

**Francis Bacon's Quasi-Materialism and its Nineteenth-Century Reception (Joseph de Maistre and Karl Marx)**

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**Abstract:** This paper will address the nineteenth-century reception of Bacon as an exponent of materialism in Joseph de Maistre and Karl Marx. I will argue that Bacon's philosophy is "quasi-materialist." The materialist components of his philosophy were noticed by de Maistre and Marx, who, in addition, pointed out a Baconian materialist heritage. Their construction of Bacon's figure as the leader of a materialist lineage ascribed to his philosophy a revolutionary import that was contrary to Bacon's actual leanings. This contrast shows how different the contexts were within which materialism was conceived and valued across the centuries, and how far philosophical and scientific discourses may be transformed by their receptions, to the point that in many cases they could hardly be embraced by the authors of these discourses.

**Keywords:** Francis Bacon, Joseph de Maistre, Karl Marx, materialism, empiricism, nineteenth-century philosophical reception, Francis Bacon's reception

The reception of Francis Bacon has taken place along several paths, that have crossed, faced, or ignored each other. As a result, different images of Bacon have emerged, that sometimes have little or even nothing to do with each other. Father of experimental philosophy, father of empiricism, inductivist, atheist, devoted Christian, eclectic, utilitarian, positivist and materialist—these are some of the labels that he has received. The figure of Bacon underwent dramatic changes during the nineteenth century. While in the seventeenth century he was recognized as one of the most influential *novatores*, and in the *Siècle des lumières* this recognition reached its climax, by the mid-nineteenth century his good philosophical reputation began to fall.<sup>1</sup> This turn explains—at least in

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<sup>1</sup> There are many studies dedicated to the reception of Bacon. Among them are: Paul Dibon, "Sur la réception de l'œuvre de F. Bacon en Hollande dans la première moitié du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle," in Marta Fattori (ed.), *Francis Bacon: Terminologia e fortuna nel XVII secolo*, Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1984, pp. 91–116; Michèle Le Doeuff, "Bacon chez les grands au siècle de Louis XIII," in Fattori (ed.), *Francis Bacon*,

part—why Bacon ultimately remained outside the core of the philosophical canon of early modern philosophy that has been predominant over the last two centuries.

This canon has been shaped in the wake of the “epistemological paradigm,”<sup>2</sup> which postulates that the kernel of true philosophy is the problem of knowledge and assumes that during the early modern period philosophers increasingly understood the importance of this problem. Rationalism, empiricism and critical philosophy provided the early modern responses to the questions on knowledge posed by the revival of skepticism during the Renaissance. In the most restricted versions of this traditional narrative, Bacon appears as supporting actor in a cast whose leading stars were Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz (rationalism), Locke, Berkeley and Hume (empiricism), and Kant (critical philosophy).

This paper will address the nineteenth-century reception of Bacon as an exponent of materialism. I will concentrate on two interpretations maintained by representatives of the most extremely opposed ideological perspectives at the time: on the one hand, the Savoyard Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821), Catholic, prominent anti-Enlightenment advocate and staunch opponent of the French Revolution; on the other hand, the German Karl Marx (1818–1883), scientific socialist and founder of modern communism. Of course, their opinions about materialism were quite distinct from each other. While de Maistre regretted its subversive impact on the political and religious

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pp. 155–178; Richard Yeo, “An Idol of the Market-Place: Baconianism in Nineteenth Century Britain,” *History of Science* 23/3 (1985), pp. 251–298; Michel Malherbe, “Bacon, l’Encyclopédie et la Révolution,” *Les études philosophiques* 3 (1985), pp. 387–404; Antonio Pérez-Ramos, *Francis Bacon’s Idea of Science and the Maker’s Knowledge Tradition*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, pp. 7–31; Alberto Elena, “Baconianism in the Seventeenth-Century Netherlands: A Preliminary Survey,” *Nuncius* 6/1 (1991), pp. 33–47; Brian Vickers, “Francis Bacon and the Progress of Knowledge,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53/3 (1992), pp. 495–518; Graham Rees, “Introduction,” in *The Oxford Francis Bacon* [OFB hereafter], vol. XI: *The Instauration Magna Part II: Novum Organum and Associated Texts*, ed. by Graham Rees and Maria Wakely, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004, pp. xxii–xxxviii; Chantal Jaquet, “Introduction,” in Chantal Jaquet (ed.) *L’héritage baconien au XVII<sup>e</sup> et au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Paris: Kimé, 2000, pp. 7–16; Dana Jalobeanu, “Four Idols of Baconian Scholarship,” *Procedia: Social and Behavioral Sciences* 71 (2013), pp. 123–130; Dana Jalobeanu, “Francis Bacon, Early Modern Baconians, and the Idols of Baconian Scholarship,” *Societate și politică* 7/1 (2013), pp. 5–27; Alexis Tadié, *Francis Bacon: Le continent du savoir*, Paris: Garnier, 2014, pp. 197–204; Denise Phillips, “Francis Bacon and the Germans: Stories from when ‘science’ meant ‘Wissenschaft,’” *History of Science* 53/4 (2015), pp. 378–394; Vera Keller, “Deprogramming Baconianism: The Meaning of *desiderata* in the Eighteenth Century,” *Notes and Records: the Royal Society Journal of the History of Science* 72/2 (2018), pp. 119–137.

<sup>2</sup> On the notion of the “epistemological paradigm” of early modern philosophy see Knud Haakonssen, “The History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy: History or Philosophy?,” in Knud Haakonssen (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 3–25.

fields and advocated for the restoration of the monarchic order, Marx wanted to pave the way for a materialist interpretation of history whose highest goal was to reach a classless society. As we shall see, the preoccupation with the religious consequences of materialism was far deeper in de Maistre.

Despite these obvious ideological differences, de Maistre's and Marx's concern with materialism had some important points in common that justify a comparative study of their receptions of Bacon. In the first place, both authors shared the strategy of tracing back the origins of materialism in order to discuss its historical evolution and its philosophical and religious significance. Although the texts where they exposed their genealogies of materialism were not histories of philosophy, both were permeated by the historical approach that gave shape to the institutionalization of philosophy in European universities during the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> In the second place, their historical construction of the category "materialism" was part of nineteenth-century discourses that linked national European identities with specific philosophical "families" or "schools," often regarded in relation to the major early modern trends mentioned above.<sup>4</sup> In this context, Bacon was seen as the leader of the English philosophical spirit, just as much as Descartes was portrayed as the main voice of the French philosophy. Last but not least, and in connection with the former point, de Maistre and Marx were deeply engaged with political agendas and were convinced that materialism entailed revolutionary political implications.

