

An Examination of the  
Philosophy of Bacon

WHEREIN DIFFERENT QUESTIONS  
OF RATIONAL PHILOSOPHY  
ARE TREATED

Joseph de Maistre

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY  
RICHARD A. LEBBUN

---

*An Examination of the  
Philosophy of Bacon*

*An Examination of the Philosophy of Bacon* is one of Joseph de Maistre's most original and important works. Probably best known for his defence of throne and altar and for his critique of the political and religious thought of the Enlightenment, Maistre also addressed more fundamental philosophical issues. His critique of Bacon is a vigorous attack on the materialism and scientism that he judged characterized the thought of the French philosophes. Although often neglected, this work is crucial for an understanding of Maistre's epistemology, which formed the philosophical basis for his critique of modern science as well as for his criticisms of other aspects of Enlightenment thought. Given Maistre's stature in the history of conservative thought, his critique of Bacon remains significant for what it tells us about Maistre's own thought, for what it reveals about attitudes towards science in his time, and for its relevance for issues that remain under debate today. The work is also a showcase for Maistre's polemical skills and his powerful prose style.

This volume provides an annotated translation of Maistre's complete text, an introduction that places the work in the context of Maistre's life and offers a critical exposition and assessment of his criticisms of Bacon, Biographical Notes on persons cited or mentioned by Maistre, and a Bibliography.

Richard Lebrun is a professor in the Department of History, St. Paul's College, University of Manitoba.

---

*This page intentionally left blank*

---

*An Examination  
of the Philosophy  
of Bacon*

---

Wherein Different  
Questions of Rational  
Philosophy Are Treated

---

JOSEPH DE MAISTRE

---

Translated and edited by  
RICHARD A. LEBRUN

McGill-Queen's University Press  
Montreal & Kingston • London • Buffalo

McGill-Queen's University Press 1998  
ISBN 0-7735-1727-8

Légal déposit fins cours: 1998  
Bibliothèque nationale du Québec

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

This book has been published with the help of a grant from the Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada, using funds provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada

---

**Complete Cataloguing in Publication Data**

Maisie, Joseph, comte de, 1753-1821.  
*An Examination of the Philosophy of Bacon:*  
wherein different questions of natural philosophy are treated.  
Translation of *L'examen de la philosophie de Bacon*.  
Includes bibliographical references and index.  
ISBN 0 7735 1727 8

1. Maisie, Joseph, comte de, 1753-1821. *Examen de la philosophie de Bacon*. 2. Bacon, Francis, 1561-1626 - Criticism and interpretation. 3. Bacon, Francis, 1561-1626 - Contributions in philosophy of science. 4. Maisie, Joseph, comte de, 1753-1821 - Contributions in philosophy. I. Lebrun, Richard A. (Richard Alexander), 1921- II. Title.

81198.65513 1998            192            C35-988876-X

---

---

## *Contents*

Preface vii

Introduction ix

Bibliography xliii

Biographical Notes on Persons Cited or  
Mentioned by Joseph de Maistre xvii

A Note on the Text lix

Abbreviations lxiii

*An Examination of the Philosophy of Bacon*

PART ONE LOGIC AND THE RATIONAL SCIENCES

- 1 *Novum organum* – Induction and  
Syllogism 5  
Appendix to Chapter 1 32
- 2 Of Experience and of the  
Genus of Discoveries 37
- 3 Continuation of the Same Subject 52
- 4 Of Essences and of Their Definitions 65
- 5 Cosmology and the System of  
the World 74
- 6 The Ebb and Flow of the Seas 87
- 7 Motion 91
- 8 Natural History and General Physics 96

---

vi Contents

9	Optics - The Progression of Light	102
10	Experiments and Physical Explanations	111
11	Meteorology	127
12	The General Goal of Bacon's Philosophy	139
BOOK TWO METAPHYSICS		
1	Of God and of Intelligence	157
2	Of the Soul	172
3	Of the Origin of Spontaneous Motion and of Motion in General	181
4	Of the Senses and of the Sensible Principle	195
5	Of Matter and of the Principle of Things	204
6	Final Causes	235
7	The Union of Religion and Science	270
8	Bacon's Religion	292
9	Bacon Judged by his Translator - Conclusion	307
	Index	320

---

## Preface

No book of this kind could be completed without the support, cooperation, and assistance of a number of people, and I am most pleased to acknowledge the assistance of all those who assisted in the preparation of this volume. In the first instance, I continue to be extremely grateful to Count Jacques de Maistre for his cooperation in a microfilm project a number of years ago. That project gave me access to Joseph de Maistre's manuscript of *J. Examen de la philosophie de Bacon*; without this access it would have been impossible to produce a critical translation of this work. I also want to acknowledge the support and assistance of fellow "Maistrian" Professor Jean-Louis Darcel of the Université de Savoie in Chambéry for his moral support, for his help in identifying some particularly elusive references, and for his hospitality and good advice during a pleasant visit to Chambéry in the autumn of 1995. I owe a special debt as well to Dr. Jean-Yves Franchère of Paris for verifying a number of difficult references for me. I am also grateful to Dr. Larry Hurtado of the University of Edinburgh for his assistance in trying to identify one of Maistre's references to a supposed Pauline saying.

