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Dominating nature and colonialism. Francis Bacon's view of Europe and the New World

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ABSTRACT

Francis Bacon's works are pervaded by the firm belief that he was living in a new epoch. He thought of this epoch as based on knowledge and mechanical arts, which would permit dominion over nature. This dominion arises from mankind's taking concrete action to improve the living conditions of humanity. Defining the nature of this action leads to individuate a plural historical subjectivity in Bacon's thought. The different kinds of agency, and different kinds of technologies, define peoples in ethnological and spatial terms. Imperiality, that is human dominion over nature, implies the necessity of improving the conditions of the whole mankind, in a manner that opens the way of thinking in which 'backward' peoples are subject to this action of improvement. Colonialism is strictly related to imperiality. The idea of colonialism, in the New World in particular, rests on the assumption that human race can improve its living conditions, exercising power over nature. Therefore, imperiality and colonialism are not simply a tool of a British dominion, but elements of the new epoch that Bacon is theorising. In this sense, imperiality and colonialism are part of the philosophical structure of Bacon's modernity.

KEYWORDS

Colonialism; European modernity; domination of nature; imperiality; imperialism

1. The definition of an epoch and its subjectivities

The topic of the relation between colonialism and Bacon's philosophy is quite neglected in the study of Bacon. There was some generic effort to connect Bacon's views on Empire and colonies with his thought.¹ However, it is just in recent years that the topic has received specific attention. I refer to two works in particular: the first is *'In a Pure Soil': Colonial Anxieties in the Work of Francis Bacon* by Sarah Irving published in 2006.² Irving distinguishes between imperialism as dominion of man over nature and colonialism. The author maintains that Bacon's 'anxieties' about colonialism create a divergence between the meaning of imperialism and colonialism. The second work is the unpublished paper by Richard Serjeantson *Francis Bacon, Colonisation, and the Limits of Atlanticism*, presented in the Conference 'Politics, Nature, and the Imagination in the Work of Sir Francis Bacon (1561–1626)', Berkeley, University of California, March 15, 2014.³ In his text the author deals

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¹Howard B. White, *Peace Among the Willows: The Political Philosophy of Francis Bacon* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1968), 88–92; Charles Whitney, *Francis Bacon and Modernity* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press 1986), 167–9, 197–8; Julian Martin, *Francis Bacon, the State and the Reform of Natural Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 132–6.

²Sarah Irving, "In A Pure Soil": Colonial Anxieties in the Work of Francis Bacon', *History of European Ideas* 32 (2006). She expands her argument in *Natural Science and the Origins of the British Empire* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008).

³Richard Serjeantson, 'Francis Bacon, Colonisation, and the limit of Atlanticism' (University of California, Berkeley, 16 March 2014, cited with the permission of the author) <http://rems.berkeley.edu/files/2012/03/Richard-Serjeantson-Bacon-and-the-Limits-of-Atlanticism.pdf>

with the geopolitical context of Bacon's thought. According to Serjeantson, Francis Bacon's interest in colonialism in America was limited compared to the interest in promoting a Europe-centred foreign policy.

In this essay I will present a position different from these two works. I will argue that the presence of the New World and colonialism is crucial in Bacon's thought. I will also show that the idea of an Empire of the human race over nature, that I will label *imperiality*, is related to colonialism. Even if these two concepts are historically and analytically different they are connected with Bacon's central concerns: the elaboration of a method of experimental science, the use of knowledge to improve the man's living conditions, and the question of knowledge as the axis of a new kind of society. The connection between the two, which I will explain at the end of this article, shapes Baconian imperialism. Also, I will show how Bacon elaborates on this basis an idea of civilisation that helps to shape European identity as well as the idea of modernity.

Francis Bacon's works are pervaded by the idea that he was living in a new epoch. He considers his own thinking to be a manifesto for an era founded on knowledge:

The things I speak of are certainly quite new in their very kind, but are framed on an extremely ancient archetype, i.e. the very world itself and the nature of things and of the mind. And I frankly admit that I myself am certainly inclined to regard this work more as the birth of time than of talent.⁴

The originality that Bacon attributes to himself is the eminently practical character of knowledge.⁵ The aim of knowledge is, according to him, to improve and relieve 'Mans estate'.⁶ The idea of practical—rather than theoretical and bookish—knowledge with the goal of improving man's living conditions implies that nature is the centre of Bacon's philosophy: nature, not books or theories, is the real source of knowledge. Additionally, yielding something useful to mankind is the crucial goal of knowledge, an end perfectly expressed by the idea that mankind must 'conquer nature in operation'.⁷ Bacon uses this characteristic to trace the difference between his epoch and the others. Bacon condemns firmly 'the condition of the knowledge handed down and received' that are incapable of a real improvement of man's condition.⁸ Here Bacon characterises the new epoch by an opposition between a useful, dynamic knowledge on one side, and an abstract, static one on the other. Real knowledge, one aimed at improving the condition of mankind, is not separable from action; that is, there is no real knowledge without action or, in Bacon's language, work.⁹

The practical nature of Bacon's philosophy is not a minor feature, but the very core of his system. As Pérez Ramos demonstrates, 'making' appears to be the crucial axis of Bacon's thought since his philosophical system is based on the identification of knowledge with making.¹⁰ In brief, Bacon's thinking can be defined as a great project to transform the Earth into something useful to mankind through action, and his epistemological and methodological works are the foundations of this project.

⁴Sunt certe prorsus noua; etiam toto genera sed descripta ex veteri admodum exemplari, Mundo scilicet ipso, & Natura Rerum & Mentis. Ipse certe (vt ingenue fatear) soleo aestimare hoc Opus magis pro partu Temporis, quam Ingenij'. Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, ed. Graham Rees with María Wakely, Oxford Francis Bacon IX (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), (6) 7. I will give the Latin text of most relevant quotations. The number in parenthesis corresponds to Latin text. From now on I will abbreviate Oxford Francis Bacon with OFB followed by the volume number.

⁵The problem of the novelty of Bacon's idea of knowledge opens a terminological question. Bacon uses the terms 'knowledge', 'science', 'learning' to describe the intellectual operation that he is promoting. For the sake of simplicity, and largely following Bacon, I will use these terms interchangeably, even if the term 'science' may be misleading if anachronistically associated with contemporary use of the word. The space of this essay is obviously too narrow to deal with the question whether Bacon's science actually is modern science, so I will use the words 'science', 'knowledge', 'learning' as synonyms.

⁶Francis Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, OFB IV, 32.

⁷'Opere naturam vincere', Bacon, *Novum Organum*, (58) 59.

⁸Ibid., (14) 15.

⁹See Antonio Pérez Ramos, *Francis Bacon's Idea of Science and the Maker's Knowledge Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 141–5.

¹⁰Ibid., also, Robert Miner stresses the importance of 'making' in Bacon's thought in order to overcome the fragility of human mind. Robert Miner, *Truth in the making* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 40.

The practical nature of Bacon's knowledge goes hand in hand with his historicity. When Bacon says that his own thinking is a 'birth of time' he is not postulating some idealistic spirit, but rather the possibility of understanding history as a collective, not individual, enterprise. Here a problem emerges: how to determine and analyse agency in this collective enterprise. Who *makes* history? The question about historical subjectivity resolves in the question of who is improving mankind. The answer to this question is far from simple. Improving mankind's condition is a complex process that takes place in different ways thus many areas of subjectivation may be identified.