Before analyzing de Maistre's and Marx's readings,<sup>5</sup> I would like to briefly discuss to what extent Bacon's philosophy can be regarded as a materialist philosophy. I will argue that Bacon's philosophy is "quasi-materialist." This entails that it contains some theses that can be regarded as supporting a materialist approach. That is why eighteenth- and nineteenth-century materialist philosophers shared some tenets with him and recognized Bacon as one of their sources or main influences. The materialist

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<sup>3</sup> On the importance of the literary genre of the history of philosophy in nineteenth-century philosophy, see Ulrich Schneider, *Philosophie und Universität: Historisierung der Vernunft im 19. Jahrhundert*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1999. On the category "materialism" in nineteenth-century histories of philosophy, see Pierre Daled, *Le matérialisme occulté et la genèse du "sensualisme": Écrire l'histoire de la philosophie en France*, Paris: Vrin, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Delphine Antoine-Mahut and Silvia Manzo, "Introduction: Debates on Experience and Empiricism in Nineteenth Century France," *Perspectives on Science* 27/5 (2019), pp. 643–654; Élodie Cassan (ed.), *Bacon et Descartes: Genèses de la modernité philosophique*, Lyon: ENS Éditions, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Due to the limited scope of this paper, I will not analyze and criticize the historical (in)accuracy of De Maistre's and Marx's reconstructions of the materialist lineages and the many exponents included there. I will do that only in the case of Bacon's philosophy.

components of Bacon's philosophy were noticed by de Maistre and Marx, who, in addition, pointed out a Baconian materialist heritage. Although their interpretations of Bacon's work were sometimes inaccurate, they rightly claimed that Bacon's philosophy provided some seeds that found fertile soil in the full-fledged materialist doctrines developed by later generations.

*Was Bacon a materialist?*

To answer this question, we must first define what we mean by "materialism." I follow Charles Wolfe's general characterization of materialism as consisting of two basic theses: a) everything that exists is material, or the product of interactions or relations between material entities (cosmological thesis); b) every mental phenomenon is a corporeal phenomenon or process, or can be reduced to it (psychological thesis).<sup>6</sup> True, throughout history there have been several variants of materialism.<sup>7</sup> However, for the aim of this paper it will suffice to start from this general characterization.

My interpretation holds that Bacon's philosophy is quasi-materialist. This means that it contains (A) materialist theses and (B) pro-materialist theses, that is, theses usually associated with materialist positions.<sup>8</sup> However, at the same time, Bacon's philosophy includes (C) non-materialist theses. While the non-materialist theses prevent us from describing Bacon's philosophy as purely materialist, the predominance of materialist and pro-materialist theses over the non-materialist ones allows us to call it "quasi-materialist."

#### A) Materialist theses

- 1) Human beings have a sensitive soul that "must clearly be regarded as a corporeal substance" (psychological thesis).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Wolfe, "Materialism," in Aaron Garrett (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Eighteenth Century Philosophy*, London: Routledge, 2014, pp. 99–100; Charles Wolfe, *Materialism: A Historico-Philosophical Introduction*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2016, pp. 10–11.

<sup>7</sup> On the varieties of materialism, see Bloch, *Le Matérialisme*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995; Falk Wunderlich, "Varieties of Early Modern Materialism," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 24/5 (2016), pp. 797–813; Charles Wolfe, *Lire le matérialisme*, Lyon: ENS Éditions, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Of course, pro-materialist theses could be defended by non-materialist authors. For that reason, I described them as theses that were "usually" (not "always and necessarily") associated with materialist positions.

<sup>9</sup> Francis Bacon, *De augmentis scientiarum*, in *Works*, ed. by James Spedding, Robert L. Ellis and Douglas D. Heath, 14 vols., London: Longman, 1857–1874 (repr. Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt: Frommann,

- 2) “[N]othing really exists in nature besides individual bodies, carrying out pure, individual acts according to law” (cosmological thesis).<sup>10</sup>

#### B) Pro-materialist theses

- 1) Matter’s appetites play a central role in physical changes.<sup>11</sup>
- 2) Forms of simple natures—that constitute the highest subject matter of natural philosophy—are arrangements of latent corpuscles (and are the laws governing their motions).<sup>12</sup>
- 3) Corpuscular matter theory and high opinion of ancient atomism.<sup>13</sup>
- 4) Criticism of the explanatory and operational value of the final causes in natural philosophy.<sup>14</sup>
- 5) Commitment to the operational and technological goals of natural science.<sup>15</sup>

#### C) Non-materialist theses

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1961–1963) [SEH hereafter], vol. I, pp. 604–607 (Latin); vol. IV, pp. 396–399 (English). By itself and isolated from the rest, this claim—that has a natural philosophical and medical content—can be taken as a materialist thesis. However, given that Bacon also affirmed the existence of a rational soul in human beings (see C1 below) there is no unanimity among scholars concerning the issue of materialism regarding Bacon’s doctrine of the human mind. For a non-materialist reading, see Sorana Corneanu, “Francis Bacon on the Motions of the Mind,” in Guido Giglioni, James A.T. Lancaster, Sorana Corneanu and Dana Jalobeanu (eds.), *Francis Bacon on Motion and Power*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2016, pp. 201–229. For a materialist reading, see Sophie Weeks, “Francis Bacon’s Doctrine of Idols: A Diagnosis of ‘Universal Madness,’” *British Journal for the History of Science* 52 (2019), pp. 1–39. Graham Rees maintains a kind of intermediate position. See Graham Rees, “Francis Bacon’s Biological Ideas: A New Manuscript Source,” in Brian Vickers (ed.), *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp. 297–314.

<sup>10</sup> Francis Bacon, *Novum organum*, Book 2, Aphorism 2 (OFB XI 202).

<sup>11</sup> Silvia Manzo, *Entre el atomismo y la alquimia la teoría de la materia de Francis Bacon*, Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2006; Guido Giglioni, “Mastering the Appetites of Matter: Francis Bacon’s *Sylva Sylvarum*,” in Charles Wolfe and Ofer Gal (eds.), *The Body as Object and Instrument of Knowledge*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2010, pp. 149–167; Silvia Manzo, “The Ethics of Motion: Self-Preservation, Preservation of the Whole, and the ‘Double Nature of the Good’ in Francis Bacon,” in Giglioni, Lancaster, Corneanu and Jalobeanu (eds.), *Francis Bacon on Motion and Power*, pp. 175–200.

