POLITICAL AND MORAL VISION IN THE THOUGHT OF SIR FRANCIS BACON (1561-1626)

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Abstract:

This essay explores modalities of looking at, gazing upon and seeing things morally and politically in the work of Francis Bacon. It examines the relation between visual perception and affection and between visual perception and power in Bacon’s thought. This essay argues that for Bacon both visual and mental phenomena are a kind of mirroring and that visual perception and affection are not cognitively separate. From the inseparability of visual perception and affection, it would seem to follow for Bacon that politics is not to be dissociated from certain forms of affective seeing. The presence of affective seeing in Baconian politics raises questions for the possibility of ‘objectivity’ in Bacon’s moral and political thought. This essay further argues that within Baconian moral and political thought there is a fundamental asymmetry of perspective between subjects, who are not to look into the hearts or minds of their governors, and sovereigns, who are able to survey or ‘oversee’ the lives of their subjects. Examining these themes across a range of Bacon’s published works, this essay concludes that an attentive reading of Bacon’s metaphors of vision and perception reveals structural features which inflect his theory of human cognition and his views of human moral and political subjugation to sovereignty.

Keywords: Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626), political vision, moral vision, sovereignty, espionage, political subjects.
This paper aims to consider the thought of Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626) within the history of political and moral thought and within the history of science through a consideration of Bacon’s usage of visual metaphors and visual imagery. A consideration of Bacon’s discussion of mirrors, affective seeing and asymmetries of vision aims to open up questions of objectivity, subjection and sovereignty within Bacon’s political and moral thought.

**Mirrors and ‘Reflexion’: Visual and Mental Perception**

Bacon deploys metaphors of mirrors to describe visual perception as a kind of ‘reflexion’ – and then almost immediately insists that his ‘similitudes’ are more than mere metaphors:

> Are not the organs of sense of one kind with organs of reflexion, the eye with a glass, the ear with a cave or strait determined and bounded? Neither are these only similitudes, as men of narrow observation may conceive them to be, but the same footsteps of nature, treading or printing upon several subjects or matters.¹

This comparison of the eye to a glass (both of which are equally impressed by the ‘footsteps of nature’) in the *Advancement of Learning*, published in 1605, was later expanded by Bacon in the revised Latin version of the work, *De Dignitate et Augmentis Scientiarum*, published in 1623, where Bacon defines ‘sense’ as ‘the reflection of

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¹ Bacon 1996, p. 191; Bacon 2000, p. 78. All translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated.
things material’. The glass-like reflection of eyes or sense perception is compounded when Bacon compares the human mind to a glass – for Bacon both visual and mental phenomena are pictured as a kind of mirroring, albeit not always an accurate and crystalline mirroring:

For the human mind is far from the nature of a clear and equal glass, wherein the beams of things should reflect according to their true incidence; nay, it is rather like an enchanted glass, full of superstition and imposture, if it be not delivered and reduced.

To what extent is it possible for the human mind, the enchanted glass, to be ‘delivered and reduced’ from its enchantment? In his discussion of Civil Knowledge, Bacon lays out several dozen ‘sentences politic of Salomon’ drawn principally from the Proverbs but applicable to the life of a politeque. The penultimate Salomonic sentence is ‘Quomodo in aquis resplendent vultus prospicientium, sic corda hominum manifesta sunt prudentibus’ – to which Bacon gives the following gloss: ‘Here the mind of the wise man is compared to a glass, wherein the images of all diversity of natures and customs are represented’. The mind of the vir prudens pictures forth the diversity of natures and customs, presumably in the absence of enchantment. But how is the human mind to be transformed from an enchanted glass to one that is apparently not so enchanted? What processes of institution, formation or education would disenchant the glass of the human mind?