First of all, history is made by artisans that use technical (mechanical in Bacon's words) arts and materially improve the condition of man. Mechanical arts include 'agriculture, cookery, chemistry, dyeing; the manufacture of glass, enamel, sugar, gunpowder, artificial fires, paper, and the like'. Bacon stresses the tangible nature of these arts, noting that they 'display, change, and prepare natural bodies and material things'.¹¹

The action of natural philosophers, scientists, is the second source of subjectivity. Unlike the work of mechanical arts, the work of natural philosophers aims to produce knowledge not serendipitously but by carefully following the rules of experimental philosophy. It is important to remember that knowledge is never an individual activity. Bacon carefully explains the social, economic and political conditions that permit the formation of a class that resembles today's intellectual class, working in universities, and other institutions devoted to the creation of productive knowledge.

The problem of subjectivity cannot be limited to these classes. This is clear if we consider that human race itself appears as a subjectivity. Presenting his plan of 'great renewal', Bacon gives '[t]he sum or universal description of the knowledge or learning which the human race at present possesses'.¹² This is explained by the main goal of Bacon's thinking that is the bettering of humanity's condition. In other words, it is the human race itself that must advance through the action of its members. This is not a neutral remark, but a key assumption because within the tension between the idea of human race as a whole and the concrete action that modifies and improves nature lies, as I will show later, the possibility of connecting imperialism and colonialism. Between the human race and those who improve its living conditions Bacon introduces, almost surreptitiously, a spatially defined subjectivity: 'We can properly count only three revolutions or periods of learning; the first with the Greeks; the second with the Romans; and the third with us, the Western European nations'.¹³ Of course, this is not only a geographical definition: 'Western Europe' does not precede the formation of a 'scientific rationality', it is rather an identity developing within the process of advancement of learning.

The very act of improving the world is also a part of the process of subjectivation because it is involved with belonging to the same community. In *Advancement of Learning* Bacon speaks of a 'brotherhood of knowledge' invoking a greater collaboration between European Universities:

We see, there be many Orders and Foundations, which though they be deuided vnder seuerall soueraignties, & territories, yet they take themselues to haue a kind of contract, fraternitie, & correspondence, one with the other, insomuch as they haue Prouincials and Generals. [...] there cannot but bee a fraternitie in learning and illumination, relating to that Paternitie, which is attributed to God, who is called the Father of illuminations or lights.

In the same place Bacon makes a passing, but interesting, remark: 'Arts Mechanicall contract Brotherhoods in communalities'.¹⁴ If a higher level brotherhood exists among universities, mechanical arts create a more generic 'communal' identity. This is related to the idea of a subjectivity that expresses

¹¹Francis Bacon, 'Parasceue ad historiam naturalem', *OFB XI*, (462) 463.

¹²'Scientiae eius siue Doctrinae, in cuius possessione humanum genus hactenus versatur, Summam, siue Descriptionem Vniuersalem', Bacon, 'Novum Organum', (26) 27.

¹³'Tres enim tantum Doctrinarum reuolutiones periodi recte numerari possunt; Vna, apud Grecos; Altera, apud Romanos; Vltima, apud nos, Occidentales scilicet Europae nationes' Bacon, *Novum Organum*, (122–4) 123–5.

¹⁴Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, 60.

itself in the action of improving humanity's living conditions. What Bacon means emerges in a crucial remark in the *Novum Organum*:

consider (if you will) the difference between the life of men in any of the most civilised provinces of Europe and in one of the most savage and barbarous regions of the New Indies [...] this difference does not spring from soil, climate, or bodily constitution but from the arts.¹⁵

The difference between Europe and America, and in general between 'civilised' and 'barbarous', is ethnologically – not biologically – conceived and rests upon the concrete work of scientists and artisans. So, what defines and creates a European community is the peculiar ability to use knowledge in order to improve conditions of human race's life.

The human race, therefore, is qualitatively differentiated by the level of mechanical arts. Neither 'bodily qualities' (what a positivist would call 'race') nor climate is what causes differences in the human way of living, but only 'Art'. This has an important implication: according to Bacon humans are formally and potentially equals. This permits to Bacon to imagine arts, and his own method of experimental science, as universally valid: the act of producing, inventing, and creating potentially belongs to the whole of humanity.

Nevertheless, the difference in the actual development of different groups compromises the possibility of treating humanity as a homogeneous whole. As a consequence, a problem emerges in how to conceptualise the difference between the different parts of humanity. The way Bacon defines identity according to the 'technological level' seems to lead to consider Europe as a metonymy for human race. While the superiority of Western Europe is undisputed for Bacon, does this metonymic relationship imply the possibility of a political dominion over other peoples?

Before analysing these problems a terminological clarification would be useful. The notions usually implied in analysing political dominion are empire/imperialism and/or colonialism. Both terms are potentially misleading if used to refer to Bacon's thinking for historical and analytical reasons. Historically, imperialism is usually related to nineteenth-century expansion of European powers. Analytically, 'Empire' for Bacon does not indicate power over territory or peoples, but the power that human race exerts over nature. So, as I anticipated, I will use the term 'imperiality' to label the power that humanity exerts over nature.

The notion of 'colonialism' has similar problems. From a historical point of view, it is difficult to maintain that eighteenth-century England had a coherent 'colonial' policy. From an analytical point of view, Bacon distinguishes between 'colonies' identified with the will, typical of the Roman world, to incorporate peoples within the Empire, and 'plantations' referring to the 'modern' habit of planting people and fortifying the settlement in order to separate it from the original inhabitants.¹⁶ I will use in this article to indicate both plantation and colony, but, as I will explain, Bacon's colonialism can not identified with later forms of direct rule on overseas territories.

2. Bacon, imperiality and the improvement of human race

The most important feature of imperiality is power, the main concern of Bacon's project of reforming knowledge: 'In my view men properly appraise neither their assets nor their strength, but place too much faith in the former and too little in the latter.'¹⁷ For this reason, a fairer appreciation of the power of humanity is what Bacon intends with his epistemological project. The importance he attaches to power emerges in a passage concerning human ambition. According to Bacon, power is the basis of three kinds of ambition which he places in ascending order of dignity. First, the

¹⁵Rursus (si placet) reputet quispiam, quantum intersit inter hominum vitam in exultissima quapiam Europae Prouincia, & in Regione aliqui Nouae Indiae maxime fera & barbara [...] Atque hoc, non Solum, non Coelum, non Corpora, sed Artes praestant'. Bacon, 'Novum Organum', (194) 195.

¹⁶Serjeantson, 'Francis Bacon, Colonisation, and the limit of Atlanticism', 2–5.

¹⁷Videntur nobis homines, nec opes, nec vires suas bene nosse; verum de illis, maiora quam par est, de his, minora credere'. Bacon, *Novum Organum*, (10) 11.

ambition of those who want to extend their own personal power. Second, the ambition of extending the power of their own country. The third kind of ambition is the crucial one:

But if someone strives to renew and increase the empire of humanity itself over the whole universe of things, then that ambition (if that is what we must call it) is no doubt more sober and majestic than the others. Now the empire of man over things lie in the arts and sciences alone. For one can not govern nature save by complying with her.¹⁸

In this well-known definition, empire lies in the power over things that knowledge confers.

The relationship between empire and natural science is crucial: ‘The purpose of studying nature was to recover man’s original dominion over the earth, bestowed upon Adam in Eden but lost in the Fall.’ In this sense imperialism identifies with the natural philosophy’s project of recovering humanity’s empire over nature.