<sup>12</sup> Pérez-Ramos, *Francis Bacon’s Idea of Science and the Maker’s Knowledge Tradition*, p. 91; Silvia Manzo, “Francis Bacon and Atomism: A Reappraisal,” in Christoph Lüthy, John Murdoch and William Newman (eds.), *Late Medieval and Early Modern Corpuscular Matter Theories*, Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2001, pp. 229–230.

<sup>13</sup> There are many studies on this matter. For a survey, see Manzo, “Francis Bacon and Atomism.”

<sup>14</sup> Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, in OFB IV, ed. by Michael Kiernan, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000, pp. 58–59; Bacon, *De augmentis scientiarum*, SEH I 569–571.

<sup>15</sup> See for instance, Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis* (SEH III).

- 1) Human beings have a rational soul of an immaterial nature “springing from the breath of God.”<sup>16</sup>
- 2) There is a spiritual and providential God governing nature.<sup>17</sup>
- 3) The Adamic Fall is a central episode in the history of mankind and nature. The providential account and the Christian history of salvation provides legitimation to the reform of learning.<sup>18</sup>

The materialist theses were not minor but major components of Bacon’s philosophical project. The same holds for the other theses. A2, B1,2,3 and C2 were ontological tenets through which he conceived nature. B4 had to do with the methodology of the investigation of nature. B5 provided the ultimate goals of the Baconian natural science and C3 its theological legitimation. Finally, the doctrines on the human soul A1 and C1 were at the core of his philosophy of mind, his natural philosophy and medicine. They serve as a basis for the practical care of the human being in its entirety (body and soul).<sup>19</sup>

In the following sections, we shall see that de Maistre’s reception of Bacon was particularly preoccupied with the doctrines regarding the soul (A1 and C1), the reduction of nature to individual bodies (A2), the explanation of what he called “physical causes” to the detriment of “final causes” (B4), his sympathies for atomism (B3) and his conception of form and matter (B1, B2). In addition, he drew attention to the way in which, in his opinion, Bacon distorted the true meaning of the Bible to make it compatible with his materialistic views.<sup>20</sup> As for Marx, he was not interested in

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<sup>16</sup> Bacon, *De augmentis scientiarum*, SEH I 604–607.

<sup>17</sup> Bacon, *De augmentis scientiarum*, SEH I 569–571; Bacon, *Confession of Faith* (SEH VII).

<sup>18</sup> Bacon, *Novum organum*, Book 2, Aphorism 52 (OFB XI 446); Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, OFB IV 34, etc. For a survey of the role played by Adam’s fall in Bacon’s philosophy, see Silvia Manzo, “Francis Bacon: la ciencia entre la historia del hombre y la historia de la naturaleza,” *Cronos: Cuadernos Valencianos de Historia de la Medicina y de la Ciencia* 7/2 (2004), pp. 277–346.

<sup>19</sup> Despite the postulation of two kinds of souls, I do not find a clear-cut separation between a natural philosophical/medical and a metaphysical/theological perspective on the human mind in Bacon’s writings. For solid arguments in defense of this reading, see Sorana Corneanu, “The Nature and Care of the Whole Man: Francis Bacon and Some Late Renaissance Contexts,” *Early Science and Medicine* 22 (2017), pp. 130–156.

<sup>20</sup> The exclusion of the final causes from physics was one of the most controversial issues in the European reception of Bacon across the centuries. Already in the seventeenth century there were critical stances about it held by Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, with notes and dissertations of Dr. Johann Lorenz Mosheim, 3 vols., London: Thomas Tegg, 1845, vol. II, pp. 605–609 (first ed. 1678) or Samuel Parker, *Disputationes de Deo e providentia divina*, Oxford: M. Clark and Jo. Martyn, 1703, sect. XVI, pp. 283–288 (first ed. 1678). For later receptions of this aspect of Baconian

Bacon's views on the human soul, but he recovered the nominalism reflected in A2, his stances on atomism, forms and matter theory (B1, B2, B3), the explanation in terms of "physical" and non-teleological causes (B4) and the operational side of science (B5). Both de Maistre and Marx exaggerated the connotations of Bacon's B4 by interpreting it as an absolute separation of natural philosophy from theology. They attributed to him a sort of epistemological supremacy of natural philosophy and a sort of opposition between "physical" or "natural" causes against "theological" or "final causes."<sup>21</sup> They also linked Bacon's explanation of the origins of ideas in sense-experience as related with a materialist approach.<sup>22</sup>

### *The counter-revolutionary reception: Joseph de Maistre*

Born in Savoy, de Maistre earned law degrees from the University of Turin and served as magistrate and senator in Savoy. After the invasion of Savoy by the Napoleonic army in 1792, he went into exile (first in Piedmont and then in Lausanne). While living in Switzerland, he frequented the literary *Salon* of Germaine de Staël and engaged in counter-revolutionary propaganda. From 1803 onwards, during the post-revolutionary era, he spent fourteen years in St. Petersburg as the Piedmondese ambassador to the Russian court and continued his legal career. De Maistre was educated with the Jesuits, had an excellent library, and read several languages. He had an ample range of intellectual interests and became one of the best-read men of his generation. As a general attitude, de Maistre had a negative view of the religious, social and moral

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philosophy, see Dugald Stewart, "Of the Speculation concerning Final Causes," in Dugald Stewart, *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, 2 vols., Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Co., 1814, vol. II, pp. 453–466, and Pierre-Jean-George Cabanis, *Rapport du physique et du moral de l'homme*, introduction by Louis Peisse, Paris: Bailliere, 1844 (first ed. 1802), pp. 123, 235 note 1; Yeo, "An Idol of the Market-Place," p. 256; Malherbe, "Bacon, l'Encyclopédie et la Révolution," pp. 99–106.

<sup>21</sup> I will deal with Bacon's position on this issue below.