Bacon seems to suggest that as scientists and investigators of natures, as natural philosophers, human beings may overcome their

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4 ‘As water reflects the face of those gazing into it, so the hearts of man are manifest to the prudent’.
5 Bacon 1996, p. 270; Bacon 2000, p. 162.
mental enchantment by adopting the perspective and gaze of a discoverer. The discoverer compiles tables of discovery$^7$ (\textit{Tabulas inueniendi}$^8$) through the assembly of pertinent and salient particular facts, which are then ordered, set aright, and positioned for the inspection of human eyes \textit{(ritè & ordine, veluti sub oculos positorum)}.\textsuperscript{9} This idiom of discovery is explicitly visual.\textsuperscript{10} Through the concrete assembly of particulars, and sustained attention to them, Bacon argues, the human mental mirror may be overcome and the human mental mirror disenchanted. These are familiar themes in the secondary literature treating Bacon’s natural philosophy, his logic and his science.\textsuperscript{11}

Less familiar to the scholarly literature is the question of how the human mind might become disenchanted in its gaze upon matters moral and political. Assuming that an ‘unpartial view’\textsuperscript{12} is a view

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\textsuperscript{7} Bacon 2004, pp. 148, 160, 176.
\textsuperscript{8} Bacon, \textit{Novum Organum}, I.cxxvii: ‘\textit{Tam enim Historiam & Tabulas inueniendi conficimus de Irâ, Metu, et Verecundia, & similibus; ac etiam de exemplis rerum Civilium’}. Bacon 2004, p. 190.
\textsuperscript{9} Bacon 2004, p. 160.
\textsuperscript{10} Bacon’s idiom of ‘discovery’ is conceptually linked to his notion of invention. According to Bacon, ‘to invent is to discover that we know not’. (Bacon 1996, p. 222; Bacon 2000, p. 111) As Brian Vickers has noted, the semantics of Bacon’s English are often closely interconnected with the semantics of the Latin in which he was educated – and for Bacon invention and \textit{inventum} (discovery) cover closely overlapping semantic fields: \textit{invenire} means ‘to find out’. In the closing coda to \textit{The Advancement}, Bacon deploys the idiom of ‘discovery’ to describe his own endeavours in writing the book, claiming that he has ‘made as it were a small Globe of the Intellectual World, as truly and faithfully as I could discover’. Bacon 1996, p. 299; Bacon 2000, p. 192.
\textsuperscript{12} Bacon 1996, p. 276; Bacon 2000, p. 169.
without ‘passion and affection’, an it possible, on Bacon’s understanding, to take an ‘unpartial view’ of morals and politics?

Visual perception and affection are not cognitively separate in Bacon’s understanding of human psychology. This is most apparent in Bacon’s discussion of envy and love in his Essayes (1625). These, Bacon argues, find their mental space in the eye of the beholder: ‘They both have vehement wishes; they frame themselves readily into imaginations and suggestions; and they cometh easily into the eye, especially upon the presence of the objects’. Love, like envy, comes easily into the eye – it is a ‘little idol’ which enslaves the human mind, rendering the mind ‘a subject, though not of the mouth (as beasts are), yet of the eye’. When the noble-born envy the newly made, ‘it is like a deceit of the eye, that when others come on they think themselves go back’. Envy is such a perceptual emotion that it can be modified and moderated when the object of envy modifies her outward show:

Above all, those are most subject to envy, which carry the greatness of their fortunes in an insolent and proud manner; being never well but while they are shewing how great they are, either by outward pomp, or by triumphing over all opposition and competition… Notwithstanding so much is true, that the carriage of greatness in a plain and open manner (so it be without arrogancy and vain-glory) doth draw less envy than if it be in a more crafty and cunning fashion.

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15 Bacon 1996, p. 354; Bacon 2000 [1985], p. 27.
Reduce the visible show of greatness, Bacon argues, and one simultaneously reduces the envy of that greatness.

The effects of these affects are especially piquant. Envy, according to Bacon, is a superlative affection – both in its moral aspect, and in terms of its urgency and duration. Morally, envy is ‘the vilest affection, and the most depraved’. Qualitatively, ‘of all other affections’ envy is ‘the most importune and continual’. Envy has not only a private, but also a public and politic facet. ‘Public envy’ is an emotion closely allied to the human impetus to sedition and revolt:

Now to speak of public envy… This envy, being in the Latin word *invidia*, goeth in the modern languages by the name of ‘discontentment’; of which we shall speak in handling Seditions. It is a disease in a state like to infection… This public envy seemeth to beat chiefly upon principal officers or ministers, rather than upon kings and estates themselves. But this is a sure rule, that if the envy upon the minister be great, when the cause of it in him is small; or if the envy be general in a manner upon all the ministers of an estate; then the envy (though hidden) is truly upon the state itself.