There is a difference between the constitution of the empire of man over nature and the occasional invention of some mechanical art useful to human race:

If a man could succeed, not in striking out some particular invention, however useful, but in kindling a light in nature – a light which should in its very rising touch and illuminate all the border-regions that confine upon the circle of our present knowledge; and so spreading further and further should presently disclose and bring into sight all that is most hidden and secret in the world, – that man (I thought) would be the benefactor indeed of the human race, – the propagator of man’s empire over the universe, the champion of liberty, the conqueror and subduer of necessities.¹⁹

Imperiality, therefore, rests on the discovery of a method. However it would be an error to reduce Bacon’s method to the rules of induction, even if those are a crucial element, because his method includes the necessity of organising society for the production of knowledge, as it clearly appears in Bacon’s utopia *New Atlantis*.²⁰ Therefore, it is fair to maintain that the main meaning of imperialism in Bacon’s thinking is epistemic if we acknowledge that epistemology deals not only with the method of science but also with the organisation of society and that no sector of society may be excluded from epistemological concerns.²¹

The importance of the relationship between empire – that is, power – and science justifies the idea that imperialism is an epistemological and philosophical manner of interpreting and giving sense to the world. In brief, imperialism is formed by three elements: knowledge as the power humanity has to establish empire, the human race (as a whole and divided in different groups) as the subject who expands the empire by means of science, and the Earth as the potential territory of empire.²² It is easy to realise that imperialism is not something given but something to be made through the work of human race.

There is another key element of imperialism to consider: improving, enlarging and advancing not only shape the ‘making’ as form of knowledge, but they also have a moral dimension. Particularly, the idea of ‘improving’ is strictly related with morality. Morality, like knowledge, depends on action:

with the learned man, it fares otherwise, that he doth euer intermix the correction and amendment of his minde, with the vse and employment thereof: Nay further in generall and in sum: certain it is, that *Veritas*, and *Bonitas* differ, but as the Seale and the Print: for Truth prints Goodnesse.²³

¹⁸Quod si quis humani generis ipsius potentiam & imperium in rerum Vniuersitatem instaurare & amplificare conetur; ea proculdubio Ambitio (si modo ita vocanda sit) reliquis & sanior, est & augustior. Horninis autem imperium in Res, in solis Artibus & Scientijs ponitur. Naturae enim non imperatur, nisi parendo Ibid., (194) 195.

¹⁹Francis Bacon, *Of the interpretation of Nature. Proem*, in *Works of Francis Bacon* vol. X ed. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis and Douglas Denon Heath (London: Longman, 1857–1874), 84–5. From now, I will abbreviate Spedding edition of Bacon’s work with *Work* followed by the volume number.

²⁰Francis Bacon, *The New Atlantis and the Great Instauration*, ed. J. Weinberger (Wheeling: Crofts Classics, 1989). Bacon offer his ideas about the organisation of knowledge also in the second book of the *Advancement of Learning*. Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, 55–62.

²¹Irving, *Natural Science*, 22.

²²As Irving notes, Earth itself is conceptualized as an empire. Irving, *Natural Science*, xii.

²³Bacon, ‘Advancement of Learning’, 50.

Baconian morality is not the abstract individuation of what is good, but rather a ‘therapy’ aimed at individuating the way to act rightly in the public sphere.²⁴ To act rightly means to act rationally, and the objective of moral philosophy ‘is to procure the affections to obey reason, and not to invade it’.²⁵

Giving this kind of morality, it is not surprising that the core features of imperialism (improving and enlarging) present a strong moral concern:

surely it would be a *disgrace to mankind* if, while the expanses of the material globe, i.e. of lands, seas, and stars, have in our times been opened up and illuminated, the limits of the intellectual globe were not pushed beyond the narrow confines of the ancients’ discoveries.²⁶

The strong moral concern of Bacon’s reform of knowledge, the importance of actively expanding human empire over nature, and the importance of Bacon’s thinking on the reshaping of modern Europe appear in a dialogue published posthumously in 1629, *An Advertisement Touching an Holy Warre*. In this dialogue six characters appear debating about the legitimacy and the possibility of a holy war.²⁷

Giving the unfinished nature of *An Advertisement*, it is difficult to interpret the text in a definitive manner, and also it is impossible to identify a fully developed Baconian idea in one character or another. Rather some Baconian elements can be recognised in each one of the characters.

It seems plausible that opting for those six characters is aimed at covering a wide range of intellectuals in Western Europe: Eusebius, a ‘Moderate Diuine’, that is theologian, Gamaliel, a ‘Protestant zelant’, Zebedaeus a ‘Romish Catholike zelant’, Martius a ‘Military Man’, Eupolius a ‘Politique’, and Pollio a ‘Courtier’.²⁸ Universality and unity appear as key features of the dialogue. Of course, it cannot be the traditional unity of *Res Publica Christiana*, because of the Reformation. Indeed, the only intervention by Gamaliel leads to a quarrel with Zebedaeus.²⁹

The most important remark comes from Pollio: ‘I am of [the] opinion, that except you could bray *Christendome* in a Mortar, and mould it into a New Paste, there is no *Possibilitie* of an Holy Warre’. That the very voice of Bacon appears here is made clear by what follows: ‘I was euer of opinion, that the *Philosophers Stone*, and an *Holy Warre*, were but the *Rendez-vous* of Crackt Braines.’³⁰ In the same manner in *De sapientia veterum* he maintains that the philosopher’s stone has ‘no ground in theory’.³¹

Both religion and alchemy, for very different reasons, are not an adequate base of unity of the new Christianity, or, better yet, of the new Europe. What is, then, the basis of this reconstruction? The incompleteness of the *An Advertisement* precludes a definitive answer. Nonetheless, the introductory *Letter of Dedication* gives some clues. In a general reassessment of his own thinking Bacon indicates in the *Instauratio Magna* the work he ‘doe most esteeme’. Once again, he insists particularly upon the novelty of this work.³² It is clear, even if is not explicitly stated in *An Advertisement*, that Bacon conceives his own work as the means to ‘mould in a new past’ Christendom. It is not by chance that Bacon uses the term ‘Instauration’ strictly related to power and empire and that means restoration, but also the act of instituting something.³³ Indeed, in this essay Bacon is proposing the adoption of

²⁴On Bacon’s morality see Ian Box ‘Bacon’s Moral Philosophy’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Bacon*, ed. Markku Peltonen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 271.

²⁵‘Finis itidem Ethicas affectus ita componere, ut rationi militent, non autem eam invadant’. Francis Bacon, *The Augmentis Scientiarum, Work I*, 671, translation, *Works IV*, 456.

²⁶‘Quin & turpe hominibus foret, si globi materialis tractus, Terrarum videlicet, Marium, Astrorum, nostris temporibus immensum aperti illustrati sint; globi autem Intellectualis fines, inter veterum inuenta angustias cohibeantur’. Bacon, ‘Novum Organum’, (132) 133 (emphasis added).

²⁷Francis Bacon, *An Advertisement Touching a Holy Warre*, OFB.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 187.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 190.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 195.

³¹Francis Bacon, *Translation of the ‘De Sapientia Veterum’, Works VI*, 761.

³²Bacon, *An advertisement Touching a Holy Warre*, 185.

³³About the meaning of the word *Instauration* see Charles Whitney, ‘Francis Bacon’s *Instauration*: Dominion of and over Humanity’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50, no 1 (1989): 371–2.

the new epistemological empire as a basis for European identity. He tries to replace an identity founded on religion subject to sectarian divisions with an identity founded on scientific cooperation.

