

III

FRANCIS BACON AND THE IDEAL COMMONWEALTH

THIS course is a sort of drama in which Bacon is made to appear in the various characters that he so notably portrayed in his life. His two appearances preceding the present occasion, and the two still to come, have all the measure of major rôles. But Bacon as protagonist of an ideal commonwealth is only a minor character. There is for this part but one fragment of his writings, the "New Atlantis", standing among works of stupendous range and significance. In his public life, in his acts and expressions, Bacon seemed to fail entirely to prevision, or even to desire, social and political change in the England of his day. He disregarded the adumbrations of that struggle which was to constitute the history of his country for near a hundred years. He did his utmost to stem what was soon to prove an irresistible tide sweeping Parliament and people into new regions of political liberty. He was, to the end of his days, champion of the royal prerogative in its most reactionary and absolute construction. He linked his personal fortunes to the Elizabethan regime, and to the Stuart dynasty, and he prosecuted, with an almost fanatical zeal, any and all who lifted voice or hand against the royal authority. And some of those who felt the weight of his power and his almost unexampled legal skill had been his friends and benefactors in the long years of waiting while he sought royal favor and the mantle of public office.

It is, indeed, an open question to what extent Bacon's

Bacon and the Ideal Commonwealth 57

public actions expressed his views of politics, and whether they did not flow, rather, from the conception of his personal career which dominated him from beginning to end, and which has left it open to history to characterize him as a mean and corrupt sycophant. It is, however, fair to believe that if Bacon had held a political philosophy as noble in intention and as profoundly a part of himself as the natural philosophy to which he devoted every spare moment and thought, his public life would have worn a different aspect. There is even reason, as we shall see, for the belief that Bacon's social and political conceptions were quite of a piece with his public life and his relationship to the political factors of his time. If these three hundred years had not intervened and carried the world immeasurably beyond the England of Elizabeth and James I; if on the contrary, an absolute monarchy had received the justification of success and historical persistence, we might now be giving him the same acclaim with respect to his political attitude as we give to his enunciation of those transforming principles which bridged the world from mediæval superstition to our age of the mastery of nature. If we may state it crudely, one half of Bacon guessed correctly, and the other half wrongly, as to what history was going to do.

It may be that we can give Bacon's practical political philosophy—for he never stated a theoretical one—an even larger measure of justification. After all, the government of Elizabeth and the Stuarts represented an enormous stride forward when measured against that of only two centuries before. Reactionary as it seems, it was pregnant with all those movements which carried the world forward to modern principles and institutions. My colleagues who describe Bacon's contribution to the history of science will probably admit that it had only a relative importance; that

his methods of research were mostly wrong; that he made no individual discoveries of particular importance; that he was not even a part of that great army whose vanguard had already made a measurable advance. Perhaps it is because political change so often comes through violence and leaves behind an atmosphere of deadly hatred that we are so inclined to regard with favor or disfavor the supporter of a position identical with, or opposed to, our own.

We have therefore only the most meager material on which to base a statement of Bacon's political philosophy. His voluminous writings on other subjects give us not even hints of a social theory. We have only the facts of his public life, his consistent political practice, on the one hand, and on the other, a fragment portraying a Utopia which nowhere describes a political system, and gives only the scantiest account of social usages. It is principally the fact that he was a Utopian, which supplies us a basis for interpretation. Obviously then, our task is to paint the kind of background which will enable us to understand Bacon's attitude, even if we have to assume that his principles were unconscious. But the painting of any historical setting is an enormously complex affair for which few have the materials or the skill. Certainly not too much should be expected for that particular moment in European history.

Bacon's attitude and acts as a servant of the Crown place him very definitely anterior to all those movements that led to popular sovereignty. His death in 1626 was only two years before the acceptance of the Petition of Right. Indeed, his own downfall as Chancellor, so utterly unjust to him as an individual, was a first great swing of the people against an irresponsible and corrupt government. The real attack was not upon him, but upon the Crown and the kings' favorites.

Bacon and the Ideal Commonwealth 59

The new political philosophy which animated the whole succession of events for the next two centuries, and, indeed, to our time, was one to which he was completely a stranger. The Reformation gave fixation to the concept of individualism as the basis of political organization. It was most natural to conceive such organization as deriving from contract, so the thought of the next two centuries was dominated by the great contract philosophers. Individualism and contract are an adequate theoretical basis for the whole sequence of popular upheavals. By the same curious contradiction, Bacon was reared in the most intense atmosphere of Puritanism, in that very essence of the Reformation that in a few years was to alter the whole political complexion of England. But he did not go forward with it, or catch any of its practical implications. Though upon the last jutting promontory, he belonged to an older order.