If it is true that, for Bacon, envy is both an affection and a mode of perception, and if Bacon understands envy to be an emotion which carries an impetus toward revolution and sedition, then it would seem to follow that, for Bacon, politics is not to be dissociated from certain forms of affective seeing.

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Affective Seeing in *The Advancement of Learning*: Paradox and Asymmetry: The Obscurity and Transparency of Government

In the *Advancement of Learning*, Bacon structures several general claims about government in terms of visual paradoxes, stating that:

(A) ‘We see all governments are obscure and invisible’.  
And:
(B) ‘We see the government of God over the world is hidden’.

If ‘all governments’ are invisible, how can ‘we see’ that they are so? Similarly with the ‘government of God’, if it is ‘hidden,’ how might ‘we see’ it to be such? Further, who is the ‘we’ doing the seeing? Is it ‘we, who are not in power,’ or ‘we, who are subjects of the King’? Is it ‘we, who are analysts,’ ‘we, who are scientists’? Is this ‘we’ Bacon and his reader, Bacon and his sovereign addressee, ‘we, who are courtiers’ or ‘we, who are counsellors to the King’? Or again, is this ‘we’ ‘we, who are Sovereign’, ‘we, who are King’?

These questions of perspective and related paradoxes of vision are tied to questions of the position from which one might be thought to have knowledge that is held to be ‘objective’. The applicability of the terms ‘objective’ and ‘objectivity’ as descriptive attributes deployed to describe the scientific and philosophic project of Francis Bacon has been a matter of scholarly controversy over the course of the last two decades. Some intellectual historians and historians of science have asserted that Bacon is a kind of ‘objectivist’ *avant la lettre* because he was interested in the kinds of

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23 Bacon 1996, p. 286; Bacon 2000, p. 179: ‘wee see all gounernments are obscure and inuisible’.

24 Bacon 1996, p. 286; Bacon 2000, p. 179: ‘we see the gouvemment of God ouer the world is hidden’.
things contemporary scientists and philosophers mean when they speak of objectivity and impartiality.\textsuperscript{25} Other historians, while conceding that the semantics of ‘objectivity’ describe a facet of Bacon’s thinking, assert that deployment of such terms as ‘objective’ and ‘objectivity’ to describe Bacon’s thought is an obvious anachronism – such terms appear nowhere in Bacon’s corpus, and in the case of ‘objectivity,’ nowhere in English print usage prior to the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{26} Both sides to this debate overlook a tension internal to Bacon’s thought, implicit in the asymmetry of political perspective.

The asymmetry between the gazes of subjects and the gazes of sovereigns in Bacon’s thought is parallel to a tension within Bacon’s claims concerning whether his demonstrative method is applicable to politics and civil affairs – Bacon seems to say both that it is and that it is not. On the one hand, in the ninetieth aphorism of the Liber Primus\textsuperscript{27} of the \textit{Novum Organum}, Bacon asserts that civil matters (\textit{Res Ciuiles}) and the arts (\textit{Artes}) must be greatly distinguished, and this for two reasons. First, even civil change for the better, Bacon asserts, is more suspect and liable to incite perturbations than changes in the arts and sciences. Second, whereas the arts and sciences rest upon \textit{demonstratio}, matters civil (\textit{Ciuilia}) rest upon authority, consensus, fame and opinion.\textsuperscript{28} On the other hand, thirty-seven aphorisms later (Aphorism CXXVII) in the Liber Primus of the \textit{Novum Organum}, Bacon claims that ‘our logic’ (\textit{Logica