This understanding of *An Advertisement* explains why Bacon wrote an essay on Holy War. Indeed, Bacon *does* approve of the idea of a Holy War. None of the characters in the dialogue reject that some kind of holy war is legitimate. Even Pollio, who seemingly disapproves of it, merely poses the condition that Christianity must be radically changed in order to start a legitimate holy war. The holy war Bacon is writing about is none other than the process of expansion of empire. In this sense, imperialism is inherently expansionist, simply because that is the way Bacon conceives it. He defines the improvement of man's living condition and the expansion of mankind's power over nature as empire.

As mentioned earlier, imperialism and European civilisation define each other. In fact, Europe defines the standards of living for the human race. It is impossible, in Bacon's thinking, to conceive a way of life different from materially improving one's own conditions. It is easy to see how Eurocentric his thinking is. We can not find in it any empathy with 'Indian' way of life such as in De Las Casas's writing.³⁴ Moreover, Bacon rejects theoretically every form of pluralism: 'Unity is the hallmark of truth, and the variety of their opinion is proof of error.'³⁵

3. Bacon, America and colonialism

Now it is important to analyse colonialism and its relations with imperialism. The definition of Bacon's colonialism must be placed in the wider context of the birth of an English colonialism and of the discovery of the New World.

The discovery of America was not only, of course, an event that marked a new epoch because of its scientific and epistemological implications but because it was, above all, a conquest. After the discovery, Spain, and later Portugal, started the occupation of the continent. Spain was, therefore, the first and foremost model of imperialist colonisation. Debate on what English colonialism should be, or even if an English colonialism should exist, was very intense in the Tudor and early-Stuart eras and Bacon's thinking must also be understood as a part of that discussion.

The most important advocate of a Spanish-like imperialism was Sir Walter Raleigh, who maintained that the key element of an empire was gold and conquest the best way to get it.³⁶ The main attempts by Raleigh were the foundation of a colony in Roanoke Island and the conquest of Guyana. This model of colonialism proved disastrous and eventually ended when Raleigh was executed in 1618.³⁷

Apart from Raleigh's attempts, there was a strong conviction in England that English colonialism should be different from the Spanish one. Starting from the first successful settlement in Virginia, English colonialism takes a different path, in which Virginia has a special place, acting like a sort of model of English expansion in the Atlantic.³⁸ English colonialism, and all of English Atlantic politics, were shaped by the conflictual relationship with the Spanish empire. The English process of empire-building, which would be inappropriate to think of as consciously planned, was created by a set of processes that were (or were perceived to be) in opposition to the process of creation of the Spanish empire.³⁹

³⁴The main writings of De Las Casas are in Bartolomé de las Casas, *A selection of his writings*, ed. George Sanderlin (New York: Knopf, 1971). For an account on De Las Casas life and works, in the context of the conquest of America see Lawrence A. Clayton, *Bartolomé de las Casas and the Conquest of the Americas* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

³⁵Francis Bacon, 'The Masculine Birth of Time', in *The Philosophy of Francis Bacon: An Essay on Its Development from 1603 to 1609*, ed. Benjamin Farrington (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1964), 69. The Latin text is somehow more elegant: 'Errori varietas, veritati unitas competit'. Francis Bacon *Temporis Partus Masculus. Works VI*, 535.

³⁶Andrew Fitzmaurice, *Humanism and America. An Intellectual History of English Colonisation 1500–1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 55. See also Anthony Pagden, *Lords of all the Worlds. Ideologies of Empire in Spain Britain and France c. 1500 – c. 1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 64–8.

³⁷Luis Roper, *English Empire 1602–1658: beyond Jamestown* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), 13.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 47.

³⁹Pagden, *Lords of all the Worlds*, 65–6. On the intellectual need to differentiate with Spanish colonialism see also Fitzmaurice, *Humanism and America*, 27, 145–6.

It was not only the failure of Raleigh's politics to press English planters into elaborating a new model of colonialism but also the poor performance, in economic and social terms, of Virginia where plantations was particularly affected by high mortality rate, unsuccessful attempts to start a self-sufficient economy, and a lack of natural resources as gold or silver. Also, the commercial and financial performance of the Virginia Company was, compared to the East India Company, very poor.⁴⁰ Therefore, for the first period of English settlement in America, colonialism was not a matter of profit or expansion but of mere survival.

The need to differentiate itself from Spain and to sustain the Virginia colony despite the lack of profit provoked a strong effort to explain, support and justify the English settlement on the other side of the Atlantic. As a consequence, a huge intellectual debate on colonisation spread. Frequently this debate has been interpreted in terms of humanism. For example, Fitzmaurice maintains that colonialism was not a 'modern' enterprise, but a way to extend the civil sphere through a *vita activa*, that put glory, honour and virtue at the centre of the participation in public life.⁴¹ Moreover, humanist culture shows a deep anxiety about colonialism, on the argument that the search for gold and riches would make the empire weaker.⁴² However, it is also true that it is impossible to equate humanism and anti-colonialism because, as Armitage maintains, humanism itself brings assumptions about the superiority of civility over barbarism and the necessity of actively spreading civilisation.⁴³

This scenario appears even more complicated when taking into account the considerations of political opportunity. On one hand, the complexity of arguments in favour of colonialism depends on the necessity of speaking a different language of colonisation according the audience to be persuaded.⁴⁴ On the other hand, there was also an element of political prudence. It can be acknowledged that in late Tudor and early Stuart England many intellectuals were fiercely opposed to colonialism.⁴⁵ Any defence of colonialism must be carefully undertaken in order to prevent possible criticism. In this sense, the emphasis on morality of plantation was also instrumental to a defence from scepticism and overt attacks.⁴⁶

What emerges from this very concise review is the complexity of the intellectual genealogy of colonialism. But also a crucial element emerges in that some sort of reflection was needed in order to place colonialism coherently in the history of English society. Moreover, in many cases English planters, especially among the Virginia Company promoters, thought of themselves as the founders of a new Commonwealth, not merely an extension of English monarchy.⁴⁷

Bacon was fully part of this complex scenario. First of all, it is important to note the two geographical dimension of Bacon's colonialism: Ireland and America. While Ireland was doubtlessly very important to Bacon's thinking it lacks the crucial feature of America: novelty. Nothing like the discovery of the New World illustrated the process of spreading human empire over nature in the whole world. In 1620 Bacon choose the image of a vessel passing through the Pillars of Hercules to illustrate the first page of his *Instauratio Magna*. The discovery is both the result and the premise of scientific progress. It is a result since it would be impossible to cross the Atlantic without the invention of nautical compass, one of the epoch-defining inventions according to Bacon.⁴⁸ But the discovery of America is also the premise of a new epoch of discoveries: 'nor should this fact count for nothing: that by prolonged voyages and journeys (which have become prevalent in our times) many things in nature have been disclosed and found out which could shed new light on

⁴⁰Fitzmaurice, *Humanism and America*, 61.

⁴¹Ibid., 134 and 199 above all 3–4.

⁴²Ibid., 67. For the specific theme in Jacobean epoch, see also Markku Peltonen, *Classical Humanism and Republicanism in English Political thought 1570–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 199.

⁴³David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 51–2.

⁴⁴See Fitzmaurice, *Humanism and America*, 120–1.

⁴⁵Roper, *English Empire*, 37–8.

⁴⁶Fitzmaurice, 'Humanism and America', 82.

⁴⁷Ibid., 71.

⁴⁸Bacon, 'Novum Organum', (194) 195.

philosophy'.⁴⁹ Here, even if the reference to America is not explicit, the discovery of the New World is the gamut of a new relationship between 'mankind' and 'nature'. Moreover, the discovery was not only a matter of geography but also of ethnology. The presence of a savage humanity shows, as we saw earlier, how mechanical art is paramount in developing a civilisation. For the 'epistemological modernity' of Bacon the discovery of America was the key event that marks a before and an after.