<sup>22</sup> The extent to which Bacon's philosophy can be considered as empiricist deserves a paper on its own. I sketched out my interpretation on this issue in Sofia Calvente and Silvia Manzo, "Early Modern Empiricism," in Dana Jalobeanu and Charles Wolfe (eds), *Encyclopedia of Early Modern Philosophy and the Sciences*, Cham: Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-20791-9\\_588-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-20791-9_588-1). On the association between empiricism and materialism, see Charles Wolfe, "Rethinking Empiricism and Materialism: A Revisionist View," *Annales Philosophici* 1 (2010), pp. 110–123; Daled, *Le matérialisme occulté*. For studies on the nineteenth-century notion of empiricism and Bacon's reception within this context, see the special issue Delphine Antoine-Mahut and Silvia Manzo (eds.), "Debates on Experience and Empiricism in Nineteenth Century France," *Perspectives on Science* 27/5 (2019) and Silvia Manzo, "Historiographical Approaches on Experience and Empiricism in the Early Nineteenth-Century: Degérando and Tennemann," *Perspectives on Science* 27/5 (2019), pp. 655–679.

impact of scientific progress. He believed that the spirit of the modern times was defined by the “hatred of authority” (be it the authority of God, of the sovereign, or of the Pope). This attitude towards authority was initiated by Protestantism and reached its highest point in the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. In response to this, de Maistre defended monarchical and papal absolutism, and the supremacy of the Catholic religion.<sup>23</sup>

De Maistre could not see in Bacon but the best friend of his worst enemies: the French Revolution and Protestantism. Indeed, Bacon had been revered by many philosophers that had paved the way for the victory of the French Revolution: the philosophers of the *Encyclopédie*, firstly, and the French *idéologues*, later. As for the Protestant cause, Bacon’s project of human dominion over nature. Puritan and non-Puritan British intellectuals in the context of a millennial expectation.<sup>24</sup> However, this kind of inspiration extended far beyond the limits of British Protestantism and reached different geographical areas and religious strains in Europe.<sup>25</sup>

The association of Bacon with the revolutionary cause, the defense of freedom and the critique of religion was already a matter of debate in nineteenth-century France, before de Maistre’s coming into the scene. Bacon was a major and controversial figure in the intellectual and political arena. Several authors from opposed bands discussed the merits of his work, his religious perspective and his Christian faith, regardless of the distinction between Protestantism and Catholicism.<sup>26</sup> Those who wanted to free Bacon from the accusation of atheism or anti-Christianism were aware that his philosophy was regarded as prone to materialism. One of them was Jacques-André Eméry, who, in 1799, was engaged in vindicating Bacon as a faithful Christian. He argued that although Bacon embraced some ideas of ancient atomism, he did not fall either in the materialist

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<sup>23</sup> On de Maistre’s life and work see Richard Lebrun (ed.), *Joseph de Maistre’s Life, Thought, and Influence: Selected Studies*, Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001 and Richard Lebrun, “Introduction,” in Joseph de Maistre, *An Examination of the Philosophy of Bacon: Wherein Different Questions of Rational Philosophy are Treated*, ed. and trans. by Richard Lebrun, Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014, pp. 9–41.

<sup>24</sup> This is the classical thesis maintained by Charles Webster, *The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine and Reform, 1626–1660*, second ed., Bern: Peter Lang, 2002.

<sup>25</sup> Due to the limited extension of this paper, I will not discuss here the complex reception of Bacon and Baconianism in Puritan and non-Puritan circles. For an interesting recent study from a different approach of Bacon’s influence and a discussion of the much debated “Merton thesis” on Puritanism and science, see Joel Mokyr, *A Culture of Growth: The Origins of the Modern Economy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017, ch. 7 and ch. 13.

<sup>26</sup> See Michel Malherbe, “Le christianisme de Bacon,” in Jaquet (ed.), *L’héritage baconien au XVII<sup>e</sup> et au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, pp. 91–110.



or the atheist camp, since he affirmed that the ultimate principle behind atoms is God.<sup>27</sup> This care for dissociating Bacon from materialism should not come as a surprise. The most read Baconian source in pre-revolutionary France, *Analyse de la philosophie de Bacon* (1755) by Alexandre Deleyre, shows Bacon as approving ancient materialism in explaining his position on final causes. In a section entitled “De la Métaphysique,” the text paraphrases Bacon’s texts very freely and attributes to him the following words: “les Matérialistes qui n’ont point apperçu les traces d’une Intelligence supérieure dans le gouvernement de l’univers, d’ailleurs connoissoient mieux la nature que la plûpart des autres Philosophes qui, voulant suivre la marche de la Providence, lui prêtoient des contradictions indignes même de l’homme.”<sup>28</sup> Deleyre likely drew on a passage of *The Advancement of Learning*, where Bacon pointed out that “Democritus, and some others” did not suppose a divine intelligence ordering the course of nature, and, as a result, their philosophies were closer to the truth than Aristotle’s and Plato’s who introduced final causes in their accounts.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, Deleyre introduced the label *materialists* in this paraphrasis, a word not used by Bacon and not yet coined at the time he wrote *The Advancement of Learning*.

Along the same lines as Emery, Jean-André de Luc opposed the attempts to secularize Bacon’s philosophy from a revolutionary perspective. In particular, he criticized the French translation of Bacon’s corpus promoted by the revolutionary government and undertaken by Antoine Lasalle in 1800.<sup>30</sup> Lasalle had portrayed Bacon as herald of a project of reform of learning leading to the progress of humanity and the equality of all men. In that project there is no place for religion. Besides, Lasalle heavily intervened in the original text with terminological modifications, additional notes, or omission of passages to make the original text compatible with this image of Bacon. De Luc strived to counter Lasalle’s picture of the Baconian philosophy and to reinterpret those passages where Bacon might be seen irreligious. For instance, de Luc revealed Lasalle’s deceitful maneuver of calling “agent universel” what Bacon’s original text called “God,” a term denoting a spiritual supreme being, the first cause of the

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<sup>27</sup> [Jacques-André Emery], *Le christianisme de François Bacon, Chancelier d’Angleterre; ou Pensées et sentiments de ce grand homme sur la Religion*, 2 vols., Paris: Benin, 1799, vol. I, pp. 155–156 note.

<sup>28</sup> Alexandre Deleyre, *Analyse de la philosophie du Chancelier François Bacon*, 2 vols., Amsterdam: Arstkee et Merkus, 1755, vol. I, pp. 72–73.

<sup>29</sup> Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, OFB IV 86.