\textsuperscript{25} Daston 1991, pp. 337-64; Daston and Galison 1992, pp. 81-128.
\textsuperscript{26} Zagorin 2001, pp. 379-93.
\textsuperscript{27} ‘Aphorismi de interpretatione naturae, et regno hominis’. Bacon 2004, p. 64.
proceeding by induction, ‘comprehends everything’ (*omnia complectitur*) – excluding neither the sciences of politics and ethics (‘Scientiis… Ethicis, Politicis’), nor examples of matters civil (‘de exemplis rerum Civilium’). Bacon quickly rounds the edges of the claim that his logic comprehends everything—he suggests that one should not expect the same level of exactitude in all subjects. Bacon seems, within a space of less than forty aphorisms, to have asserted both that his logic (which is demonstrative logic) encompasses politics and civil matters, and that civil matters are not susceptible of demonstration. The *Res Civiles* are a limit case for Bacon’s *organon* and for whether all knowledge, to be knowledge proper, must have a demonstrative character. This issue has been left unresolved both in Bacon scholarship and perhaps within Bacon’s thought itself. The resolution of the question whether civil knowledge and the ‘Scientiis Ethicis, Politicis’ can have a demonstrative or ‘unpartial’ character may not be so straightforward, given the asymmetries Bacon has highlighted concerning human moral and political vision.

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29 *Novum Organum* I.cxxvii: ‘Etiam dubitabit quispiam potius quam obijciet, utrum nos de Naturali tantum Philosophiâ, an etiam de Scientiis reliquis, Logicis, Ethicis, Politicis, secundum viam nostram perficiendis loquamur. At nos certe de uniuersis haec, quae dicta sunt, intelligimus: Atque quemadmodum vulgaris Logica, quae regit res per Syllogismum, non tantum ad naturales, sed ad omnes Scientias pertinet; Ita & nostra, quae procedit per Inductionem, omnia complectitur. Tam enim Historiam & Tabulas inueniendi conficimus de Irâ, Metu, et Vercundiâ, & similibus; ac etiam de exemplis rerum Civilium: nec minus de motibus mentalibus Memoriae, Compositionis & Divisionis, Judicij, & reliquorum; quae de Calido & Frigido, aut Luce, aut Vegetatione, aut similibus’. Bacon 2004, p. 190.


One possible resolution of these paradoxes, and the related theme of objectivity, is that there is a fundamental asymmetry of perspective between the subject and the sovereign, between the governors and the governed:

Concerning Government, it is a part of knowledge secret and retired, in both these respects in which things are deemed secret; for some things are secret because they are hard to know, and some because they are not fit to utter… even unto the general rules and discourses of policy and government there is due a reverent and reserved handling. But contrariwise in the governors toward the governed all things ought, as far as the frailty of man permiteth, to be manifest and revealed. For so it is expressed in the Scriptures touching the government of God, that this globe, which seemeth to us a dark and shady body, is in the view of God as crystal: ‘Et conspectus sedis tanquam mare vitreum simile crystallo.’ So unto princes and states, and specially towards wise senates and councils, the natures and dispositions of the people, their conditions and necessities, their factions and combinations, their animosities and discontents, ought to be, in regard of the variety of their intelligences, the wisdom of their observations, and the height of their station where they keep sentinel, in great part clear and transparent.\(^\text{32}\)

Government is to be clear and transparent to the governors; opaque, concealed, and inscrutable to the governed. Bacon pictures the seat of sovereignty in the Scriptures as structuring an asymmetry of gaze: the gaze of the throne (\textit{conspectus sedis}) is like a crystal sea of glass (\textit{mare vitreum}) looking out, but a ‘dark and shady body’ for those prying to look in.\(^\text{33}\) This glass is like the two-way mirror of a latter-day interrogation room: see-through for the powerful, opaque to the disempowered.

\(^{32}\) Bacon 1996, p. 286; Bacon 2000, p. 179.

