



Bacon, Sidney, Milton

RENAISSANCE HUMANISM

THE PURPOSE OF LEARNEDNESS

- What is the purpose of being a learned person?
- What do the learned disciplines (the humanities and the sciences) contribute to society?
- Should there be limits on the scope of human hunger for knowledge?

Renaissance HUMANISM

- Emphasis on the POTENTIAL of humans to improve, to grow, to change their place in the world;
- Emphasis on the INDIVIDUAL in a SOCIAL context;
- Reconceived relationship with the PAST and with the FUTURE:
 - POSTERITY
 - CHANGE

Renaissance Self: Duality

- INWARD
 - EDUCATION
 - PRIVACY
 - INDIVIDUALISM
 - SELF-EXPRESSION
- OUTWARD
 - CIVIL SERVICE
 - PUBLIC PERSONA
 - SOCIAL CONTEXT
 - PUBLIC EXPRESSION
 - "MAN OF LETTERS"

5

PROGRESSIVISM: MILTON

- "The light which we have gained was given us, not to be ever staring on, but by it **to discover onward** things more remote from our knowledge" (*Areopagitica* 1934, my emphasis);
- "To be still searching what we know not by what we know" (Ibid).

PROGRESSIVISM: Bacon

- Scientific model: movement to ever greater illumination:
 - "This same truth is a naked and open daylight" ("Of Truth" 1663);
 - "but no pleasure is comparable to the standing upon the vantage ground of truth" (a hill not to be commanded, and where the air is always clear and serene" ("Of Truth" 1664)

7

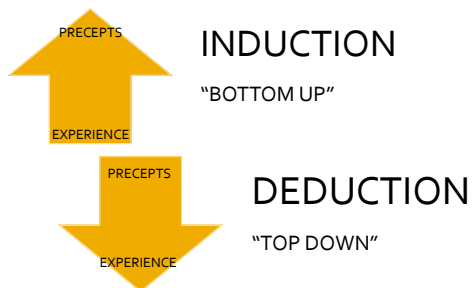
NATURE vs nature

- **Nature:** the ideal, universal, immutable aspect of the universe subject to divine reason;
- **nature:** the material, mutable aspect of the world, subject to human will.

BACON'S CRITIQUE OF GIDDINESS

- "giddiness" (changeability, groundless assertion): "Certainly there be that delight in giddiness, and count it a bondage to fix a belief" ("On Truth" 1663);
- "in all superstition wise men follow fools, and arguments are fitted to practice in a reversed order" ("Of Superstition" 1668).
- Bacon argues for a **GROUNDING** of Truth in *observation* and *experience*

FRANCIS BACON: INDUCTION



PROGRESSIVISM: Sidney

- POET as CREATOR (*poiein*=maker)
- "Only the poet, disdainful to be tied to any such subjection... doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite new" (*Defense* 1050).
- "so as he coupleth the general notion with the particular example" (*Ibid.* 1055)

BACON'S INDUCTION/SIDNEY'S POETICS

- BOTH propose means to reconcile the **perfection of the ideal** with the **material of the real**:
 - Bacon: scientific method tests hypotheses with experience;
 - Sidney: poetry marries the imperfections of life to the ideals of the "golden world"

MILTON: TESTING TRUTH/CRITIQUE OF CENSORSHIP

- "Where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions; for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making" (*Areopagitica* 1935);
- "how can we more safely, and with less danger, scout into the regions of sin and falsity than by reading all manner of tractates and hearing all manner of reason?" (*Ibid.* 1931)

HUMANISM: PRIVATE/PUBLIC

- Emphasis on the INDIVIDUAL in a SOCIAL context:
 - The CIVIL SERVICE;
 - The “middling sort”: educated populace seeking employment (government, diplomacy);
 - Emph. on FULFILLING POTENTIAL

ACTIVE VIRTUE

- “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” (Bacon, “Of Truth” 1664 my emph);
- “I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed” (Milton, *Areopagitica* 1930);

ACTIVE VIRTUE: TO “MOVE”

- DELIGHT:
 - the pleasure derived when one is “moved” by art to virtuous action—the synthesis of gnosis (knowledge) and praxis (action):
- “we **know** it is well to do well.... But to be **moved** to do that which we know, or to be moved with the desire to know, *hoc opus, hic labor est* [that is the work to be done]” (*Defense* 1060)



- Reconceived relationship with the PAST and with the FUTURE:
 - POSTERITY
 - CHANGE

Spatial Analogue to Historical Sense



POSTERITY

- "a good book is the precious lifeblood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life" (Milton, *Areopagitica* 1930).
- Sidney's etymologies of poetry: *vates* (prophet), *poiein* (maker): the authority of historical knowledge.

STUDIES: The "Renaissance Man"

"Histories make men wise; poets, witty; the mathematics, subtle; natural philosophy, deep; moral, grave; logic and rhetoric, able to contend" ("Of Studies" [1597], 1674).

STUDIES: The Inward and the Outward Man

"[Studies] perfect nature, and are perfected by experience; for natural abilities are like natural plants, that need pruning by study; and studies themselves do give forth directions too much at large, except they be bounded by experience" ("Of Studies" [1625],1674).