As far as the relationship between Bacon and colonialism is concerned, first of all, we must notice that he was directly involved in plantations in the New World. Bacon, indeed, owned a share of the Virginia Company, and was part of its Council, as it appears in the Second Charter dated 23 May of 1609.⁵⁰ However, more than the consideration of Bacon's interests in Virginia it is important to analyse the impact of the Virginia enterprise on his considerations about colonialism.

While imperialism is developed in scientific works, Bacon deals with colonisation in some of his *Essays*, and in various occasional or political writings. The nature of all these works, often very short, makes it such that, strictly speaking, Bacon can be hardly considered a theorist of plantations. However, a careful analysis of those writings offers many elements to elaborate, if not a theory of colonialism, at least a vision of colonialism coherent and profoundly connected with the context of his epoch.

The greater part of these writings are about plantations in Ireland.⁵¹ In spite of their specificity, it is possible to draw from these writings some useful indications about plantations in the New World. First of all, Bacon gives in *Certain Considerations Touching the Plantation in Ireland* his understanding about the reasons to act, that are pleasure, honour, profit. These same reasons are what pushes people to plant. 'Pleasure' is what is of interest here. Speaking about the reasons for planting in Ireland Bacon also gives a possible reason to plant in the New World:

In this region [Ireland] or tract of soil, there are no warm winters, nor orange-trees, nor strange beasts, or birds, or other points of curiosity or pleasure, as there are in the Indies and the like: so as there can be found no foundation made upon matter of pleasure, otherwise than that the very general desire of novelty and experiment.⁵²

Here Bacon shows a sort of 'lust' for knowledge. The great amount of quotations from works on exploration of the New World, above all by the widely-quoted Acosta, testifies to this lust for knowledge.⁵³

But a key difference appears between the abstract lust for knowledge that pervades Bacon's scientific writings and the idea Bacon proposes in *Certain Considerations*: the connection of pleasure and curiosity with action. Colonisation is a peculiar form of action inspired by knowledge. Such an idea is very important because it directly intertwines the idea of empire with colonisation.⁵⁴

There is another important reference to America in *Certain Considerations*. Speaking of the possibility of appointing a commission on plantation in Ireland, Bacon says that the plantation of Virginia is 'an enterprise in my opinion differing as much from this [plantation of Ireland], as Amadis de Gaul differs from Caesar's Commentaries'.⁵⁵ It is possible to understand this simile because Bacon uses it in almost the same form in other texts. In *Note on Bacon's Speech on Darcy's Case* he maintains that

⁴⁹Ibid., (132) 133.

⁵⁰The Second Charter is reprinted in 'Statutes at Large, Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619, 13 vols' ed. William Hening (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1969), vol. 1, 80–98. The document is accessible online thanks to the Avalon Project of Lillian Goldmann Law Library, Yale Law School. Url: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th_century/va02.asp.

⁵¹The most important writings on Ireland are *Certain Considerations touching the Queen's service in Ireland* written in 1601, and *Certain Considerations touching the Plantation in Ireland* presented to James I in 1609. These writings, and the whole of Bacon's writings about Ireland are available online thanks to The Free Digital Humanities Resource for Irish history, literature and politics. Bacon's corpus of Irish writings is available at <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/E600001-015/>.

⁵²Francis Bacon, *Certain considerations touching the Plantation in Sir Francis Bacon's MSS relating to Ireland*, 177, <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/E600001-015.html>.

⁵³Many quotes from Acosta are in Francis Bacon, *Historia Ventorum in Works II*; and in Bacon, *Novum Organum*, (320) 321.

⁵⁴Irving maintains, on the contrary, that lust for knowledge is not related with colonialism while it is related with the idea of epistemic empire. See Irving, 'Natural Science', 38, 43.

⁵⁵Francis Bacon, *Certain considerations*, 181, <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/E600001-015.html>.

‘the law of England is not taken out of Amadis de Gaul nor the books of Parallels, but out of the Scripture, out of the Law of Romans and Grecians’.⁵⁶ Most importantly, another reference to Amadis de Gaul is found in the *Novum Organum*. Here Amadis de Gaul is compared with Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great and the opposition is between the solid historical truth of Caesar and Alexander, on one hand, and the fictional nature of Amadis and King Arthur.⁵⁷

In general, Amadis de Gaul refers to an unknown land, a land of wonders and a place where the validity of traditional laws is doubtful.⁵⁸ In the context of *Considerations* Bacon is comparing Amadis de Gaul to his own experience as a member of the Council of Virginia and to plantation in Virginia in general, while Caesar refers to plantation in Ireland. This move sheds light on the difference between Ireland and Virginia. Ireland is not object of curiosity, much less of pleasure of discovery, because it is part of the known, the familiar. As a consequence, plantation in Ireland seems to lead more easily back to the traditional category that dates from the Roman tradition of empire and also to humanistic reflection inspired by Cicero. Virginia, and the New World as a whole, are a world of wonder and curiosity whose discovery leads to the unknown and vice-versa. Implicitly, understanding Virginia requires new and different means and has also different goals.

Baconian writings about the colonisation of America do not abound. The most important is the essay *Of Plantations*, part of the last edition of *Essays* (1625). Even if this text is not explicitly an account of American colonialism, many references in the text imply that this essay deals with America.⁵⁹

Of Plantations is of paramount importance in Bacon’s thought. Indeed, in this essay he makes an important statement: ‘I like a *Plantation* in a Pure Soile; that is, where People are not *Displanted*, to the end, to *Plant* in Others. For else, it is rather an *Extirpation*, then a *Plantation*.’⁶⁰ Bacon clearly states that plantation must be totally different from extirpation, that is without damaging natives. This is clearly a key point. In *Certain Considerations* he states the point even more strongly:

For most part of unions and plantations of kingdoms have been founded in the effusion of blood: but your Majesty shall build in solo puro, et in area pura, that shall need no sacrifices expiatory for blood; and therefore, no doubt, under a higher and more assured blessing.⁶¹

However, Bacon’s anxiety about colonialism, which no doubt exists, must be placed in a specific historical context and within the intricate puzzle of relations between science, imperialism and colonialism.

First, it is easy to see that Bacon’s goal is not discouraging planting, but rather to encourage planting ‘under an higher and more assured blessing’, and his foremost anxiety is to avoid ‘effusion of blood’. The moral and political rationale for this stance must be found in the widespread English aversion for Spanish colonialism that has been demonstrated earlier. Bacon was fully aware of the need to avoid a greedy and rapacious approach to plantation and, since Spain was Bacon’s geopolitical (and civil) arch-enemy,⁶² he was eager to contribute to a new model of colonialism, one not *directly* aimed towards enhancing the power of the State nor making profit with an aggressive and greedy extractionist policy.

⁵⁶Francis Bacon, *Note on Bacon’s speech on Darcy’s case Works XIII*, 109.

⁵⁷Bacon, ‘*Novum Organum*’, (140) 141.

⁵⁸The use of the image of Amadis de Gaul to convey the sense of wonder was common among the first Spanish reporters of discovery of America. See Wolfgang Haase and Meyer Reinhold, *The Classical Tradition and America Volume I: European images of the Americas and the Classical Tradition Part 1* (Berlin: Walter e Gruyter, 1994), 297.

⁵⁹Michael Kiernan, ‘Commentary’ in Francis Bacon, *The Essayes Or Counsels, Civill and Morall OFB XV*, 239.