\(^{33}\) Bacon 1996, p. 286; Bacon 2000, p. 179.
Vision, in Bacon’s political and moral thought, is structured on positional and perspectival asymmetries. Some are in a position to see what others cannot and some are in a position to see what others may not. An example of such asymmetries may be seen in the prominence Bacon accords to espionage. ‘To spy’ and ‘to espy’ were, in sixteenth-century usage, verbs of visual perception.\(^{34}\) In counselling King James VI and I to make expenditures for the advancement of natural science and ‘the disclosing of nature’\(^{35}\) in the *Advancement*, Bacon writes that ‘you must allow the spials and intelligencers of nature to bring in their bills, or else you shall be ill advertised’.\(^{36}\) Discoverers of nature are likened unto spies – what they see of Nature, she does not see of them. In his *History of the Reign of Henry VII*, first published in 1622, Bacon depicts the establishment of espionage networks and intelligence gathering as crucial to the ‘foresight’\(^{37}\) which made Henry VII ‘a wise man and an excellent King’\(^{38}\). Regal espionage is presented by Bacon in his historiography as crucial to Henry VII’s quelling of both the Yorkist insurrection of 1487 and the numerous attempts of Perkin Warbeck to seize the English throne. In defeating the Yorkist insurrection in 1487, Henry ‘sent forth a troop of light horsemen for discovery, and to intercept some stragglers of the enemies, by whom he might the better understand the particulars of their progress and purposes; which was accordingly done; though the King otherways was not

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\(^{35}\) Bacon 1996, p. 172; Bacon 2000, p. 58.


\(^{38}\) Bacon 1998, p. 3; Bacon 2012, p. 3: ‘For hee was a *Wise Man*, and an *Excellent King*’. 
without intelligence from espials in the camp’. 39 Two years into Henry’s reign, he had already implanted ‘espials’ in the camps of those likely to revolt against him. In defeating the claims of the impersonator Perkin Warbeck, who made claim to the English throne by representing himself as Richard, Duke of York in the 1490s, Bacon writes that Henry VII ‘sent abroad into several parts, and especially into Flanders, divers secret and nimble scouts and spies, some feigning themselves to fly over to Perkin and adhere unto him, some under other pretences to learn, search, and discover all the circumstances and particulars’ of Perkin Warbeck and his background. 40 Thwarted, Warbeck’s own advisors ‘told him he was mightily overseen, both when he went into Kent and when he went into Scotland’. 41 According to Bacon’s History, the success of Henry VII’s spying operation so furthers royal reputation that by the tenth year of Henry’s reign, his public actions are judged in the light of the information his ‘secret intelligence’ affords him:

The King by this time was grown to such a height of reputation for cunning and policy that every accident and event that went well was imputed to his foresight, as if he had set it before. As in this particular of Perkin’s design upon Kent. For the world would not believe afterwards but the King, having secret intelligence of Perkin’s intention for Kent, the better to draw it on, went of purpose into the north afar off; laying an open side unto Perkin to make him come to the close. 42

Espionage, as a fact of political strategy and a tactic deployed for reasons of state, is based on informational asymmetries as well as visual ones. Those espied know that which the spies would like to find out- but those espied do not necessarily know that they are

39 Bacon 1998, p. 33; Bacon 2012, p. 27.
being spied upon. In espionage, which is part of politics, it is almost impossible to know at any given moment what all the relevant agents do and don’t know.

The question arises as to how these asymmetries play out ethically and politically. How should subjects and sovereigns, citizens and politicians look upon one another? Does Bacon offer a political ethics of looking and seeing? A brief examination of Bacon’s legal treatment of these issues may help to open this question.

Speaking before the Star-chamber in his capacity as Attorney General in a ‘Charge… touching Duels’ on 26 January of 1614, Bacon argued for the prohibition not merely of duels, but of all deeds – such as delivering of challenges, and agreeing to serve as a second – ‘tending to that offence’ of duelling.43

How, then, ought such malefactors to be deterred from sporting duels? In answering this question, Bacon states that ‘I must acknowledge that I learned out of the King’s last proclamation the most prudent and best applied remedy for this offence’.44 The remedy consists in locating the psychological or epistemic basis of the desire to duel: ‘this offence (my Lords) is grounded upon a false conceit of honour’.45 A propensity to duel is constructed upon the conceit that failing to meet a challenge damages one’s honour. The remedy that Bacon proposes is to eliminate this conceit by denying those who make or accept duelling challenges access to the presence and person of the sovereign. Bacon claims that ‘the fountain of honour is the King, and his aspect and the access to his person continueth honour in life, and to be banished from his presence is

