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978-0-521-03566-8 - Francis Bacon, the State, and the Reform of Natural Philosophy

Julian Martin

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Why was it that Francis Bacon, trained for high political office, devoted himself to proposing a celebrated and sweeping reform of the natural sciences? Julian Martin's investigative study looks at Bacon's family context, his employment in Queen Elizabeth's security service and his radical critique of the relationship between the common law and the monarchy, to find the key to this important question. Deeply conservative and elitist in his political views, Bacon adapted Tudor strategies of state management and bureaucracy, the social anxieties and prejudices of the late-Elizabethan governing elite, and a principal intellectual resource of the English governing classes – the common law – into a novel vision and method for the sciences. Bacon's axiom that 'knowledge is power' takes on far-reaching implications in Martin's challenging argument that the reform of natural philosophy was a central part of an audacious plan to strengthen the powers of the Crown in the state.

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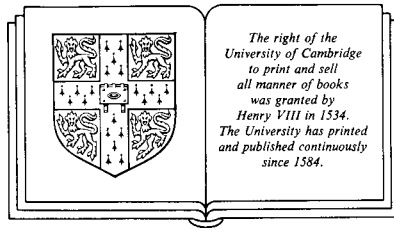
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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA



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Acknowledgements

This book is the product of my interests in the natural philosophy and the politics of early modern Europe and, more specifically, of my desire to integrate the history of natural philosophy with political and legal history in the hope of enriching our understanding of the natural philosophy of this era. My concerns, therefore, may be seen as ‘interdisciplinary’ ones, and they reflect the wide-ranging character of my own training.

I had not intended to pursue an ‘interdisciplinary approach’ when I became a student of history; it has been the consequence of the privilege of acquaintance with many learned scholars with very different interests. My father, and then Robert Schuler, Janos Bak, Steven Straker, the late Gerhardt Benecke, Brian Levack, Myron Gutmann, Guy Fitch Lytle, Sabine McCormach, Robert Palter and Adrian Wilson have all taught me more, and better, than they can have known then from appearances. To Andrew Cunningham, my Cambridge supervisor, go my very warmest thanks: without his encouragement and attention, it is unlikely the doctoral thesis which underlies this study would have been attempted, let alone completed.

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A note on the text

Nearly all references here to the writings of Francis Bacon are to the great Victorian editions of James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis and Douglas Denon Heath, *The Works of Francis Bacon*, 7 vols. (London, 1857–61) or to James Spedding, *The Letters and the Life of Francis Bacon*, 7 vols. (London, 1861–74). These titles are abbreviated as *Works* and *Letters*.

Because the *Works* incorporate many translations of Bacon's Latin treatises, notably in Volumes IV and V, references to these are included in parentheses; for example: 'Praefatio', *Instauratio magna* (1620), *Works*, I, p. 132 (IV, p. 21). The translations in the *Works* are by many hands (see J. Spedding, 'History and Plan of this Edition', *Works*, I), and I have amended several of these. Despite its textual inadequacies and oddity of arrangement, this edition remains the standard – at least until the completion of a critical edition of Bacon's works being prepared under the general editorship of Lisa Jardine and Graham Rees.

Many commentators conflate the *Works* and *Letters*, offering citations to *The Complete Works* or, say, to *Works*, Vol. XII, and the like: a small enough distraction, were it not for the fact that in America the seven-volume edition of *The Works* edited by Spedding, Ellis and Heath was issued in *fifteen* volumes. Considerable difficulties in trans-Atlantic scholarly communication have been the result. I append a table of comparisons.