I am most pleased to acknowledge and thank colleagues who read and critiqued drafts of my translation, Dr. William R. Everdell of Saint Ann's School in Brooklyn Heights, New York, and Dr. George Knysb of St. Paul's College (University of Manitoba). These same colleagues, as well as Dr. Owen Bradley, University of Tennessee (Knoxville), Dr. Graeme Garrard of the University of Wales (Cardiff), and Dr. Jean-Yves Franchère, also provided comments on drafts of my Introduction. Their encouragement, corrections, and suggested revisions are reflected on almost every page of this book.

Assistance with identifying and translating citations in Greek and Latin was provided by Dr. Henry Hardy of Wolfson College, Oxford University, and University of Manitoba colleagues Dr. Edmund G.



Berry, Professor Emeritus, and Dr Rory Egan, both of the Department of Classics, University of Manitoba colleague Mrs Christina Povolodo of the Department of French and Spanish, who assisted with some Italian passages, also deserves recognition. Where published translations have been used, these have been acknowledged in the notes.

Finally, I want to thank the University of Manitoba for Administrative and Research Leaves that provided the necessary time to bring this project to completion.

Responsibility for the interpretation and for the remaining errors and faults is, of course, my own.

---

## Introduction

Joseph de Maistre's *Examination of the Philosophy of Bacon* is of interest for a number of reasons. In the broad context of early nineteenth-century intellectual history, Maistre's critique of empiricism can be seen as part of a wider defence of Christian spiritualism against modern scientific materialism. Sharing something of the perspective of Chateaubriand's Romanticism as well as the spiritualism of Maine de Biran and Royer-Collard, Maistre's work exemplifies a turning away from the materialism and empiricism of the Encyclopedists and the *Mémoires* and a return to religious and spiritual values. Since Bacon had been touted by the philosophes as the first spokesman for modern science and the father of its inductive method, he was perhaps a logical target for an offensive against the Enlightenment, but Maistre was the only conservative writer of the time to undertake a detailed critique of the English thinker.

By the time he turned his attention to Bacon, Maistre had already won a reputation as a defender of throne and altar. In his *Considerations on France* of 1797 he had spelled out what he perceived to be the deleterious social and political consequences of eighteenth-century thought. In other well known works – the *Essay of the Generative Principle of Political Constitutions and other Human Institutions* (1814), *On the Pope* (1819) and *St. Petersburg Dialogues* (1821) – Maistre would broaden his attack on the Enlightenment and develop his distinctive defence of traditional Catholic beliefs. However the *Examen* has its own special interest as the work that contains Maistre's most detailed critique of Bacon and eighteenth-century scientism.

Though perhaps not as well known as some of Maistre's other works, the importance of the *Examen* has long been recognized, at least in France. On its publication in 1836, Augustin Bonnelly remarked that "it would perhaps be necessary to go back to Pascal's *Lettres provinciales* to find a more severe, more mocking, more pointed critique."

More recently, it has been described it as “one of Maistre’s most original and most neglected works,”<sup>2</sup> one that is essential for an understanding of Maistre’s epistemology, which in turn provided Maistre with the foundations for his political thought as well as for his critique of modern science and the thought of the Enlightenment.<sup>3</sup> Given its importance in the corpus of Maistre’s works, what is surprising is that the *Examination* has never before been translated into English.<sup>4</sup>

The work is significant as well as an example of Maistre’s powerful prose style. Sainte-Beuve, probably nineteenth-century France’s most distinguished literary critic, thought that Maistre’s chapters in the *Examination* “on final causes and on the union of religion and science contained ... certainly some of the finest pages that have ever been written in a human language.”<sup>5</sup> The *Examination* is noteworthy too as a showcase of Maistre’s polemical skills.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time it must be acknowledged that the *Examination* has always been of more interest to Maistre’s admirers than to Bacon scholars. Whatever the validity of Maistre’s critique (and, as we shall see, he certainly raised issues of continuing importance), the fact is that his critique has been generally ignored by those who have studied Bacon and his role in the history of science. Whether or not this neglect has been unfortunate or blameworthy, given Maistre’s stature in the history of conservative thought, his critique of Bacon remains significant for what it tells about Maistre’s own thought, about attitudes towards science in his time, and for its relevance for issues that remain under debate today.

It also must be acknowledged that it is not easy to reach a fair assessment of Joseph de Maistre’s critique of Francis Bacon. Both Bacon and Maistre have been subject to sharply divergent interpretations.<sup>7</sup> Both have been charged with subordinating the search for truth to personal and political considerations. Both dealt with issues (such as the nature of science and its relation to society generally and to political and religious authority) that remain very controversial.<sup>8</sup> Both were masters of rhetoric, highly proficient in the lawyer’s trade of persuasive argument. Most of Bacon’s writings were either in English or have been translated into English. If English-speaking readers are to judge between them, it seems only fair that Maistre’s case should also be available in English.

In short, there seems reason enough to provide an English version of Maistre’s *Examination of the Philosophy of Bacon*.

In this introduction, I will try to place the work in the context of Maistre’s life and other writings, explore his reasons for attacking Bacon, outline the main features of Maistre’s epistemology, note the

differences between his "first" and "second" critiques of Bacon, trace the main features of his attack in the *Examination*, review some assessments of the effectiveness and validity of his criticisms, and consider as well the relevance of Maistre's ideas today.