43 The Charge of Sir Francis Bacon, Knight, his Majesties Attourney-generall, touching Duels, upon an information in the Star-chamber against Priest and Wright. With the decree of the Star Chamber in the same cause (1614). Bacon 1996, pp. 311, 682-4; Bacon 1868, p. 407.
one of the greatest eclipses of honour that can be’. In this image of the ‘eclipse’ the face and presence of the sovereign are likened to the light of sun, with the dishonoured covered over in obscurity. Bacon continues his visual metaphor in stating that ‘I think there is no man that hath any good blood in him will commit an act that shall cast him into that darkness, that he may not behold his Sovereign’s face’.

In his representative capacity as Attorney General, Bacon was echoing a thesis about the relation between the obedience of subjects and their effacement before their sovereign, which he had articulated nine years earlier in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), a text explicitly dedicated and addressed not to the Star-chamber of James VI and I but to King James himself. Early in his *Advancement*, Bacon claims that ‘to be speculative into another man… towards princes or superiors is want of duty’. To remedy such ‘want of duty’ towards princes, Bacon draws the attention of his readers to ‘the custom of the Levant’:

> For the custom of the Levant, which is, that subjects do forbear to gaze or fix their eyes upon princes, is in the outward ceremony barbarous, but the moral is good: for men ought not by cunning and bent observations to pierce and penetrate into the hearts of kings, which the Scripture hath declared to be inscrutable.

Intriguing in this passage is the shift from external vision to internal vision, coupled with an escalation of regal rank – subjects who ‘fix their eyes upon’ the prince long to ‘penetrate into’ the heart of the king. Outward ‘gazing’ betrays a longing for inward ‘piercing’ – those who ‘fix their eyes upon princes’ would ‘penetrate into the

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46 Bacon 1996, p. 307; Bacon 1868, p. 403.  
47 Bacon 1996, p. 307; Bacon 1868, p. 403.  
48 Bacon 1996, pp. 120-122; Bacon 2000, pp. 3-5.  
hearts of kings’. The sovereign, according to Bacon, better secures obedience and erases ‘want of duty’ by shielding his face from his subjects – Bacon’s implication seems to be that the sovereign most obeyed may be the sovereign least seen.

In this discussion of ‘the custom of the Levant’ Bacon draws upon Proverbs 25:3, which, in Jerome’s Vulgate, reads: ‘caelum sursum et terra deorsum et cor regum inscrutabile’. Bacon draws attention to this piece of Scripture again in Book II of the *Advancement*, writing that ‘for princes being at the top of human desires, they have for the most part no particular ends whereto they aspire, by distance from which a man might take measure and scale the rest of their actions and desires; which is one of the causes that maketh their hearts more inscrutable’. A similar line of argument appears in ‘Of Empire’ (in the 1625 edition of his *Essayes*), in which Bacon claims that it ‘commonly is the case of kings; who, being at the highest, want matter of desire, which makes their minds more languishing; and have many reputations of perils and shadows, which makes their minds the less clear. And this is one reason also of that effect which the Scripture speaketh of, that “the king’s heart is inscrutable”’. Finally, to render this point with particular lucidity, the engraver John Payne emblazoned the maxim ‘Cor Regis inscrutabile’ beneath a print image of Henry VII, with accompanying sceptre and orb of state, as the key text upon the verso frontispiece of the 1622 print edition of Bacon’s *Historie of the raigne of King Henry*

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54 Bacon 1996, p. 376; Bacon 2000 [1985], p. 58: ‘That the Kings Heart is inscrutable’.
55 Bacon (1622), Frontispiece. A copy of this edition is accessible in the Cambridge University Library. The frontispiece bears the signature mark ‘John Payne sculpsit’.
If, for Bacon, that which is unsearchable or inscrutable is thereby unknowable, then, on the basis of Bacon’s repeated invocation of the last clause of Proverbs 25:3 in texts published in 1605, 1622 and 1625, the interpreter is inclined to assert that, for Bacon, there is at least one salient political fact which is unknowable under a monarchical regime – the heart or will of the primum mobile of the political world.