<sup>30</sup> Francis Bacon, *Œuvres de François Bacon, Chancelier d’Angleterre: Avec des notes critiques, historiques et littéraires*, trans. by Antoine de La Salle, 15 vols., Dijon: Louis-Nicolas Frantin, 1799.

universe.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, de Luc accused Lasalle of making “grands efforts pour suppléer cet ÊTRE par quelque cause matérielle.” Even without saying it openly, he warned that Lasalle had transformed Bacon into a materialist.<sup>32</sup>

Within this controversial post-revolutionary context, de Maistre underlined the association of Bacon with materialism, and above all, the narrative that describes him as the initiator of a materialist progeny. His first mentions of Bacon appeared in *Les soirees de Saint-Petersbourg*, composed between 1809 and 1813, and published in 1831. They expressed relatively moderate judgments and rescued some elements that were considered as positive. However, in *Examen de la philosophie de Bacon ou l'on traite différentes questions de philosophie rationnelle* (written between 1814 and 1816; published posthumously in 1836) the rejection of Bacon's philosophy is virulent.<sup>33</sup> De Maistre not only read Bacon's main and most famous works, but also lesser-known writings. In addition, he engaged in respectfully disproving de Luc's and Emery's defenses of Bacon's faith. One important point that distinguishes de Maistre's concern with Bacon's piety from the earlier French reception mentioned above is the Savoyard's strong defense of Catholicism and his consequent attack on Bacon's philosophy and its materialist followers as products of the emergence of Protestantism.

One must bear in mind that the main source through which de Maistre accessed Bacon's texts was Lasalle's revolution-biased translation.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that he found materialist doctrines and its dangerous implications. The *Examen* is divided into two volumes. The first one analyzes the Baconian methodology—with a strong attack on induction—and his scientific ideas, in particular on astronomy, motion, tides, light, and physics in general. Volume two addresses Bacon's doctrines of God, the soul, spontaneous motion, the senses and sensible things, the final causes, the principles of the world and matter, the relationship between science and religion, and religion.

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<sup>31</sup> Jean-André de Luc, *Précis de la philosophie de Bacon*, 2 vols., Paris: Nyon, 1802, vol. II, pp. 155–160.

<sup>32</sup> De Luc, *Précis de la philosophie de Bacon*, vol. II, p. 124 note.

<sup>33</sup> I will quote the English translation by Richard Lebrun (see note 23) and I will also provide the reference to the French edition, Joseph de Maistre, *Examen de la philosophie de Bacon ou l'on traite différentes questions de philosophie rationnelle*, 2 vols., Paris-Lyon: Poussielgue Rusand-Pelagaud, 1836.

<sup>34</sup> Despite the fact that de Maistre's citations refer to Lasalle's translation, at least one time he quoted a passage from the original English version. See de Maistre, *Examination* p. 143 / *Examen*, vol. I, p. 296.

According to de Maistre's general verdict, two main adjectives best describe Bacon's philosophy: "dangerous" and "useless."<sup>35</sup> Bacon was useless because he made no positive contribution to any scientific methodology that may have been put into practice by any of the founders of modern science. In fact, de Maistre is one of the first critics who attacked Baconian induction in the nineteenth century.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, Bacon cannot be regarded as an inventor of successful scientific theories. The few cases in which he came close to the truth on scientific matters, he appropriated the ideas of others.<sup>37</sup> Against Voltaire's positive assessment of Bacon as a great scientist, de Maistre claimed that Voltaire talked about Bacon without having read him.<sup>38</sup>

As for Bacon's dangerousness, de Maistre referred to the terrible religious implications of his philosophy. While in several passages of his work Bacon shows himself as a faithful believer, de Maistre did not doubt that he was actually a hypocrite. In addition, he argued that materialism was not openly affirmed but remained hidden behind Bacon's statements. As the Savoyard says: "every time that Bacon is obscure, the meaning is always bad, and clear for the one who has taken the trouble to study his miserable philosophy."<sup>39</sup> De Maistre's insistence on Bacon's occultation of his impiety and his true materialist views is part of a typical way in which anti-materialists disqualified their opponents.<sup>40</sup> "Materialist" or "atheist" were opprobrious words. Those accused of being so were thought to disguise their innermost thoughts and feelings. Hence, de Maistre's argumentative strategy consists in disclosing the occult meaning behind Bacon's words and in pointing out who Bacon's followers were. As he says: "there has not been an atheist, not a materialist, not an enemy of Christianity, in our century so fertile in men of this kind, who has not made profession of being their

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<sup>35</sup> De Maistre, *Examination*, p. 304 / *Examen*, vol. II, p. 332.

<sup>36</sup> In the English context T. B. Macaulay criticized Bacon's induction in 1837. See Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Lord Bacon (July 1837)," in *Critical and Historical Essays contributed to the Edinburgh Review*, 3 vols., London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1848, vol. II, pp. 280–429. About three decades later, there appeared the influential criticism by the German Justus von Liebig, in Justus von Liebig, *Ueber Francis Bacons von Verulam und die Methode der Naturforschung*, Munich: Cotta, 1863. For studies on these receptions, see Yeo, "An Idol of the Market-Place," and Phillips, "Francis Bacon and the Germans." Similar views on Bacon's ideas were famously held by Alexandre Koyré in the twentieth century. See Alexandre Koyré, *Études galiléennes*, Paris: Hermann, 1966, p. 12, note 4.

<sup>37</sup> De Maistre, *Examination*, pp. 313–314 / *Examen*, vol. 2, pp. 354–355.

<sup>38</sup> Also, Macaulay claimed that Bacon was most mentioned than read. Much the same view is maintained by scholarly studies Yeo, "An Idol of the Market-Place," p. 288, and Malherbe, "Bacon, l'Encyclopédie et la Révolution."

<sup>39</sup> De Maistre, *Examination*, p. 158 / *Examen*, vol. II, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Bloch, *Le matérialisme*, ch. 1; Wolfe, *Materialism: A Historical-Philosophical Introduction*, ch. 1.

[Bacon's and Locke's] disciple."<sup>41</sup> Bacon's reputation began with the *Encyclopédie* and its main supporters (Voltaire, Diderot and D'Alembert). He was later commended by David Mallet (who in 1755 published *La vie de Francois Bacon*) and above all by the *idéologue* Cabanis, who in his *Rapport du physique et du moral de l'homme* (1802) depicted his own philosophy as inserted into a lineage begun by Bacon and continued by Hobbes, Locke, Helvétius and Condillac.<sup>42</sup>

In his disclosing strategy, de Maistre pointed out that Bacon's views on final causes were one of the strongest signs of his hidden materialism. In addition, he related this to Bacon's thesis A2 on cosmological materialism mentioned above:

Final causes or intentions are the torment of modern philosophy, which neglects nothing to get rid of them. From this, among other things, comes its great axiom: nature creates only individuals.<sup>43</sup>

Final causes, being the scourge of materialism, modern philosophers, of which Bacon is the undisputed chief, have neglected nothing to get rid of an argument that embarrasses so strongly the materialists and even the philosophers who, without being materialists precisely, still incline more or less towards material doctrines.<sup>44</sup>

Like many others in the nineteenth century, de Maistre associated empiricism with materialism, and thus believed that the empiricist explanation of the origin of the ideas involved inevitably a denial of immaterial reality.<sup>45</sup> For that reason, he thought that Bacon's explanation of the origin of ideas in sense-experience bears the unequivocal mark of materialism. He linked this view with Bacon's featuring of natural philosophy

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<sup>41</sup> De Maistre, *Examination*, p. 306 / *Examen*, vol. II, p. 338.