⁶⁰Francis Bacon, ‘*Of Plantation*’, in *The Essayes*, 106.

⁶¹Francis Bacon, *Certain considerations touching the Plantation*, 170, <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/E600001-015.html>. Serjeantson highlights that Ireland was the model for Bacon’s idea of a plantation ‘in a pure soil’, Serjeantson, ‘Francis Bacon, Colonisation, and the limits of Atlanticism’, 7.

⁶²In many place Bacon exposes his repulsion for Spain, for example: Francis Bacon ‘*Of the interpretation of Nature. Proem*’, *Works X*, 86. The manifesto of his repulsion is Francis Bacon, ‘*Considerations Touching a War with Spain. To the Prince*’, *Works XIV*, 469. Bacon consistently regard Spain as an enemy even after the peace with Spain that James signed in 1604.

That gives the first clue to understanding Bacon's idea of colonialism. If the nature of English colonies, unlike Spanish ones, was not predatory and if the goal was to create a new Commonwealth, it is clear that the first feature and goal of plantation was sustainability. The main measure to be implemented in order to make a plantation productive is the control of the *quality* of planters: 'The people wherewith you *Plant* ought to be Gardeners, Plough-men, Laborers, Smiths, Carpenters, Joiners, Fishermen, Fowlers, with some few Apothecaries, Surgeons, Cooks, and Bakers.'⁶³ Those people may render the colony productive. It is important to note that Bacon explicitly disagrees with those who believe that plantation may serve to resolve the problem of overpopulation in England.⁶⁴ Bacon's 'quality-based approach' to plantation also reveals another important characteristic of his colonialism. As I have already shown, one of the main historical subjectivities in Bacon's thinking is the productive one of artisans, and labourers that improve mankind's condition by enlarging the empire of Man on Nature. In this sense, the 'pure soil' is also a part of the Earth that can be (and must be) improved by the action of mankind. From this perspective planting is in itself part of Bacon's imperialism. Improving the condition of plantation, and of mankind, also implies the need to increase the knowledge of the territory of the colony: 'first looke about, what kinde of Victuall, the Countrie yeelds of it selfe, to Hand[...] and make use of them. [...] then consider, what Victuall or Esculent Things there are, which grow speedily'.⁶⁵ Knowledge and its use are key features of the success of the colony. It is important not to conflate this view with a purely commercial approach to colonialism. The government of the colony should be formed by 'rather Noblemen, and Gentlemen, then Merchants: For they looke ever to the present Gaine'.⁶⁶ Bacon is not condemning profit, on the contrary he maintains that 'Speedie Profit is not to be neglected',⁶⁷ but it should not prevent a 'slow as woods' development of the plantation. This is perfectly coherent with Bacon's idea of a relation between profit and advancement of knowledge, where the first is permitted and encouraged only as far as it does not prevail on the second.⁶⁸

It is important to note that the relation between colonies, knowledge and mechanical art is fundamental because only practical science makes colonies productive. But colonialism, far from merely being the enlarging of a kingdom, is an enlarging of the boundaries of the empire of human race over nature. Colonialism satisfies human curiosity, making the unknown useful for mankind through the work – the technical work – of the planters. This shaping of colonialism is not only coherent with Bacon's imperialism, but is a part of it. The goal of colonies is to enlarge the empire of reason and improve human race's conditions, making colonies productive and self-sufficient through work, namely a work based on carefully crafted knowledge of plantations. In this sense the main product of colonisation is not a single commodity, but knowledge. A similar idea appears in *The New Atlantis*. Bacon's utopia is a complex and highly symbolical text, and its relation with his thinking has been highly debated.⁶⁹ Speaking about Bensalem's ties with the rest of the world, the Father of Salomon's House tells about the 'trade' of the island:

you see we maintain a trade, not for gold, silver, or jewels; nor for silks; nor for spices; nor any other commodity of matter; but only for God's first creature, which was Light: to have *light* (I say) of the growth of all parts of the world.⁷⁰

⁶³Bacon, 'Of Plantation', 106.

⁶⁴It is important to note that Bacon's earlier opinion was different. In *Certain considerations* he maintains that 'discharge' the overpopulation 'out of England and Scotland may prevent many seeds of future perturbations'. Bacon is referring here to plantation in Ireland, showing that plantation in Virginia and Ireland was very different enterprise, the last one requiring the set of knowledge that Baconian method can bring. Francis Bacon, 'Certain considerations' in *Sir Francis Bacon's MSS relating to Ireland*, 172–3, <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/E600001-015.html>.

⁶⁵Bacon, 'Of Plantation', 106.

⁶⁶Ibid. 107.

⁶⁷Ibid., 106.

⁶⁸This is a recurring theme in Bacon's thought: 'For I do not chase like a child after golden apples, but stake everything on a victory for art in its race against nature', Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, (176) 177.

⁶⁹A good introduction of the interpretative problems of *New Atlantis* is Brown Price ed., *Francis Bacon's New Atlantis. New Interdisciplinary Essays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002). See also Jacqueline L. Cowan 'Francis Bacon's 'New Atlantis' and the alterity of the New World', *Literature and Theology* 25, no. 4 (December 2011).

⁷⁰Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 59.

Putting together the utopian text and the very practical instructions about the correct way to plant it is easy to recognise the coherence between the two, and the continuity of both with the overall Baconian project to enlarge the boundaries of the human empire over Nature.

Imperiality and plantation seem animated by the same purpose. Neither imperialism nor colonialism have profit as their main goal. In this sense, Bacon is not a gross utilitarian. Describing the myth of the race between Atalanta and Milanion, Bacon tells about the golden apple that Milanion threw in order to distract Atalanta, meaning that ‘to make the results of existing experiments better’, or ‘immediate profit’ must not be the goal of experiments.⁷¹ Bacon’s argument is very close, indeed identical, to the argument about colonisation that he exposes in *Of Plantation*, where he warns against a search for immediate profit instead of the patient creation of a productive colony.⁷²

Imperiality and colonialism do not deal with immediate profit but with the progress of the human race and for this reason they are actions most deserving of glory: ‘Plantations are amongst Ancient, Primitive, and Heroicall Workes.’⁷³ Similarly,

if anyone attempts to renew and extend the power and empire of the human race itself over the universe of things, his ambition (if it should so be called) is without a doubt both more sensible and more majestic than the others.⁷⁴

Moreover, scientific expansion, that is imperiality, has a moral dimension because ‘the blessings of discovery can reach out to the whole human race’.⁷⁵ The idea that the superior condition of Europeans put them in the position to help ‘barbarians’ emerges quite clearly:

Again consider (if you will) the difference between the life of men in any of the most civilised provinces of Europe and in one of the most savage and barbarous regions of the New Indies, and then you will think it great enough to justify the remark that ‘Man is God to man’.⁷⁶

Ultimately, the morality of both imperialism and colonialism rests on charity. Formally, the continuing expansion of empire and plantation rests on the assumption that charity may expand limitlessly, because ‘charity knows no bounds’.⁷⁷

Science and morals can be augmented by the action of the human race following an accumulative structure. The actions of the human race must conform to morals, thus aiming to improve ‘man’s estate’.

A crucial question remains open: the relation with the non-European other. Does the technological divide among different people and the need to improve man’s estate imply an active policy aimed toward improving the condition of ‘savages’? A similar question arises from *Of Plantations*: does Bacon’s preference for plantation in a pure soil entail indifference to the relations with original people of New World?