The Baconian politics may be regarded as the practical counterpart of Machiavelli's theory, and as thus exemplifying the earliest political philosophy of the Renaissance. This is a matter of extreme simplicity once its premises and implications are understood. It may be described as a theory of government of the barnyard type, or as rule exercised upon material that is essentially disorderly and unable to care for itself. If this major premise is understood, the rest follows naturally. Picture yourself as responsible for the care and control of a herd of animals. You will of necessity believe in, and act according to certain principles. First of all, the control of this herd is supremely necessary for its own good. Secondly, the value of any governmental method is measured by the degree of its success. You will entice your animals from one location to another without any scruple about deceiving them. You are perfectly aware that all of your animals must be kept in

order through intimidation. You never go among them without your stock whip to engender fear. Indeed, intimidation is the fundamental method of dealing with all dangerous animals. Furthermore, every animal acts first and last through its individual motives. It struggles for what it conceives to be benefits.

If you believe with reference to a people, that its behavior is always personal behavior, that it is actuated by the primary personal motives, if you are unacquainted with social self-control through community of habit or custom, you will inevitably accept the political teachings of Machiavelli. You will conceive government as a thing separate and independent, imposed upon a people as the first requirement of its own good. This separately integral thing may be the greatest of God-given blessings to humanity.

This arrangement of human affairs must have a derivation from outside the people themselves. This point of view regards only personal motives and disregards or minimizes social forces. There must therefore be a set of instruments who by divine right, or historical causation, or special competence, have the task of administering the principles of government which in themselves are sacred and independent. Successful government depends therefore upon mediation, and the instruments of mediation are created primarily by birth, but partly by special training. These instruments are princes and their official families. The good prince is the one who governs successfully, observing always the welfare of his subjects, for which they themselves are, of course, unable to provide. His methods must, whenever possible, be kindly; but they must always be firm. He must use expediency by giving ear to grievances and by acceding to the wishes of subjects, when this accords with his own superior purposes.

Bacon and the Ideal Commonwealth 61

This philosophy, moreover, assumes that there are fixed and permanent principles of government which may best be discovered by a study of their operation in specific cases. What has proved successful in the governments of the past is to be taken and used in all the procedure of the future. In other words, the system of political principles is a static thing. It has merely to be learned and skillfully applied. A commonwealth may be outfitted with a body of wise laws by a superlatively skillful lawgiver, and then run its course through the centuries without modification of this code, and with never more than the problem of appropriate application.

It is a fair interpretation of Bacon's public life that he genuinely believed in political principles of the Machiavelian type. He was much wiser than his sovereigns, and repeatedly, in his memorials addressed to them, urged policies which, while never compromising royal authority, showed ways whereby the monarchy could adjust itself to popular attitudes and movements, and thus avoid much of the odium that attends the exercise of coercive authority. While there remains the doubt to what extent Bacon was consulting the conditions of his personal fortune, there is still good reason to believe that he had a genuine sense of public duty, which should even override considerations of friendship. Certainly he discharged the labors of his office with unflinching conscientiousness, and the devotion to his rulers, which he continuously proclaimed, must have meant more than the effusive pretensions of a place hunter. In brief, Bacon considered himself a good citizen, and with him as with all Machiavellians, the good citizen is the good subject. The test of good citizenship soon changed, and Bacon has been measured by a scale which he did not even conceive as existing.

We shall now endeavor to interpret Bacon's social conceptions as expressed in his Utopian fragment, the "New Atlantis". This takes the usual form of the report of a visitor to a region hitherto undiscovered, and which, in its isolation, had learned the perfect adjustment of human relations. In this case, a ship sailing into the Pacific is driven to an island where the visitors are treated with every kindness, and to whom, in a series of discourses, the operation of affairs is described.

