by some jurists to be the father of modern [jurisprudence](#).
- m. He believed humanity would improve if access to educational resources were provided to the public, hence the need to organise it. His approach to education reshaped the Western view of knowledge theory from an individual to a social interest.

5. Quotes.

- a. “Some books are to be tasted; others swallowed; and some few to be chewed and digested.”
- b. “Knowledge is the rich storehouse for the glory of the Creator and the relief of man’s estate.”
- c. “[A] little philosophy inclineth man’s mind to atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth men’s minds about to religion.”
- d. “The causes of atheism are: divisions in religion, if they be many; for any one main division, addeth zeal to both sides; but many divisions introduce atheism. Another is, scandal of priests; when it is come to that which St. Bernard saith ‘One cannot now say the priest is as the people, for the truth is that the people are not so bad as the priest.’ A third is, custom of profane scoffing in holy matters; which doth by little and little deface the reverence of religion. And lastly, learned times, specially with peace and prosperity; for troubles and adversities do more bow men’s minds to religion.”
- e. “The desire of power in excess caused the angels to fall; the desire of knowledge in excess caused man to fall; but in charity there is no excess; neither can angel or man come in danger by it.”
- f. “Truth, which only doth judge itself, teacheth that that inquiry of truth, which is the love-making or wooing of it, the knowledge of the truth, which is the presence of it, and the belief of truth, which his the enjoying of it, is the sovereign good of human nature.”

¹ [William Hepworth Dixon](#).

² Thomas Jefferson.

- g. “Certainly, it is heaven upon earth to have a man’s mind move in charity, rest in providence, and turn upon the poles of truth.”