Joseph de Maistre himself was amused by the rather incongruous spectacle of two men of state struggling over philosophical questions. In a letter written at the time he was working on the Bacon book, he told a friend: "I don't know how I found myself led to mortal combat with the late Chancellor Bacon. We boxed like two Fleet Street toughs, and if he pulled some of my hair, I'm also sure his wig is no longer in place."<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, the quarrel with Bacon was no joking matter and no accident, since it involved fundamental issues that had concerned Maistre most of his life.

There is little in Maistre's background, education, and early career that would lead anyone to predict his challenge to Bacon's stature as a philosopher of science.<sup>11</sup> Born in 1753, the son of a distinguished magistrate in Chambéry, the capital of Savoy, then a province of the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia, Maistre received a conventional classical education from the Jesuits and from the local royal *collège* before going on to Turin for his legal training. He followed in his father's footsteps, becoming in turn a magistrate of the Senate of Savoy, a provincial high court that functioned as the equivalent of a French *parlement*. Promoted to the rank of Senator just on the eve of the French Revolution, he might well have continued in a conventional legal career if a French Revolutionary army had not invaded his homeland in September 1792. Maistre was unusual among the native-born magistrates of the Senate of Savoy in that he alone refused to live under the Revolutionary regime. He fled, first to Piedmont, and then to Lausanne, where he began a new career as a counter-revolutionary propagandist.

In retrospect, there are facets of Maistre's early career that might be considered straws in the wind. We now know that by 1792 he had put together one of the largest and most scholarly private libraries in pre-Revolutionary Savoy.<sup>12</sup> He owned works by most of the important authors of the Enlightenment, including Bacon, Galileo, John Locke, Descartes, Newton, G.J. s'Gravesande, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Hélyétius, Condillac, Mably, and Adam Smith, editions of Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique* and Diderot's *Encyclopédie*, a 180-volume collection of the *Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences et des Arts*, and a 230-volume collection of the *Journal Encyclopédique* (from the 1760's through 1791).<sup>13</sup> It is true that Maistre had to abandon most of this first library when he fled Savoy in 1792, but we know that he built up a second library from that date on, a library that

included editions of Descartes, Leibniz, Mirabeau, Newton, and Voltaire.<sup>11</sup> We also know, from his private notebooks, that in addition to judicial work in these years he was reading widely in both classical and modern authors.<sup>12</sup> In 1784, when Joseph's younger brother Xavier and some other young gentlemen in Chambéry began organizing a project to launch Savoy's first hot-air balloon (in emulation of the Montgolfier brothers who made the first successful flight at Annonay in France the previous summer), it was Joseph who was sent to Geneva to consult the celebrated physicist Benedict de Saussure on the technical details. He was also drafted to write the "Prospectus" to enlist subscribers to finance the project, which succeeded with a twenty-minute ascent in May 1784.<sup>13</sup> From Maistre's diaries we know as well that while in exile in Lausanne in 1793 he found time to take lessons in "experimental physics."<sup>14</sup> In short, Maistre had been a magistrate in the tradition of Montesquieu, with an intelligent and scholarly interest in most aspects of contemporary culture. As will be apparent to any reader of his mature works, including the *Examination of the Philosophy of Bacon* with its citations and references to an impressive number of figures in the history of science, Maistre became one of the most many-sided and best read men of his generation.<sup>15</sup>

Another manifestation of Joseph de Maistre's broad interests was his involvement in Freemasonry during most of the years of his judicial career in Savoy. It was often the case, apparently, that in the eighteenth century Masonic lodges were active in the promotion of scientific learning.<sup>16</sup> The lodges to which Maistre belonged, however, seem to have been characterized by esoteric and mystic impulses rather than Newtonian science.<sup>17</sup> Maistre may have learned how to use the Masonic rhetoric that spoke of the deity as an "Eternal Geometer,"<sup>18</sup> for example, but when the opportunity arose in 1782 for him to express his own ideas on the nature and goals of Freemasonry, what he proposed was a scheme to use the network of lodges to work behind the scenes for the reunification of the Christian churches.<sup>19</sup> Maistre's Masonic adventure confirms his openness to certain fashionable features of Enlightenment culture, but it would be difficult to establish any link between these activities and his knowledge of contemporary science. On the other hand, Maistre's attraction to the esoteric currents of thought he encountered in Masonic circles suggests that a desire of the possibility of arcane or occult knowledge may have been one motivating factor in his epistemological theorizing and his critique of scientism.<sup>20</sup>

In any case, we have evidence that well before the French Revolution confirmed Joseph de Maistre in his opposition to the main currents of Enlightenment thought, he had already been disquieted by

the potentially adverse effects of the natural sciences.<sup>29</sup> As early as his 1782 unpublished memoir on Freemasonry, he had criticized those "supposedly wise men" who, "ridiculously proud of some childish discoveries, discourse on fixed air, vaporize the diamond, teach planets how long they must last, swoon over a little prostration of the proboscis of an insect, etc., but take care not to condescend to asking themselves once in their lives what they are and what is their place in the universe."<sup>30</sup> In his *Considérations on France* of 1797, the work that established his reputation as a defender of throne and altar, Maistre claimed that "too many French scholars [savants] were the principal authors of Revolution, too many approved and gave their support."<sup>31</sup>

