

The Medicine of the Mind and Natural Philosophy in Early Modern England

A New Way of Interpreting Francis Bacon

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Our project aims to provide a reappraisal of Bacon's work and his legacy in the seventeenth century by focusing on a set of interrelated disciplinary contexts that, for reasons of interpretative and heuristic convenience, we have decided to call the early modern 'medicine of the mind'. In doing so, we will be able to make sense of many aspects of Bacon's work that still remain obscure and, as an added bonus, to clarify a number of long debated questions concerning seventeenth-century science and natural philosophy.

'Medicine of the mind' was commonly used by early modern philosophers, theologians, rhetoricians and physicians to refer to a set of practices for training and improving the powers of the mind. Disciplines dealing with the medicine of the mind devised methods to train the soul and the body to collaborate towards the attainment of forms of practical wisdom. Such disciplines provided regimens of life, cures for the passions and methods to discipline one's own thought, as in the writings of John Woolton, John Abernethy, Thomas Rogers, Thomas Wright and Robert Burton, or in the translations of continental Protestant Neostoics (e.g. Pierre de la Primaudaye, Phillippe Du Plessis Mornay, Simon Goulart).

Our project aims at recovering a body of knowledge that, precisely because of the elusive nature of its disciplinary collocation, seems not to have filled any specific institutional niche or disciplinary pigeonhole in the early modern system of knowledge and has therefore escaped the attention of scholars working in the field of the history of early modern natural philosophy. The recovery of this background will make possible a new and fruitful reading of Bacon's programme for the reformation of knowledge. We will also explore the way in which in the second half of the seventeenth century, under its Baconian definition, the notion of *medicina mentis* became part of the language of experimental philosophy.

We expect this project to have a significant impact upon the field of early modern intellectual history. By opening new exegetical horizons in the area of Bacon studies and allied subjects, it will promote a reconsideration of the development of seventeenth-century English natural philosophy and science. It will stimulate a reconsideration of the meaning of method in early modern culture. It will bring to the fore aspects that have previously been considered less relevant, such as Bacon's theory of living matter and his theological views. It will also throw light on the meanings of 'Baconianism' in the seventeenth century.

Stages of research

- The Stoic and Protestant Connection
- Medicine of the Mind and Francis Bacon's Theology
- The French Connection and Varieties of Baconianism
- 'Priests of nature': Baconianism in the Seventeenth Century

Planned workshops and colloquia

- Francis Bacon and the medicine of the mind: Stoic Protestantism in Late Renaissance England
- Seneca and Bacon on Studying Nature: The Reception of Seneca's *Naturales Quaestiones* in the English Renaissance
- Early Modern Sources of *Sylva Sylvarum*
- Francis Bacon and the Materiality of the Appetites: Stoicism, Medicine and Politics
- The Theological Background of Baconian Science
- Theology, 'Spiritual Physicke' and Experimental Life in Francis Bacon
- Stoicism and Experimental Philosophy