<sup>42</sup> De Maistre, *Examination*, pp. 305–306 / *Examen*, vol. II, p. 338. Cf. Cabanis, *Rapport du physique*, pp. 43–60; 74–78. Cabanis celebrated Bacon's method, his classification of sciences and arts, and his contributions related to medicine. While he referred to Bacon's position on final causes, he did not—at least not explicitly—associate him with materialism. On Cabanis' reception of Bacon, see Martin S. Staum, *Cabanis: Enlightenment and Medical Philosophy in the French Revolution*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980. It is interesting to notice that the Scottish reception of Bacon considered that the issue of the materiality of the soul was irrelevant for him. See Dugald Stewart, *Dissertations on the History of Metaphysical and Ethical, and of Mathematical and Physical Science*, Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1835, p. 34.

<sup>43</sup> De Maistre, *Examination*, p. 293 / *Examen*, vol. II, p. 308.

<sup>44</sup> De Maistre, *Examination*, p. 237 / *Examen*, vol. II, p. 179.

<sup>45</sup> See note 22.

(called *physique* in de Maistre's text) as the mother of all sciences.<sup>46</sup> The meaning intended by Bacon behind his hypocritical words is that natural philosophy (*physique*) is the only science, properly speaking; all real science belongs to it. This exaltation of the place of natural philosophy, de Maistre argued, occurs to the detriment of the true dignity of theology and metaphysics (the latter being reduced to the study of natural bodies).<sup>47</sup> To be fair, Bacon's description of natural philosophy as the mother of all sciences appears in the *Novum organum* and refers to those sciences studying different domains of nature (astronomy, medicine, etc.). Within this context, this affirmation does not involve a degradation of the particular sciences that do not study nature. Indeed, elsewhere Bacon advocated for the continuity among all the scientific branches, including theology, human philosophy and natural philosophy. His architectonics of science did not delineate a hierarchical or reductionist model.<sup>48</sup>

De Maistre attributed to Bacon ideas involving a cosmological materialism: the postulation of matter's inherent motion and the commitment to the atomic constitution of matter. He also ascribed to him the affirmation of matter's eternity. As textual evidence of Bacon's defense of the eternity of matter, de Maistre quoted long passages from *De principiis atque originibus*. Although in this work Bacon very explicitly embraced the creation of matter *ex nihilo* by God, as testified in the Holy Writ, de Maistre indicated that Bacon actually denied this dogma, in the following passage: “[in the Scriptures] it is not written that God in the beginning created matter, but that He created the Heaven and the Earth.”<sup>49</sup> Indeed, de Maistre claimed that Bacon pretended to assimilate the “language” of the Bible to the pagan atomist theory and disregarded the enormous differences between them.<sup>50</sup> As we shall below, he blamed Bacon for misreading the Scriptures on various occasions and judged such operations a sign of intentionally concealed impiety.

As for psychological materialism, de Maistre stated that while “[e]very line of Bacon leads to materialism,” none are more telling of this “dangerous hypocrite” than

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<sup>46</sup> Bacon, *Novum organum*, Book 1, Aphorism 79 (OFB XI 125): “Yet this same [natural] philosophy should be regarded as the great mother of the sciences.”

<sup>47</sup> De Maistre, *Examination*, pp. 157–159 / *Examen*, vol. II, pp. 2–5.

<sup>48</sup> Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, OFB IV 76; *De augmentis scientiarum*, SEH I 540–541; IV 337.

<sup>49</sup> De Maistre, *Examination* pp. 220–222 / *Examen*, vol. II, pp. 139–146. See Francis Bacon, *De principiis atque originibus*, in OFB VI, ed. by Graham Rees and Michael Edwards, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, pp. 208–211, 250–253.

<sup>50</sup> De Maistre, *Examination*, pp. 221–222 note 84 / *Examen*, vol. II, pp. 142–143 note 1.

those he devoted to the human soul.<sup>51</sup> I will focus on his treatment of this issue to provide a sample of his strategy of “making visible” the materialism “hidden” in Baconian doctrines and showing their impact on materialist philosophers. In the first place, he argued that, by restricting the task of philosophy to the study of the sensitive soul and by discarding the research into the rational soul, the main goal pursued by Bacon was to establish that human reason can only know “matter” and what stems from “*elementary matters*.”<sup>52</sup> In the second place, de Maistre blamed Bacon for placing all the mental faculties in the sensitive soul and eliminating the rational soul from the explanation of mental processes, as if it did not exist at all. In this way, the higher faculties—such as “understanding”—were placed on the same level as the lower ones—such as “appetite.” These assessments led de Maistre to point out that Locke’s, Condillac’s and Cabanis’s materialist views of the mental faculties stemmed from Bacon’s doctrine of the soul. He found an evolution of psychological materialism in Bacon’s progeny. The summit was reached by Cabanis for whom the soul was nothing but a faculty of the body. Not a single word spoken by Bacon passed by without being redoubled by the spirit of the eighteenth century—bitterly regrets de Maistre .<sup>53</sup>

The most alarming fact, in de Maistre’s opinion, is that Bacon *appealed* to the book of *Genesis* to legitimize his distinction between two kinds of soul, thus distorting the true meaning of the Biblical text. The center of de Maistre’s rebuttal of Bacon’s misuse of the Bible consists in explaining how the passages invoked by him should be interpreted and in exhibiting passages opposing a materialist view of the soul. The verses “Let the waters bring forth! Let the earth bring forth!” are taken by Bacon as attesting the creation of the sensitive soul, while the creation of the rational soul is indicated by the lines stating that God “breathed into his face the breath of life.”<sup>54</sup> Against Bacon’s reading, de Maistre argued that the first sentence refers to the creation of the physical world, not of man. Besides, the verse “Let us make man to our image and likeness,”<sup>55</sup> which clearly means that the soul by which man resembles God is immaterial, is entirely omitted in Bacon’s text. In addition, de Maistre refuted the

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<sup>51</sup> De Maistre, *Examination*, p. 172 / *Examen*, vol. II, pp. 33–46. For a refutation of the reading of Bacon as a psychological materialist in nineteenth-century France, see Charles de Remusat, *Bacon: Sa vie, son temps, sa philosophie et son influence jusqu’à nos jours*, Paris: Didier, 1857, p. 281.