In his next important work, the *Essay on the Generative Principle of Political Constitutions and other Human Institutions* (written in 1809 in St Petersburg where he was serving as the Sardinian ambassador to the court of the Russian tsar but not published until 1814), Maistre sounded a sharp warning about the dangers of science, claiming that "if we do not return to the old maxims, if the guidance of education is not returned to the priests, and if science is not uniformly relegated to a subordinate rank, incalculable evils await us. We shall become brutalized by science, and that is the worst sort of brutality."<sup>32</sup>

These works, however, contained no specific attacks on Bacon or his philosophy. We know that Maistre had long admired Bacon's *Essays*, which he described in his *St Petersburg Dialogues* (otherwise so critical of Bacon) as containing "more solid, practical, and positive true knowledge than can, in my opinion, be found in any other book of this kind."<sup>33</sup> In one of Maistre's early notebooks we find extracts from "Of Judicature," one of Bacon's *Essays*, with Maistre's French translation on opposite pages.<sup>34</sup> Maistre's own *Discours sur le caractère extérieur du magistrat*, an oration delivered to the Senate of Savoy in 1782, had been on one of the themes of Bacon's essay, i.e., that the magistrate must not only be just, but his external appearance and actions should bespeak dignity and incorruptibility.<sup>35</sup> Maistre seems, too, to have agreed with Bacon's approach to interpreting the myths and fables of antiquity. In a 1798 notebook entry, Maistre excerpted from William Robertson's *Historical Disquisition Concerning the Knowledge which the Ancients had of India* (Basel 1792) a passage that denigrated Greek mythology as the product of a period of anarchy, violence, and immorality, and then added his own reflection on the passage: "Greek mythology is full of intelligence, and even wisdom, which is very extraordinary. It contains a crowd of allegories, charming or sublime. It could not have been invented by barbarians. That some vulgarity may have been mixed in proves nothing. See Bacon's *Wisdom of the Ancients*."<sup>36</sup> In his *Essay on the Generative*

*Principle* (1809), Maistre suggests that a fable can be something "much truer than ancient history for those who are ready to understand it,"<sup>31</sup> a proposition that clearly accords with Bacon's approach. In any case, it is curious and probably significant that Bacon's *Wisdom of the Ancients* is never cited in Maistre's *Examination of the Philosophy of Bacon*.<sup>32</sup>

On reflection, we can think of a number of reasons why Joseph de Maistre might have been expected to be relatively sympathetic to Francis Bacon. Both were trained in the law, both were staunch royalists and opposed to political or social innovations, both were highly sensitive to any infringement on the sovereignty of the monarch, and both feared the disruptive effects of private interpretation of the Scriptures and "sectaries" who defied established religious authority.<sup>33</sup> They differed in language, nationality, and religion, of course, but Maistre was something of an Anglophile who had taken the trouble to teach himself a reading knowledge of English while still a young magistrate.<sup>34</sup> He clearly respected (and often cited) other Protestant English writers such as Ralph Cudworth, Robert Boyle, Robert Black, and Isaac Newton. If Maistre turned on Bacon, it had to be for more substantive reasons than difference of religion or nationality.

The first evidence we have that Joseph de Maistre was thinking of giving Bacon special attention occurs in his notebooks. In a manuscript notebook labelled *Philosophie D* there is a substantial section headed "Notes on Bacon to be used for an examination of his philosophy," which is dated St Petersburg, 1806. On the very first page of these notes, Maistre cites Article 6 of Bacon's *Filae Labyrinthi sive Formula inquisitionis* (which, despite the Latin title, was written in English). Maistre's reflections on the passage reveal some of his deepest convictions, suggest the relationship of these concerns to Bacon, and explain as well, perhaps, his failure to publish his critique during his lifetime.

Article 6 explains Bacon's principal thought: "For since the Christian faith, the greatest number of wits have been employed, and the greatest helps and rewards have been converted upon civility. And before this likewise, the greatest part of the studies of philosophers was contained in mortal philosophy, which was as the heathen divinity."<sup>35</sup>

This is what really distressed him, and this is what pleases our century so much. With all his intelligence, he ignored the following fundamental truths:

1. All nations begin with theology, and are founded on theology
2. The more its institutions are theological, the stronger the nation, Rome, Sparta, etc.

3. All sciences spring from theology, and everywhere theologians found sciences. Egyptian priests. Etruscan brabanns. Fathers of the Church. St Thomas. St Bernard. The twelfth-century Bacon. Alexis de Spina (Alessandro della Spina), Dominican, who died at Pisa in 1313. Cardinal Nicolaus of Cusa, who died in 1464. Purbach [Peurbach], Regiomontanus and finally Copernicus. Bacon himself says that no one occupied themselves entirely with science *except perchance some monk in a cloister*. Ibid. § 6.

4. The more theology is perfect, the more it is fertile. This is why Christian nations have surpassed all others in the sciences, and why the Indians and the Chinese, with their *so much* and *too much* praised wisdom, will never catch up with us. Copernicus, Kepler, Descartes, and Newton are the immediate productions of the Gospel: I say the immediate productions.

5. The more theology will be cultivated, honoured, and dominant, the more (all else being equal) human science will be perfect.

The development of these truths would produce a large book, but why would it be necessary to prove them? They are clear in themselves; to see them, it is only necessary to open one's eyes. They flow from the most evident principles. Metaphysics demonstrates them, history proclaims them. Sometimes I am tempted to cry out *NILI HOMINUM USQUEQUO GRANT CORDIS*<sup>66</sup> But I am afraid that Condilliac's disciples and even his schoolchildren will treat me only as a priest: I do not want to expose myself.<sup>67</sup>

Maistre had already developed the theme of the relationship between theology (or religion) and lasting institutions in his *Considerations on France*,<sup>68</sup> and it would be the central theme of his *Essay on the Generative Principle of Political Constitutions and other Human Institutions*. Extending the notion of the foundational and civilizing role of religion from politics to the sciences was probably natural enough.