It is evident that Bacon does not theorise, at least in a literal sense, a ‘war of civilisation’ and also rejects the idea of a forced conversion of ‘savages’ as I will show below. This leads some scholars to reject a connection between colonialism and the expansion of human’s Empire over nature.⁷⁸

The essay *Of Plantations* offers a useful perspective to address this theme. First of all, it is useful to keep in mind the historical context of Virginian plantation. For English planters a war of conquest in

⁷¹‘praesenti Experimentorum fructu iuuet’ Bacon, ‘The Novum Organum’, (38) 39. ‘Immediate profit’ is the translation by Lisa Jardín and Michael Silverthorne see Francis Bacon, *New Organon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). See also Bacon, ‘Advancement of Learning’, 32.

⁷²Bacon, ‘Of Plantations’ 106.

⁷³Ibid., 106.

⁷⁴Bacon, *The Novum Organum*, (194) 195.

⁷⁵‘Inuentorum beneficia ad vniuersum genus humanum pertinere possunt’. Bacon ‘Novum Organum’, (192) 193.

⁷⁶‘Rursus (si placet) reputet quispiam, quantum intersit inter hominum vitam in exultissima quapiam Europae Prouincia, & in Regione aliqui Nouae Indiae maxime fera & barbara: Ea[m] tantum differre existimabit, vt merito Hominen homini Deum esse’, Bacon, ‘Novum Organum’, (194) 195.

⁷⁷Ibid., (22) 23.

⁷⁸The importance of colonialism in Bacon’s thought has been questioned, from different points of view by Irving, *Natural Science* and ‘In a pure soil’, and by Markku Peltonen, *Classical Humanism and Republicanism*.

Spanish-fashion was not viable so, as we saw earlier, English planters had to manage their presence in the New World in a different way. This does not mean that no relation was conceived of between native and planters. Bacon, despite his preference for pure soil, acknowledges the presence of natives and the necessity establishing a relationship: 'If you *Plant*, where Savages are, doe not onely entertains them with Trifles, and Gingles; But use them justly, and gratuitously.'⁷⁹ Of course, it is correct to see here the great difference between what Bacon intends as plantation and a predatory form of colonialism. Neither here nor in any other part of his works does Bacon advocate the acquisition of colonies through policies of war and conquest, but this does not mean that the objective was to expand civilisation to natives. A brief sentence explains his basic idea: 'send oft of them, over to the Country, that *Plants*, that they may see a better Condition then their owns, and commend it when they returne'.⁸⁰ What did Bacon mean with this idea? First of all, it emerges that Bacon, despite his love for a plantation in a pure soil, sees clearly that relations with 'Indians' were unavoidable. This relation entails an anthropological asymmetry, precisely of the same kind he writes about in *Novum Organum*: there is a better condition, thanks to arts and work, than savagery. However, they can understand and learn how to improve their own condition because, as already noted, they differ by art, not by some physical defect. The key question comes from the idea that savages should 'send oft the to the country that plants'. It is not clear how or why a 'savage' should be interested in doing so and, above all, Bacon do not explain if it may imply a degree of force. Bacon is not explicit on this point, but it seems plausible that Bacon does not think of violence as a necessary tool. Then, what might Bacon be thinking of when he speaks of the journey of a savage to England? A story from the chronicles of Bacon's era fits his idea perfectly.

In 1616 the leading planter John Rolfe married Pocahontas, the daughter of a 'savage' king Wahunsonacock. This event had an important political meaning, because it significantly contributed to stopping the Indian war starting in 1609.⁸¹ Pocahontas, the favourite daughter of Wahunsonacock, was kidnapped in 1613 in order to help planters stop the first Anglo-Powhatan war. The story of Pocahontas is muddled with myth, and it is not fully clear what pushed Pocahontas to leave her group to join the English colony.⁸² What really matters here is the trip that Rolfe and his wife made to London in 1616–1617:

Their appearance at court, accompanied by the once and future governor of Virginia, Lord de la Ware [*sic*], and his wife, constituted a key item in the tour that was designed to bring renewed (positive) attention to English America and to convince people to invest their persons and their money in the Virginia Company's venture.⁸³

Of course, the presence of Pocahontas aimed to show the end of tensions between Powhatan peoples and Virginia planters, and that the peaceful coexistence was possible.

While we do not have evidence that concretely shows that Bacon, writing *Of Plantation*, was thinking about Pocahontas, or that he was even aware of this event, given the interest than Bacon had in the Virginia Company and his role in the court of King James, it was very likely that he was fully aware of this event. We can only speculate about Bacon's assessment of the Rolfe-Pocahontas marriage, but it serves as a perfect example of what the Lord Chancellor writes in *Of Plantation*. It was the evidence that a conversion, not only to Christianity but to European civilisation, was possible by means of the main Baconian power: knowledge. It is the power of knowledge that permits the civilisation of savages, both because of the superior form of European knowledge and because of the capability of the 'savage' to learn.

⁷⁹Bacon, 'Of Plantation', 108.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 108.

⁸¹Roper, *English Empire*, 16–17.

⁸²About the story of Pocahontas see Camilla Townsend, *Pocahontas and the Powhatan Dilemma* (New York, Hill and Wang, 2004) and Helen C. Rountree, *Pocahontas, Powhatan, Opechancanough: Three Indian Lives Changed by Jamestown* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005).

⁸³Roper, 'English Empire', 73.

There is another feature that can be usefully brought in to interpret the Pocahontas story from a Baconian point of view: marriage. In *The Masculine Birth of Time* Bacon writes about a very special kind of marriage:

What I plan for you is to unite you with things themselves a chaste, holy, and legal wedlock. And from this association you will secure an increase beyond all the hopes and prayers of ordinary marriages, to wit, a blessed race of Heroes or Supermen who will overcome the immeasurable helplessness and poverty of the human race, which cause it more destruction than all giants, monsters or tyrants, and will make you peaceful, happy, prosperous and secure.⁸⁴

The supreme form of marriage is, according to Bacon, between man and nature. The marriage between man and things in *The Masculine Birth of Time* is aimed at producing security and happy richness. Similarly, Colonisation for Bacon is the creation of a productive, prosperous community through a carefully crafted plan of exporting European arts to America.

Metaphorically, the marriage between Pocahontas and Rolfe means not only marriage between a man and a woman, and of civilisation with nature, but also a marriage between England and the New World that can create a new kind of Commonwealth and enlarge both the English empire and the empire of human race over nature.

Reading *Of Plantations* with the Pocahontas story in mind is useful because it sheds light on the passage about the savage's trip to England. Far from being a mere occasional remark, it shows that the theme of relations between Europeans and Indians, and their civilisation is crucial to Bacon.

After all, even the scholars who more energetically maintain that Bacon was not a theorist of colonialism admit that Bacon supports that 'the English were to adopt a policy of granting civic laws to their colonies, and incorporating the indigenous people into the English Commonwealth'.⁸⁵

4. The meaning of Bacon's colonialism and imperialism

In the last paragraphs, it emerges that plantation rests on the possibilities opened by science and mechanical arts and that the relationship with 'savages' was informed by the intention of 'conversion'. Colonialism, if conducted according to the project of the improvement of human race's condition, is an important part of it and therefore an important part of the construction of a new civilisation. The opposition between the Spanish and English approaches to colonisation shows the difference between imperialism as a mere tool to enlarge the boundaries of a kingdom and an imperality, i.e the improvement of mankind conditions. Colonialism is also the instrument of imperality used to show human race better conditions of life for 'savages' whose 'conversion' is a task basically assigned to the power of European (and English) example. Colonialism is not a goal in itself but is instrumental to the constitution of a new civilisation that is the real end of Bacon's thinking. In this sense, more than a theorist of imperialism, Bacon is the theorist of imperality as the foundation and the expansion of a civilisation recognisable as European.