The "New Atlantis" is not distinguished from any other commonwealth by any peculiarity of its traditional culture, as this is found to be Christian, and therefore largely the same as that of a European country. The difference lies in that the wisdom of some of its princes had discovered the enormous benefits of knowledge of nature, and had so organized the commonwealth that research into the secrets of nature and the making them available for human uses had become the chief of all public functions. An institution known as the House of Solomon, a combination of a research university with a kind of monastic order, was maintained as a means by which the processes and forces of nature could be made servants of human welfare. Much of the actual arrangements for research seem to us merely fantastic, but here is expressed a clear and marvelously comprehensive view of public provision for experimental science, and the enormous practical benefits that could flow from it.

Regarding this commonwealth nothing is said of government, it being assumed that this is the work of good and wise princes. The only description of social organization is little more than that of a strong and solid family system after the pattern of the patriarchate. The matter of real importance is that here is a human group, building its

Bacon and the Ideal Commonwealth 63

arrangements and securing its welfare on the basis of scientific knowledge. The "New Atlantis" is therefore a Utopia after the formula of salvation by knowledge.

Although the "New Atlantis" represents a marvelous foresight of the part to be played by science in human affairs, this by itself fails to provide a social philosophy. It is the fact that Bacon was a Utopian that gives us insight into his principles. We must therefore inquire into the significance of Utopianism as such. First of all it is a product of creative imagination exercised upon the system of human affairs. We are quite familiar from daily observation with the ways in which imagination dramatizes particular phases of life. It is seen in representations of the world's dominant concepts such as creation, maternity, youth, loyalty, honor and goodness. Human thought concerned with these provides material with which the imagination delineates them in concrete forms represented and symbolized in story, poetry, sculpture or painting. We are further familiar with the ways in which youth dramatizes the personal career, providing in this way fixation of purpose and setting in operation the motives of personal ambition. Examples in the social field are to be seen in every case of projected reform. The world is pictured as realizing in some feature its capacity for improvement. Youth is prolific of these efforts at betterment. Not yet discouraged by the harsh failures that come from attempts at realization, not yet hardened into cynicism, youth, seeing vividly and desiring ardently, is perhaps the greatest force by which the world makes its advances. Make this attitude towards social matters sufficiently comprehensive, and you have a Utopia. Every person interested in social betterment is to that extent a Utopian.

It is next to be noted that social dramatization of the

Utopian kind involves the future. The control and direction of all action involves an end not yet attained. Directed operations are always telic, observant of objectives foreseen but unrealized. Every plan which involves concerted or coöperative action must be purposive, determined, backward, so to speak, out of the future.

A few years ago Mr. Wells delivered a notable lecture before the Royal Institution in which he laid it down as the duty of science to look forward into the future as well as backward into the past. It is of greater importance to know what will happen to human beings fifty, a hundred, a thousand years hence, than what has happened to them at similar intervals in history. Moreover, in proportion as science is accurate and sure of its ground, it undertakes the predictive function.

The direction of affairs from the point of view of future and unrealized ends is familiar in every political movement. Parties are built upon platforms which are nothing more than declarations of intention, plans of action. The center of gravity of a democracy is always located in time yet to come. We discover in this manner that Utopianism variously modified is by no means exceptional, is indeed a universally present and active principle of personal and public affairs. We may therefore well inquire how it relates itself to a thoroughgoing conception of social action and organization. What kind of social and political philosophy can include Utopianism as one of its consistent parts?

The first and only thoroughgoing philosophy that gave a place to Utopianism was that of Plato. It is commonly known as Idealism. Plato conceived the universe as consisting primarily of ideas, and, secondarily, of their copies. Confronted by a world of things, persons, and affairs which

Bacon and the Ideal Commonwealth 65

unfailingly impress the observer with their inherent imperfection, he believes that there exists somewhere, transcending the region of tangibilities, another world in which all of these things are found in their perfect state. These perfect ideas are dimly sensed, and the effort is made to translate them into more and more perfect copies. What the craftsman or artist strives to do with things, those concerned with political and social matters also strive to attain and so are working always toward an approximation to the perfect social order. It is their concern to build states after the transcendental pattern which is the embodiment of reality. His myth of the cave, on the walls of which we see shadows cast by the realities passing outside, has its equal application to societies and states.

In harmony with this philosophy, he presents us his own vision of the perfect state and describes the kind of instruments by which social raw material may be continuously shaped toward that perfect pattern. These are the "guardians", set apart, like poet or sculptor, for this special service. By a communism which enables them freely to give their services to directing the affairs of the commonwealth, namely, the personal needs of property and family that dominate the raw material.