Maistre's reluctance to expose himself may account for the fact that it is only in the works published after his death in February 1821, *The St Petersburg Dialogues* (1821) and *An Examination of the Philosophy of Bacon* (1836), that his criticisms of Bacon and what he represented were expressed in any detail. We can speculate that his caution may be explained by his awareness of the achievements of contemporary science and by his appreciation of the seriousness of the philosophical and religious problems involved. In a letter written towards the end of his life, Maistre warned a clerical friend who was thinking of writing a work of apologetics:

Be very careful ... of the objection taken from science. It is a very delicate point ... this is a subject about which I have meditated a great deal. Science is a plant that we must abandon to its natural growth ... To be learned is not everything, it is necessary to be as learned as necessary, and when necessary,



and as much as necessary. The fire that gives life to man, the fire that warms him when he is cold, and the fire that burns him when he falls into it, is not at all the same thing in its results, and yet it is always *fire*.<sup>39</sup>

The delicacy of the issues involved is a point that Maistre stressed in the long last note of the *St Petersburg Dialogues*. There, after reflecting at length on various theoretical, mathematical, and observational issues concerning astronomy and geomorphology, he breaks off with the following unfinished remark:

In closing, let us observe that several parts of science, notably those in question at the moment, rest on infinitely delicate observations, and that all delicate observation requires a delicate conscience. The most rigorous probity is the premier quality of every observer ...<sup>40</sup>

This note also suggests Maistre's focus on moral issues. As we will see, Maistre's critique of Bacon centers on what he perceives to be the dangerous moral implications of Bacon's philosophy.

Maistre's "first" attack on Bacon occurs in the *St Petersburg Dialogues*. Although the *Dialogues* were written first (during the years from 1809 to 1813), with the *Examination of the Philosophy of Bacon* following in the years from 1814 to 1816, it is probably a mistake to try to trace any substantive development in his critique in the intervening years.<sup>41</sup> It is true that in the *Dialogues* Maistre gives the impression that he is seeing and judging Bacon through his eighteenth-century disciples rather than from a detailed study of Bacon's own writings. He says that "there is a sure rule for judging books just as there is for judging men: it is enough to know *by whom they are loved and by whom they are hated*." Maistre uses Bacon to illustrate the rule: "As soon as you see a book made popular by the encyclopedists, translated by an atheist, and unstintingly praised by the past century's flood of philosophers, you can be sure, without further examination, that its philosophy is false and dangerous, at least in its general foundations."<sup>42</sup> However, as we have already seen, we now know that it was in 1806 that Maistre began his "special and thorough study of that strange philosophy" (as he put it in a letter to Louis de Bonald).<sup>43</sup> If the attack in the *Dialogues* lacks the long quotations from various Latin, English, and French editions of Bacon that are a feature of the *Examination*, as well as the much sharper tone of the second critique, it must be for stylistic or strategic reasons.<sup>44</sup> Maistre was almost ready to publish the *St Petersburg Dialogues* when he died; we simply don't know if he ever intended the *Examination of the Philosophy of Bacon* to see the light of day.

In any case, the context of Maistre's attack on Bacon in the *Dialogues* is an epistemological discussion, which in turn is part of a broader discussion of the utility of prayer. The latter topic is obviously one of the major themes of the *St. Petersburg Dialogues*, which are subtitled "Conversations on the Temporal Government of Providence." The efficacy of prayer as a "secondary cause" depends, of course, on the existence of a transcendent God, and Maistre's epistemological discussion aims at demonstrating the possibility of knowing and interacting with a reality that transcends the visible material world. Since much of the force of the argument against Bacon (in both the *Dialogues* and in the *Requiem*) rests on this epistemological theory, it appears essential to provide at least a brief explanation Maistre's position as it appears in the *Dialogues*.

It must be appreciated, of course, that Maistre was not a systematic or "professional" philosopher; nowhere did he offer a systematic exposition of his epistemological ideas. His views were elaborated and enunciated in reaction to the theories of John Locke, which Maistre judged to be absolutely destructive of traditional morality.<sup>45</sup> In Maistre's view, to maintain, as Locke did, that all ideas come to us from our senses, was to "materialize the origin of our ideas,"<sup>46</sup> and unleash materialism. In effect, Maistre's concerns went much deeper than technical epistemological questions. Insofar as materialism implied fatalism, questions of liberty and freedom of the will were inevitably involved. Maistre equated the defence of innate ideas with the defence of the spirituality and immortality of the soul, the existence of God, and Christian morality and religion.