<sup>52</sup> De Maistre, *Examination*, p. 178 / *Examen*, vol. II, pp. 47–48, italics in the original.

<sup>53</sup> De Maistre, *Examination*, pp. 179–180 / *Examen*, vol. II, pp. 49–51.

<sup>54</sup> *Gen.* I, 20, 24; II, 7; Bacon, *De augmentis*, SEH I 604–605.

<sup>55</sup> *Gen.* I, 26.

separation of the two kinds of soul postulated by Bacon, by noting that the divine breath constitutes the only soul that gives life to the human body. With respect to this point, he believed that Bacon distorted the passage that mentions the divine breath by identifying it with only one kind of soul and by pretending that the slime denotes the whole man and not just his body.<sup>56</sup> De Maistre also detected another important omission here: the book of *Genesis* adds that thanks to the divine breath “*man became a living creature (or soul).*”<sup>57</sup> This phrase, he argued, is a clear indication that the human soul is the only one that gives life to the human being without needing the assistance of a sensitive soul.

Driven by his defense of Catholicism and the conviction that Protestantism inaugurated the period of decadence culminating in the French Revolution, de Maistre characterized Bacon’s way of misusing and misrepresenting the sacred text as an instance of the common hermeneutic practice of Protestantism. In this context, Bacon’s novelty would consist in employing it in favor of materialism. His materialist turn is all the more damaging as his followers continued that path. The Baconian operation of “remaking the human understanding” resembles the Protestant operation of “remaking Christianity”: both despise and humiliate all that preceded them. However, even though they claim otherwise, they strictly have nothing new to offer but only negative views.<sup>58</sup> The parallelism that de Maistre established between Baconianism and Protestantism shows the extent to which he judged that Bacon’s philosophy was a clear enemy of Catholicism, as it was a philosophy produced in the wake of the Reformation, whose long-reaching impact extended up to the nineteenth century. In de Maistre’s words: “His philosophy resembles this religion, which protests continually: it is entirely negative and thinks only to contradict.”<sup>59</sup> It was this spirit of contradiction that led straight to the political Revolution and to the undermining of the Catholic religion.

### *The place of Bacon in Marx’s history of materialism*

It will come as no surprise that what for de Maistre was a motive of scandal, for Marx was a ground for approval. In chapter VI of *The Holy Family* (1844), a young Marx, still close to Feuerbach’s philosophy, presented a genealogy of eighteenth-century

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<sup>56</sup> De Maistre, *Examination*, pp. 313–314 / *Examen*, vol. II, pp. 354–355.

<sup>57</sup> De Maistre, *Examination*, p. 176 / *Examen*, vol. II, p. 44, italics in the original.

<sup>58</sup> De Maistre, *Examination*, p. 178, note 20 / *Examen*, vol. II, p. 46 note 1.

<sup>59</sup> De Maistre, *Examination*, p. 317 / *Examen*, vol. II, p. 364.

French materialism.<sup>60</sup> This narrative constitutes a kind of proto-history of philosophical materialism, twenty years before the publication of Albert Friedrich Lange's famous *Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart* (1866).<sup>61</sup> The target of this section is Bruno Bauer, one of the members of "the Holy Family" of the Young Hegelians, which Marx and Engels aimed to desacralize in this book.

More specifically, Marx criticized an article where Bauer engaged in a "critical history of French materialism."<sup>62</sup> To counter Bauer's narrative, Marx offered a brief outline of the "profane history" of materialism,<sup>63</sup> as opposed to the "sacred history" proposed by the Young Hegelian. Marx's main reproach to Bauer's history is that he interpreted the dispute between materialism and anti-materialism within an exclusively speculative framework, by taking Spinozism as the main point on discussion. Instead, Marx's historiographical construction argued that eighteenth-century French materialism resulted from the confluence of two sources: 1) the mechanical materialism initiated by Descartes's physics and 2) the English materialism promoted by Locke and ultimately initiated by Bacon. The waters of both sides would eventually flow into socialism and communism.<sup>64</sup>

Unlike de Maistre's, Marx's text is very brief and is not exclusively concerned with Bacon. This section of *The Holy Family* is the only text in which he provided an account of the history of early modern philosophy at some length. On other occasions he only made short and incidental mentions of the topic. Marx had no interest in the history of philosophy by itself. His concern with the history of materialism in this text is motivated by his general goal of distancing himself from the Young Hegelians. As a result, he developed an alternative way of understanding materialism, which, assuming the historicist pattern established by Hegelianism, gives shape to a materialist conception of history.

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<sup>60</sup> *The Holy Family* was a text written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. We know that the section devoted to the history of materialism was authored by Marx alone. See Olivier Bloch, "Marx, Renouvier et l'histoire du matérialisme," *La Pensée* 191 (1977), pp. 3–42, at pp. 4–5. I will quote the English translation: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Holy Family*, in *Collected Works of Marx and Engels*, vol. 4, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975.

<sup>61</sup> For a brief comparison of Marx's and Lange's histories of materialism, see Bloch, *Le matérialisme*, ch. 2.

<sup>62</sup> See Bruno Bauer, "Was ist jetzt der Gegenstand der Kritik? (Juni 1844)," in Bruno Bauer, *Feldzüge der reinen Kritik*, epilogue by Hans Martin Sass, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1968, pp. 200–212.

<sup>63</sup> Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, pp. 143–144.

<sup>64</sup> In this presentation I am indebted to Bloch, "Marx, Renouvier et l'histoire du matérialisme."