Here is to be noted first the projection into the future, or the transcendently distant, of conditions conceived as perfect and therefore fixed and static; secondly, a machinery of mediation to link perfection back to resistant and disorderly raw material.

Two things are impressive in the history of Platonic thought. One is that it was immediately succeeded by its almost complete antithesis in that of Aristotle; and secondly that in various modifications, Platonism has largely dominated the history of European civilization. Its most

familiar example is found in the Christian system of theology. Every historian knows that Christianity, as taught by Jesus, however new to the world and however powerful as a social force, was in itself a very simple set of teachings about the relationships of man to God and of men to one another. This new and vital body of ethics was, in the course of the next four centuries, built into a philosophical structure which gave it to history in the form of the great Creeds. This philosophical framework was Platonism. Here again we see a transcendental perfection, a kingdom of heaven located not "within you" but in the distant and the future; here, again, the mediators, not now the guardians of the state, but especially selected agents for connecting the divinely perfect back to resistant raw material. By the Apostolic succession and by others divinely called, the Church takes on its mediatorial function. Note that perfection is fixed once for all, and all man can do is to approximate it as nearly as may be by the procedure which the mediators set and keep in operation.

The other important fact about Platonism is the immediate appearance of Aristotle. The Aristotelian view of nature and society is so transforming and so prolific that it can never be neglected by those who wish to understand their kind. Here the system of universals which Plato had conceived as separate and independent ideals, are considered inherent in the things to which they pertain. They are the factors of meaning discoverable because of their rationality, by which the universe is held together and of which things are the expression. Causation is not now intervention from afar, but operation through the nature of things themselves. Here we have stated almost in a stroke that conception of nature which has become so familiar in modern times.

Bacon and the Ideal Commonwealth 67

With this view, the social order is not constituted by wise men who fix relationships upon raw material, but these relationships are inherent in the nature of human beings, and merely express themselves in a society. Given the two primary relationships, that of man and woman, and that of master and servant, which Aristotle considered undeniably natural, the various branches and twigs grow out of these great trunks. Here again it is not so much what Aristotle taught as what is implied in his teaching that ultimately counts. It is the doctrine of inherent and sequential causation, the principle found so prolific of results when used in the study of nature or man. Obviously, an interpretation of society which uses Aristotelian principles will be the antithesis of Platonism, and therefore of Utopianism. And as these principles when become modern are those employed in scientific study of the social order, we are compelled to broaden our inquiry.

While the Aristotelian naturalism grew quickly with the Renaissance and fruited in the scientific study of natural processes, it only slowly found its way into the interpretation of society. Man seemed so obviously separate from the rest of the world. He, being rational, appeared antithetical to matters of time and space. How could mind be in any sense continuous with matter?

It was Bodin who first among Renaissance scholars applied the new view and methods to social affairs. He saw that men placed under varying conditions of environment, which determined livelihood and welfare, produced different social forms and types of culture. But, strangely, his was but a single voice. The contract philosophers held the field, and contract is clearly not a matter of growth but a voluntary event. It was not until Montesquieu laid the groundwork of modern social science in his "Spirit of the

Laws" by showing how completely social formations are determined by reaction to natural environment, that the social order came to be understood as a process of growth. From this time on, ever broader reaches of human organization found their explanation through the inherent causation of social forces. The modern formula that explanation of anything must show the conditions under which it arises, and the causative sequence of which it is a part, dominated the studies of human society. Soon a new history came into being, and one after the other of the human sciences moved from the philosophical into the scientific camp.

In social science proper, Herbert Spencer built a complete and consistent system on the new principles. With him, voluntarism definitely leaves the stage. Human affairs are continuous with those of nature, and are as capable of explanation by anterior causation as any natural fact. This point of view leads, of course, to the conclusion that efforts to modify the operation of social forces are as futile as attempts to change the course of the forces of nature. The only possible attitude is one of *laissez-faire*. Social reform is not only useless but foolish as well. Social operations, like those of nature, take care of themselves.

An even more perfect example of the determinist or naturalist point of view is the work of William Graham Sumner. What he calls "folkways" are the deep-lying, unconscious, and all but irresistible determinants of human conduct. In convention and custom, in the *mores*, he finds social action shaped without thought or choice. These forces are capable of slight modification, but this only through long periods in which natural change submerges voluntary effort. One familiar with these studies can never doubt that enormous fields of human conduct can be explained without the assumption of any other factor than those inherent in the

Bacon and the Ideal Commonwealth 69

processes themselves. What now has become of reason operating upon and shaping its raw material? Where is place left for idealism if naturalism shows itself able to cover the whole field?