In opposition to Locke's sensationalism, Maistre adhered to a theory of innate ideas by which he explained both the process and the capabilities of human knowledge. By innate ideas Maistre meant those "original notions common to all men, without which they would not be men, and which are in consequence accessible, or rather natural, to all minds."<sup>47</sup> In contrast to Locke, Maistre denies that sense experience can be the formal cause of knowledge. For Maistre the important thing about the learning process is that human beings react to sense experience in a way that is determined by the innate ideas or first principles that are proper to human nature. He insists that "all rational doctrine is founded on antecedent knowledge ... [and that] syllogism and induction always proceed from principles posed as already known."<sup>48</sup> Maistre argues that if one refuses to admit innate ideas, "no proof is any longer possible, because there are no longer principles from which it can be derived."<sup>49</sup> For Maistre, "the essence of principles is that they are anterior, evident, non-derived, indemonstrable, and causes in relation to the conclusion."<sup>50</sup> In a statement that

embodies the argument he will use against Bacon, Maistre maintains that "All the sciences communicate with one another by these common principles."<sup>51</sup>

Maistre liked to illustrate his argument by likening innate ideas in humans to instinct in animals. In a notebook entry dating from about 1805, he uses the phrase "innate capacities" to capture what he has in mind, and remarks: "My dog sees my two legs just as I see them myself; but neither one nor the other of us sees *twoness*."<sup>52</sup> In a more elaborate development of the same analogy in the *St Petersburg Dialogues*, Maistre argues that a dog accompanying his master to an execution sees the same events as his master, but equipped only with instinct, is unable to comprehend the significance of the events. "Ideas of morality, sovereignty, crime, justice, public force, etc., attached to this sad spectacle mean nothing to it. All the symbols of these ideas surround it, touch it, press in on it so to speak, but without avail, since no symbol can have meaning unless the idea it represents pre-exists."<sup>53</sup> In a similar way, as human beings, "we can ourselves no doubt be surrounded, touched, and pressed upon by the action and agents of a superior order of which we have no knowledge other than that which pertains to our actual situation."<sup>54</sup> However, according to Maistre, this is a profound difference between the two situations, "*Your dog does not know that he does not know, and you, intelligent man, you know it. What a sublime privilege this intuition is!*"<sup>55</sup> Awareness of the true dimensions of human knowledge should, according to Maistre, lead man to acknowledge that the visible world is only a part of reality: "I make a very great use of this intuition in all my inquiries about *causes*. I have read millions of witticisms about the ignorance of the ancients who saw spirits everywhere: it seems to me that we are much more foolish in never seeing them anywhere. They never stop talking about *physical causes*, but what is a physical cause?"<sup>56</sup>

All the talk about physical causes, of course, is what Maistre blames on Bacon. The notion of a physical, or material, cause, Maistre regarded as a "NON-SENSE, even a contradiction in terms."<sup>57</sup> He could not see how matter, which the physics of his time thought of as essentially inert (as in Newtonian laws of motion), could be the true cause or origin of anything. Yet this "chimerical" idea, Maistre charges in the *Dialogues*, was just what Bacon proposed, and what has misled the crowd who followed him. Having assumed that all the forces acting in the universe are material, Bacon had sought to find a common or original cause in the material world by imposing one cause upon another. However Bacon was mistaken, Maistre contended, in his ideas of nature and "the science that must explain it."<sup>58</sup> "How can they be

so blind as to seek causes in *nature* when nature itself is an effect?"<sup>60</sup> Scientific discovery, he argues, "consists solely in the uncovering of unknown facts or relating unexplained phenomena to already known primary effects that we take for causes." "The discovery of facts" he continues, "has nothing in common with that of causes."<sup>61</sup> However, it was Bacon's treatment of final causes that upset Maistre most.

Bacon, he charged, dared to maintain that inquiry into final causes was harmful to true science. For Maistre, this was an error as glaring as it was deadly, and contagious as well. Using all his energy to attract men to the physical sciences, Bacon had left them with a distaste for all other kinds of knowledge. Seemingly inspired by a "mechanistic cancer" against all spiritual ideas, Bacon had turned men against Plato and towards Democritus, relegated metaphysics and natural theology to the realm of positive theology, and disposed of theology by confining it to the church, "forbidding it to come out."<sup>62</sup>

These were serious charges, of course, but compared to the violence of Maistre's attack in the *Examination*, the criticisms levelled against Bacon in the *St Petersburg Dialogues* seem relatively passionless. Bacon was mistaken, his ideas were chimerical, those who followed him were misled, and the consequences have been unfortunate. In the *Dialogues*, however, there is no attack on Bacon's personal morality. Maistre castigates Bacon's eighteenth-century disciples for having loved and praised him for his worst qualities (i.e., his "materialism"), while refusing "to acknowledge what was good and even excellent in him."<sup>63</sup> In the *Dialogues*, Maistre was concerned to refute the "materialism" and "practical atheism" of the eighteenth century. Maistre thought that the eighteenth century had "made Bacon its god,"<sup>64</sup> and concluded that "time has come when all the idols must fall."<sup>65</sup>

Bringing down the idol meant attacking Bacon's reputation as well as his ideas. Voltaire may have called Bacon the "father of experimental philosophy,"<sup>66</sup> but Maistre thought it "a very great error to believe that he influenced the progress of science."<sup>67</sup> "All the true founders of science preceded him or were ignorant of him," Bacon was, at best "a barometer who announced good weather, and because he announced it, was thought to have made it."<sup>68</sup>

In the *Dialogues*, then, Maistre denigrated Bacon's reputation, but his treatment remained reasonably balanced. In contrast, in the *Examination of the Philosophy of Bacon*, Maistre mounts a focussed, sustained offensive designed to demolish Bacon's reputation as an innovator in scientific method, demonstrate the childishness of his scientific views, and prove the consequences of his philosophy destructive of true philosophy and religion.