The Atlantic world, and more specifically the New World, was not a theatre of a nineteenth-century imperialistic competition, but a laboratory of a new understanding of the world directly derived from the experience of scientific and technological revolutions of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. If the discovery of America is the key event of modernity that changes the conception of space, in Bacon this process emerges very clearly: the discovery of America makes the world definitively global.⁸⁶ That event is not separable from the technologies that permitted it, above all the nautical compass, but is also related with the innumerable discoveries that would follow it.⁸⁷

The space of America was not, of course, empty but inhabited by a great number of peoples. Therefore, the new space had to be thought of also in terms of an ethnology, which Bacon does

⁸⁴Bacon, 'The Masculine Birth of Time', 72.

⁸⁵Irving, *Natural Science*, 40.

⁸⁶Carl Schmitt describes this process very clearly. See Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth* (New York: Telos), 86–7.

⁸⁷Bacon, 'Novum Organum', (194) 195.

not found on the analysis of the capacity or characteristic of man as an individual, but on the capacity to use reason to build an intersubjective and rational productive system that faces the problems of human being's existence and subsistence with technical and scientific practices. It is this intersubjective capacity, 'art' in Bacon's words, that constitutes the difference between Europe and America, not some bodily or mental capability deducible from an analysis of the individual.

As we saw earlier, Bacon defines his era by comparison with Romans and Greeks and also with the 'savages' of the New World. There is a crucial difference if the 'we' Bacon is identifying is defined in opposition to Romans and Greeks or if it is defined not historically but ethnologically in opposition to the New World. While the reference to Romans and Greeks, however obviously Eurocentric, is a temporal characterisation, the ethnological definition of Western Europe implies also a spatial definition that indicates the boundaries of a civilisation. Historical time, while theoretically pertaining to the whole 'human race', is determined by the belonging to a concrete and spatially defined social group. This conception of historical time means that Bacon is performing a temporalisation of space: the definition of space is strictly related with the action of a community that shares the same historical time. Moreover, the action of this community can expand this historical time to other spaces and peoples because of the theoretical and potential equality of human race.

Through this temporal and ethnological structure Bacon's theory of civilisation opens up the world as well as time. Time is explicitly thought of as linear in opposition to traditional time: 'Then no longer shall we, like people bewitched, tread out our narrow round; instead we shall bestride the walls of the world.'⁸⁸ This walk implies a directionality in time, towards improvement and progress, in other words towards Western Europe as a model.

This is the temporal structure of imperialism that also shapes Bacon's colonialism. Is it possible to see the connection between imperialism and colonialism as a form of 'imperialism'? The answer is yes, if one can accept to consider Bacon's imperialism as a peculiar conception. Of course, it would be anachronistic to see in this conception imperialism in nineteenth-century terms. Baconian imperialism lies neither in a worldwide application of a politics of power, nor simply in its epistemological construction, but in its historical structure shaped by the goal of improving human race's conditions, together with the individuation of modern Western Europe as the real subject of this historical structure.

This theory of civilisation is one of the key features of Bacon's modernity, that is strictly related, indeed identified, with imperialism as the dominion of human race on nature. Using the category of modernity to define Bacon's thinking is somewhat debatable. Some authors underline how Bacon's method is far from the real modern scientific method.⁸⁹ On the other hand, Paolo Rossi wrote extensively to assert Bacon's modernity and to present a canvas of the origins of modernity that is less lineal and more complicated, showing the complex relationship between the scientific revolution and magical thought. In this complicated process Bacon's global reassessment of science is a fundamental contribution toward overcoming the idea of science as a personal, solitary and often esoteric work and towards creating the idea of science as an open, collective and public enterprise.⁹⁰ Kuhn adds another important element of Baconian modernity. According to him, the main contribution of Bacon to modern science is the facilitation of the development of a wide range of new sciences that often originates from prior crafts, for example chemistry, through the elaboration of the scientific method.⁹¹ But even more important in the definition of Baconian modernity is the new relationship that Bacon proposes between science and humanity. Bacon's modernity lies in the idea that science and technique must be the core of the whole organisation of society.⁹² Work, through mechanical arts, becomes the centre of society because only work can transform nature into something useful for human race.

⁸⁸Neque igitur amplius intra Circulos paruos (veluti incantati) subsultabimus, sed Mundi Pomoeria circuitione xquabimus. *Ibid.*, (462) 463.

⁸⁹For example, the position of Koyré is particularly harsh. According to him, Bacon has nothing to do with scientific revolution (and with modernity). Alexander Koyré, *Etudés Galiléennes* (Paris: Hermann, 1966), 12.

⁹⁰Paolo Rossi, *Francesco Bacone dalla magia alla scienza* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1974), 15–16.

⁹¹Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Essential Tension. Selected Studies in Tradition and Change* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1977), 46.

The strict relationship between society and science as production of knowledge implies a relation between politics and knowledge. The relation between Bacon's political activity and writing is the centre of one of the most important debate in Bacon's scholarship. On one side, there are authors that consider natural philosophy and politics as different and separated fields.⁹³ On the other side, there are authors that consider natural philosophy and politics as strictly connected. Within this perspective we can distinguish two interpretations. One of them sees the reform of natural philosophy as a means to develop the power of British monarchy.⁹⁴ The other considers that Bacon's reform of knowledge may contribute to the order of society, supposing a direct political value of science.⁹⁵

Presenting imperialism and colonialism as related fields I offer a contribution to the latter perspective. This implies also a rethinking of the idea of politics. It is not only about the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, the debate about the best State, or about how to increase the power of the monarchy. Bacon introduces a further level, 'human race', that is the key subject that must dominate the nature, and elaborate an order not limited to the State but aimed to create a new civilisation. This is the symbolic meaning of the message of the Father of Salomon House to the whole world: 'God bless thee, my son, and God bless this relation which I have made. I give thee leave to publish it for the good of other nations; for we here are in God's bosom, a land unknown.'⁹⁶

All these elements that shape Bacon's conception of imperialism and colonialism, constitute, more than his imperialism, his modernity, which is the creation of a global order founded on science and technology and driven to constantly expand. To this order imperialism and colonialism offer both temporal and spatial categories. In this sense Bacon is part, and first theorist, of the process that leads modernity to become global.

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⁹²One of the first to present this view was Benjamin Farrington, see Francis Bacon, *Philosopher of Industrial Science* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1951).

⁹³Markku Peltonen elaborates this perspective in Markku Peltonen, 'Politics and Science: Francis Bacon and the True Greatness of States', *Historical Journal* 35 (1992); see also Peltonen, 'Bacon's Political Philosophy' in *The Cambridge Companion to Bacon*, ed. Peltonen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 283–310.

⁹⁴See Julian Martin, *Francis Bacon, the State and the Reform of Natural Philosophy*, esp. 141–75; John E. Leary, *Francis Bacon and the Politics of Science* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1994), esp. 257–8; Stephen Gaukroger, *Francis Bacon and the Transformation of Early-Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 6–10.

⁹⁵White, 'Peace among the Willows'; Michelle Tolman Clarke, 'Uprooting Nebuchadnezzar's Tree: Francis Bacon's Criticism of Machiavellian Imperialism', *Political Research Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (Sep., 2008); Denise Albanese, 'The New Atlantis and the Uses of Utopia', *ELH* 57, no. 3 (Autumn, 1990).

⁹⁶Bacon, 'New Atlantis', 83.