It may be that mind and society are parts of a continuous and harmonious universe, but it has not yet been possible to show that mind is part of the kind of nature upon which mind operates. From its earliest beginnings, intelligence introduces a new kind of adaptive action; one in which individuals shape their conduct in terms of their past experience. In its further progress, the business of mind is seen increasingly to be that of directing energies to preconceived ends. Soon there comes the mediation of tools, and thenceforth human adaptation takes place almost wholly as a mental affair. An artificial environment is created to mediate between man and his natural environment, as that of weapons, clothing, shelter, and appliances for doing things. Reason appears to be the controlling factor, even when it pertains only to methods of expressing natural ends. But not all human aims are natural. Reason selects among them and invents new ones.

The invention of non-natural human aims appears to be a matter of social organization. The need of security and welfare are natural motives of all individuals. But when they become corporate, they react upon the whole body of natural impulses in a way which gives them the character of outside forces. Good conduct is group-preserving conduct. When natural impulses are antagonistic to this new social aim, such impulses are considered evil and subjected to repression and control. This struggle of individual impulses and social aims is elevated into a cosmic contest between good and evil. The effort is perpetually to remake aims into conformity with social ends.

In this sense, unsocialized individual ends are natural and bad, while ideal ends are a social product.

There are undoubtedly natural forces, always present and powerful, motivating the expression of so-called human nature. A permanent disharmony between nature and ideal, as represented in Asceticism or Puritanism, is impossible. Ideal conduct must be consistent with natural factors to the extent of using rather than eliminating them. Such direction then becomes continuous with, and a part of, those operative forces that may be regarded as natural. The conduct of a work-horse is not natural in the strict sense. But no one using an animal of this kind can eliminate essential characteristics. On the other hand, the training produces habits which become determinants of the same kind as the habits that might have been formed if the horse had educated himself. Moreover, in the course of generations the essential nature of the animal may have changed by selective breeding. This horse may be studied with respect to both heredity and education as a part of nature because of the orderliness of his conduct, and because it is determined by inherent forces. But the whole affair is the product of deliberate design operating from outside.

The matter is much more complicated with humans, but of the same kind. The selective and guiding agency is the organized group. This becomes concrete in various ways. Most deities are so obviously tribal or communitary, and their codes so clearly intend to make individually determined into socially guided conduct, that it is hardly possible to miss their true significance. When the social ends become embodied as also individual ends, the whole process becomes again a part of nature in the sense of operating through inherent forces. Any student of savagery is aware that here are human beings, often very fine, whose essential

Bacon and the Ideal Commonwealth 71

nature does not provide for coöperative and continuous labor. It must have required many generations of harsh selection before work became a possibility. The process is still incomplete, and the selective method known as slavery has only closed within living memory. The educational apprenticeship must, of course, always go on. Yet we are able to study the conduct of an industrial population as we can study a hive of bees. It is orderly, and determined through inherent causes.

Group processes are not natural in the physical or biological sense of sequential causation, but ideo-natural, in that the shaping agent operates from outside by some kind of design.

The foregoing discussion outlines a possible way of solving the antithesis of voluntarism and determinism, or, stated in other terms, of idealism and naturalism. It is an antithesis which inevitably appears in theories about society and is at times most troublesome. It shows itself in current discussions of evolution. There is an almost instinctive revolt against an interpretation which hands human life and destiny over to the operation of blind natural forces. On the other hand, it is quite clear that social forces are in operation, that civilization is a thing of growth, that societies are self-controlling, that nations are self-governing. But we are equally aware that human progress is a thing of thought, foresight, and design, that an industrial civilization, for example, involves the deliberate application of knowledge, that a democracy needs the finest and wisest quality of leadership. Civilization moves through an infinite number of acts of design, shaped toward ideal ends; but this action of reason is engulfed by, and made a part of, the great self-operating total of things human and social.

We can now, perhaps, venture to define the social philosophy of Francis Bacon. For him, humans were merely persons ordered and directed by a governmental machinery of which they were in no way parts. He was a thoroughgoing Utopian. His ideal commonwealth was one in which a wise prince could discover, and use for the welfare of his subjects, the riches of natural science.

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