Perhaps the most novel and remarkable feature of Maistre's critique in the *Examination* is its thoroughly negative character. He simply refuses to give Bacon any credit whatsoever for constructive innovation in scientific method or any contributions to scientific knowledge. This is a judgement that flatly contradicted the general opinion of Maistre's own time. Maistre exaggerates a bit in claiming that his century had made Bacon its god, but it is nevertheless true that he had been widely praised and rarely criticized. Even the Jesuit *Journal de Trévoux* had praised Bacon's "profound books," his "just and reasoned induction," and his "great genius and knowledge."<sup>66</sup> There had been some authors who had criticized Bacon on one point or another (and Maistre carefully collected and used every such criticism he could find), but Maistre's total condemnation seems unprecedented. He was fully aware of the novelty of his wholesale attack and he expected that his book would "astonish" even such a like-minded spirit as his fellow conservative, Bonald.<sup>67</sup>

Part of the explanation for all the uncritical praise of Bacon, Maistre suggested (perhaps as a polemical tactic), was that "Voltaire, as well as most of Bacon's panegyrists had not read him." At best, they may have opened Bacon's books and "gone through them by chance."<sup>68</sup> Relying on his reputation, they had attributed to Bacon knowledge that he did not have. Maistre depicted his own task as largely one of exposure, of simply showing the reader what Bacon had said and what he really meant. "As soon as one understands him," Maistre claimed, "one sees that he knew nothing."<sup>69</sup> Demonstration of Bacon's ignorance is thus a major theme and polemical device in Maistre's critique. As evidence of this ignorance, Maistre cites Bacon's excessively pessimistic view of seventeenth-century science, his opposition to the great scientific achievements of his own time (such as Copernican astronomy), his invectives against the syllogism, and his exaggerated claims for the originality and worth of his "new instrument" (as Maistre derisively translated *Novum Organum*).<sup>70</sup> Maistre charges as well that all Bacon's pretensions talk about "legitimate induction," method of exclusion, and his recommendations as to the proper method of conducting experiments only show that Bacon was not a scientist, and that he knew nothing about how scientific discoveries were actually made. Going to great lengths to expose Bacon's views on such diverse topics as astronomy, the tides, motion, natural history, optics, and meteorology, Maistre pillories his beliefs as a shameful collection of extravagant nonsense.<sup>71</sup>

In the light of recent attempts to blame Bacon's "knowledge is power" program for our contemporary ecological crisis, Maistre's judgement of the Baconian vision of the practical possibilities of

science merits particular attention. Maistre did take note of the list of practical benefits Bacon hoped to derive from science, but only to ridicule the list as "false and impossible."<sup>57</sup> Reproducing Bacon's English text in a long footnote, Maistre poked fun at Bacon's ideas by providing an ironical translation in his text. Bacon's vision for "the prolongation of life," becomes "make a man live three or four centuries."<sup>58</sup> Bacon's talk about the "making of new species" and "transplanting of one species into another" is ridiculed as sheer foolishness. To Bacon's suggestion that science should invent new "instruments of destruction, of war and poison," Maistre's sarcastic comment is "always *QUOD UTAT HUMANUS* [for the use of man]."<sup>59</sup> When Bacon expresses his hope for "greater pleasures of the senses," Maistre asks "Ah! Mr. Chancellor, what are you thinking about?"<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, even though he scorned Bacon's particular ideas about the benefits that might be expected from science, Maistre's own ideas about the utility of science are not that different. His "true maxims" about man and science picture man using his powers, perfecting them by exercise, and "turning the forces of nature to his profit."<sup>61</sup> We may conclude that his quarrel was not with Bacon's program of using science for the amelioration of the human condition, but with the philosophical assumptions Maistre judged to underlie Bacon's vision of science. The focus of Maistre's concern remains the "materialism" and "atheism" of eighteenth-century philosophy, with over half the *Examination* devoted to exposing and denouncing Bacon's alleged contributions to the errors of eighteenth-century thought.

Maistre's most fundamental and most often repeated complaint about Bacon is that "he is at the same time ridiculous and dangerous for having called this science [physics] *THE TRUTH*, as if there were no other."<sup>62</sup> To summarize the argument and state it in modern language, Maistre's accusation is that Bacon reduces all science to physics, both methodologically, by assuming that the method of physics is the only method of discovering truth, and materially, by assuming that all truth is essentially the truth of physics – its propositions and data.<sup>63</sup> It must be stressed, however, that Maistre's attack on Baconian science was not an attack on science itself. Although Maistre did not use the terms "empiricism" and "scientism," it is clear that what he found unacceptable were the assumptions that all our knowledge is derived from sensation and experience (i.e., empiricism) and that all philosophical problems could be resolved by science (i.e., scientism).<sup>64</sup>

The argument for the ridiculousness of Bacon's philosophy is based on the epistemological theory Maistre had enunciated in the *St. Petersburg Dialogues*. The very possibility of science, according to Maistre's theory, depends on the innate ideas that are common to all

human minds. Without such first principles of human knowledge, Maistre argued, experiments would be useless because there would be no basis for judging their validity.<sup>85</sup> Against the notion that physics alone is real, Maistre maintains that "all the sciences, without distinction, have their reality in the intelligence that possesses them."<sup>86</sup>

Basing himself in part on his own epistemological theory, Maistre challenged the credibility of Bacon's theory of induction. Maistre's criticisms of Bacon's ideas on "induction," the syllogism, and Bacon's claim that his method of "legitimate induction" constitutes a "new instrument" for discovery are elaborated in the first four chapters of the *Examination*. Since Bacon's account is far from clear and since commentators still have not reached agreement on the substance or worth of Bacon's concept of induction, it is not surprising that Maistre was not entirely successful in his description and critique of Bacon's views.