The image of an all-surveying King with an inscrutable heart, on the one hand, and subjects with averted gazes, on the other, might present the reader of the Advancement with a simplified view of Bacon’s ethics of seeing: Sovereigns are to survey, subjects are to avert their eyes, or at least are to look upon the theatre of state without casting glances of scrutiny. Yet, in his treatment of ‘Civil Knowledge’ in Book II of the Advancement, under the heading of ‘Faber Fortunae’, Bacon proposes to ‘teach men how to raise and make their fortune; a doctrine wherein every man perchance will be ready to yield himself a disciple’. In counselling the ‘true politique’, the ‘Courtier’, the prudent man or ‘vir prudens’ to be ‘politic for his own fortune’, Bacon instructs him to frame his gaze

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57 Bacon refers to the sovereign as the primum mobile of the political cosmos in both ‘Of Seditions and Troubles’ and ‘Of Faction.’ Bacon 1996, pp. 367, 441; Bacon 2000 [1985], pp. 44, 156.
61 Bacon 1996, p. 284; Bacon 2000, p. 177.
63 ‘So likewise, when a Prince or Courtier hath been described by such as have handled those subjects, the mould hath used to be made according to
to ‘obtain the window which Momus did require, who seeing in the frame of a man’s heart such angles and recesses, found fault there was not a window to look into them; that is, to procure good informations of particulars touching persons, their natures, their desires and ends, their customs and fashions’.

Such ‘politiques’ are to be procurers of information touching the persons and practices of others – in order to ‘use’ this information in being politic for their own fortune, becoming craftsmen or Fabri of the same.

In procuring such information of others for one’s own ends, Bacon notes that this comes either from the direct observation of the deeds of others, the direct hearing of the words of others, or ‘second hand from reports’. Direct observations of others are to be esteemed more highly than ‘reports’; deeds seen are to be weighed more than words heard; and verbal slippages are to be seen as more revealing than set speeches. But how is one to procure such observations and reports? Bacon gives three tactical recommendations for information procurement: he recommends lying, domestic espionage and duplicity. First, in order to get others to ‘open themselves’ to giving true information concerning their persons, it may be helpful to lie to them:

the perfection of the art, and not according to common practice: so I understand it that it ought to be done in the description of a Politic man; I mean politic for his own fortune’. Bacon 1996, p. 284; Bacon 2000, p. 177; see also Bacon 1996, p. 283; Bacon 2000, p. 175.


66 ‘The sinews of wisdom are slowness of belief and distrust; that more trust be given to countenances of deeds than to words; and in words, rather to sudden passages and surprised words, than to set and purposed words’. Bacon 1996, p. 273; Bacon 2000, p. 166.

Experience sheweth, there are few men so true to themselves and so settled, but that, sometimes upon heat, sometimes upon bravery, sometimes upon kindness, sometimes upon trouble of mind and weakness, they open themselves; specially if they be put to it with a counter-dissimulation, according to the proverb of Spain, ‘Dimentira, y sacaras verdad,’ ‘Tell a lie, and find a truth.’

Second, to acquire accurate assessments concerning the habits of others, Bacon recommends procuring the information from the servants, domestics, and members of the household of the one to be found out:

As for the knowing of men which is second hand from reports; men’s weaknesses and faults are best known from their enemies, their virtues and abilities from their friends, their customs and times from their servants, their conceits and opinions from their familiar friends with whom they discourse most. General fame is light, and the opinions conceived by superiors or equals are deceitful; for to such men are more masked: ‘Verior fama e domesticis emanat.’

Since the ‘truer fame’ (Verior fama) ‘emanates from the domestics’ (e domesticis emanat) – he who would be politic for his own fortune should spy upon the household of the one to be found out – interrogating servants and household members and getting the information out of underlings rather than ‘superiors or equals’.