As Amédée de Margerie pointed out in his preface to the 1884 edition of the *Examination*, by using the phrase *novum organum* Bacon was not claiming to give man a new faculty (like a new limb, as Maistre suggested), but only a new method of using his existing faculties.<sup>87</sup> Bacon may have been guilty of pretension in trying to appropriate the title of Aristotle's treatises on logic, but not of folly. Maistre's complaint about Bacon's use of the word *form* to designate essence also seems unjust; such usage had ample precedent in the Aristotelian and scholastic traditions.<sup>88</sup>

Although Maistre accuses Bacon of misunderstanding the nature of both induction and syllogism and of confusing the two, it must be acknowledged that Maistre's own contention that induction is nothing more than a special kind of syllogism is less than helpful.<sup>89</sup> We can also observe that no one has adopted Maistre's proposal to employ the "old dialectic" in the new sciences.

Maistre was on sounder ground in criticizing Bacon's "method of exclusion," which prescribed systematic elimination of false theories as the proper method of achieving progress in science. Maistre argued that nothing was "more absurd ... nothing more contrary to the development of the human mind and to the progress of the sciences."<sup>90</sup> As Maistre pointed out, Bacon's approach would appear to rule out "conjecture," or what we would call intuition and hypotheses.<sup>91</sup>

Maistre is also on firm ground when he charges that Bacon "battled against a shadow" in trying "to prove the uselessness of the syllogism in experimental physics."<sup>92</sup> As Maistre rightly points out, citing a long list of astronomers, mathematicians, chemists, mechanics, and naturalists who had preceded Bacon, "it was never a question of the syllogism

in any book written on the sciences of observation.<sup>95</sup> Maistre has good reasons as well for doubting the possibility of inventing a sure-fire "method of invention" and for stressing the role of genius in discovery and invention.

As historians of the philosophy and methodology of science have insisted, the "problem of induction" has been and remains one of the most intractable issues relating to the actual practice of science.<sup>97</sup> Despite the prescriptions of Bacon, of other philosophers of science, and of some practising scientists themselves, working scientists have generally paid little attention to strict rules of inductive method.<sup>98</sup> If one conceives of the "arch of knowledge" as having two legs, one an inductive leg that involves the process of proceeding from observation of particulars to more general conclusions, and the other a deductive leg that involves proceeding from known or established principles or laws back down to specific applications, theorists have always found it much more difficult to account for what goes on in the inductive process than to describe the logical process by which specific "truths" are deduced from accepted premises.<sup>99</sup> Bacon's proposed methodology of "legitimate induction" scarcely resolved the problem, nor did Maistre. Even so, raising doubts about the effectiveness of Baconian induction might be counted an effective polemical technique for getting a hearing for his case against Bacon's philosophy.

Bacon's philosophy is not only ridiculous, Maistre argues, "it is eminently dangerous and tends directly to the degradation of man."<sup>100</sup> It is dangerous because the inevitable consequence of the radical reduction of all science to physics must be the promotion of materialism and atheism. If physics is the only true science, all others are reduced to mere opinion.<sup>101</sup> Maistre pointedly asks what happens to religion, mathematics, astronomy, literature and the fine arts?<sup>102</sup> More important still, he complains, metaphysics "loses the place and functions that it had occupied up to him."<sup>103</sup> In the past, metaphysics had meant natural theology, but for Bacon it appears to be not much more than a kind of generalized natural science that, as Maistre read Bacon, "looks for nothing outside nature."<sup>104</sup>

Maistre was highly suspicious of what he interpreted to be a scheme to relegate the traditional subject matter of metaphysics to the realm of positive theology. Bacon might have talked about giving "to faith that which belongs to faith," but the consequence of his system was, in Maistre's view, to "degrade reason by rendering it, so to say, foreign to God."<sup>105</sup> Bacon's system was a threat to revealed religion as well, Maistre argued, because "as soon as you separate reason from faith, revelation not being able to be proved, proves nothing."<sup>106</sup>



---

sample content of An Examination of the Philosophy of Bacon: Wherein Different Questions of Rational Philosophy are Treated

- [read online La chambre de veille pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub](#)
- [Titanic Style: Dress and Fashion on the Voyage pdf, azw \(kindle\)](#)
- [download online Rogues' Gallery: The Secret Story of the Lust, Lies, Greed, and Betrayals That Made the Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)
- [download Me, Myself and Pie](#)
  
- <http://xn--d1aboelcb1f.xn--p1ai/lib/La-chambre-de-veille.pdf>
- <http://bestarthritiscare.com/library/Alejandro-Gonzalez-Irritu--Contemporary-Film-Directors-.pdf>
- <http://berttrotman.com/library/This-Sentence-is-False--An-Introduction-to-Philosophical-Paradoxes.pdf>
- <http://cambridgebrass.com/?freebooks/To-Have-And-To-Hold--An-Intimate-History-Of-Collectors-and-Collecting.pdf>