Third, to garner the trust of others that one may procure

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68 Bacon 1996, p. 275; Bacon 2000, p. 167. Bacon deploys this same adage in ‘Of Simulation and Dissimulation,’ writing that ‘for to him that opens himself men will hardly shew themselves adverse; but will (fair) let him go on, and turn their freedom of speech to freedom of thought. And therefore it is a good shrewd proverb of the Spaniard, “Tell a lie and find a truth.” As if there were no way to discovery but by simulation’. Bacon 1996, p. 351; Bacon 2000 [1985], p. 22.


information from them, Bacon recommends a policy of duplicity between secrecy and liberty of speech – one should be free-tongued in unimportant affairs, while being tight-lipped and discreet about matters of greater import. Bacon counsels his ‘politique’ in training ‘to keep a good mediocrity in liberty of speech and secrecy; in most things liberty; secrecy where it importeth; for liberty of speech inviteth and provoketh liberty to be used again, and so bringeth much to a man’s knowledge; and secrecy, on the other side, induceth trust and inwardness’.71

Counselling occasional lying, domestic prying and verbal duplicity, Bacon’s ethics of seeing in order to be politic for one’s own fortune are, to speak moderately, somewhat ambivalent. The ambivalence is not diminished when, near the end of his discussion of ‘Faber Fortunae’, Bacon claims that ‘the precepts which we have set down are of that kind which may be called “bonae artes”’.72 Such arts are to be contrasted with arts of another sort: ‘As for evil arts, if a man would set down for himself that principle of Machiavel, that “a man seek not to attain virtue itself, but the appearance only thereof; because the credit of virtue is a help, but the use of it is a cumber”; or that other of his principles, that “he presuppose that men are not fitly to be wrought otherwise but by fear, and therefore that he seek to have every man obnoxious, low, and in strait”… certainly with these dispensations from the laws of charity and integrity the pressing of a man’s fortune may be more hasty and compendious’.73 In other words, if the ‘Politic man’ becomes an expert craftsman of Bacon’s bonae artes (lying, spying, and verbal duplicity among them), then he shall make his own fortune, but if the politique practices the malae artes of ‘Machiavel,’ he shall make his fortune all the faster. Rather than practise such ‘evil arts’, Bacon

72 Bacon 1996, p. 284; Bacon 2000, p. 177.
73 Bacon 1996, p. 284; Bacon 2000, p. 177.
again counsels his ‘disciple’\textsuperscript{74} that while ‘the shortest way is commonly the foulest’, nonetheless ‘surely the fairer way is not much about’.\textsuperscript{75} In seeing that we have good information touching the particulars of other persons, the ethical distance between Bacon’s \textit{bonae artes} and the \textit{malae artes} ‘is not much about’ – but the distance between a ‘Politic man’ and a submissive, non-prying subject is not insubstantial.

\textbf{Conclusion}

This article has advanced the claim that for Bacon both visual and mental phenomena are a kind of mirroring and the view that visual perception and affection are not cognitively separate for Bacon. From the inseparability of visual perception and affection, it would seem to follow for Bacon that politics is not to be dissociated from certain forms of affective seeing. The presence of affective seeing in Baconian politics raises questions for the possibility of ‘objectivity’ in Bacon’s moral and political thought, much discussed in the extant secondary literature on Bacon.\textsuperscript{76} Bacon deploys the metaphor of ‘seeing’ at times to explain human political and historical relations and further to understand those relations in various situations being \textit{shaped by} his own persistent ‘lens’ – for Bacon, certain human political and historical situations are \textit{explanatorily} seen in terms of ‘seeing’.

The question of whether scientific objectivity is possible in Baconian moral and political thought is further raised by a fundamental asymmetry of perspective between subjects (who are not to look into the hearts or minds of their governors) and sovereigns, who are able to survey or ‘oversee’ the lives of their

\textsuperscript{74} Bacon 1996, p. 272; Bacon 2000, p. 164.
\textsuperscript{75} Bacon 1996, p. 284; Bacon 2000, p. 177.
subjects and are licensed to deploy spies and espials to peer into the private lives of their domestic subjects and foreign opponents. For these reasons, an attentive reading of Bacon’s metaphors of vision and perception reveals structural features which inflect his theory of human cognition and his views of human moral and political subjugation to sovereignty.

**Works Cited**

**Primary**


Secondary


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