While a few years earlier, in the doctoral dissertation presented at the University of Jena in 1841, Marx asked himself about the differences between the natural philosophies of Democritus and Epicurus and drew on Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, in *The Holy Family* he blamed Bauer for relying in his account on the Hegelian narrative.<sup>65</sup> Accordingly, in *The Holy Family* he drew on other sources to write his brief history. Olivier Bloch has found irrefutable evidence that Marx employed the recently published *Manuel de philosophie moderne* (1842) of Charles-Bernard Renouvier.<sup>66</sup> Marx himself said that he collected "things already known," which can be found "in most recent French histories of philosophy."<sup>67</sup> Renouvier noticed, on the one hand, the connection of French materialism with Descartes and Locke, and, on the other hand, the eighteenth-century opposition to the metaphysics of the seventeenth century. While these connections had been already noted by existing histories, Marx claimed that further research is needed in order to complete this history and to explain the link of early modern materialism with nineteenth-century French and English communism. To fill this gap, Marx quoted Helvétius's, D'Holbach's and Bentham's writings.<sup>68</sup> Only that in these cases he seems to have read the original sources themselves.

As Bloch points out, although "a considerable part" of *The Holy Family*'s history of materialism borrows extensively from Renouvier's *Manuel*, this does not entail that there is nothing original written by Marx's hand in this text.<sup>69</sup> Marx did not limit himself to merely repeating and passively reproducing this source. On the contrary, he extracted from Renouvier what he regarded as the most suitable elements to build his own narrative. This was not only appropriation or copy-paste, but also creative work. In the first place, Marx created the narrative that distinguishes the two orientations leading to eighteenth-century French materialism. In the second place, he

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<sup>65</sup> Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, p. 131. Bloch, "Marx, Renouvier et l'histoire du matérialisme," p. 5.

<sup>66</sup> Charles Renouvier, *Manuel de philosophie moderne*, Paris: Paulin, 1842. In addition, Bloch provided convincing arguments for discarding Hegel's and Feuerbach's historical works as main sources of Marx's account of the history of materialism. See Bloch, "Marx, Renouvier et l'histoire du matérialisme," pp. 7–8. It is interesting to note, however, that in a text that Marx could not have ignored, Ludwig Feuerbach maintained that Bacon's philosophy contained the "spirit of materialism" (*Geist des Materialismus*) as it would unfold later. See Ludwig A. Feuerbach, *Geschichte der neuern Philosophie von Bacon von Verulam bis Benedikt Spinoza*, Ansbach: Brügel, 1833, pp. 41–42.

<sup>67</sup> Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, p. 132.

<sup>68</sup> Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, p. 152, note. Marx also alluded to "a French writer" when commenting on the place of Pierre Bayle in the history of early modern philosophy (*The Holy Family*, p. 146).

<sup>69</sup> Bloch, "Marx, Renouvier et l'histoire du matérialisme," pp. 33–47.

introduced the connection with nineteenth-century communism, showing parallels between the two historical periods. Most importantly, the fundamental innovation of Marx's narrative lies in delineating the rudiments of the materialist conception of history that was beginning to take shape at this stage of his intellectual career. These rudiments both articulate the theoretical with the practical level of history and feature the history of materialism in terms of a dynamic progression of oppositions. While in Renouvier the practical aspect of history is simply parallel with the theoretical one, in Marx it is its condition.

It must be added that Marx set aside the ideological bias that permeated Renouvier's manual. Renouvier was educated at the Polytechnic School and received influences from Saint Simon and Comte. According to Bloch, his political ideology can be placed in the center-left, while his philosophical position combines non-Cousinian eclecticism with socialist ideas.<sup>70</sup> From this perspective, Renouvier's opinion of materialism is negative. For instance, unlike Marx, he thought that Diderot's and La Mettrie's ideas were harmful to the French society. Apparently, Marx believed that although every history is an ideological construction, this does not impede that the "factual" bits that it provides may be extracted and assembled in order to write alternative or even ideologically antagonistic narratives. It is as if histories contained factual elements that are "true" and ideologically neutral in themselves. The same "neutral historical facts" may be read from different ideological points of view. For instance, regardless of Renouvier's political and philosophical orientation, Marx took from his history the "true" fact that Bacon was the "father" of English materialism and put it into his own account of early modern philosophy in the light of the materialist conception of history.<sup>71</sup>

Marx begins by a quotation from Bauer stating that the fate of the philosophy of the eighteenth century was to end in Romanticism after having been dominated by Spinoza's philosophy. Within this narrative, two schools discussed the true meaning of Spinoza's system. The French school held that Spinoza "made matter into substance," and the deist school "conferred on matter a more spiritual name."<sup>72</sup> Against this "holy

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<sup>70</sup> Bloch, "Marx, Renouvier et l'histoire du matérialisme," pp. 28, 22–24.

<sup>71</sup> We know that this judgement is quite incorrect. The first well-known figure to endorse a full-fledged materialism in England was Thomas Hobbes. Contemporary to him was Margaret Cavendish's materialism, a philosopher a couple of decades younger than him, who was ignored by traditional narratives and has been gaining visibility in the last decades.

<sup>72</sup> Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, p. 124.

critical history,” Marx’s “profane history” maintains that the fight of eighteenth-century French philosophy, and especially of French materialism, had two different targets, one theoretical and another practical. At the practical level it fought against political, religious and theological institutions. At the theoretical level it opposed the metaphysics of the seventeenth century represented by Descartes, Malebranche, Spinoza and Leibniz. Marx characterized this theoretical confrontation as the opposition between materialist philosophy and metaphysics.<sup>73</sup>

In turn, Marx assimilated this confrontation with Feuerbach’s combat against the “wild” Hegelian speculation that dominated German philosophy in the nineteenth century. The latter, according to Marx, was nothing but a restoration of seventeenth-century metaphysics, which Hegel masterly fused with all subsequent metaphysics and with German idealism, thus producing a “metaphysical universal kingdom.”<sup>74</sup> Marx’s dialectical interpretation of the evolution of metaphysics foresees that, after its Hegelian restoration, metaphysics will “succumb forever.” Just as he distinguished the practical from the theoretical targets of eighteenth-century materialism, with respect to nineteenth-century philosophical antagonism, Marx distinguished Feuerbach’s theoretical battle in Germany from the practical battle sustained by French and English socialism and communism.

After this general presentation of the main paths of materialism, Marx delineated the two “orientations” that gave life to the French materialism of the eighteenth century. One of them is the “mechanical materialism” that, starting in Descartes’s physics, extended up to the French natural sciences. Fundamental to understanding this association of Cartesianism with materialism is the Marxian postulation of a stark separation between physics and metaphysics inside the Cartesian program. Although this divide is not openly stated by Renouvier, it can be inferred from his postulation of the existence of “two halves” in the Cartesian system, as if they were compartments that

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<sup>73</sup> Marx’s earlier reception of Spinoza (ca. 1841–1844) contrasts with his stance in *The Holy Family*, where Spinoza is inserted in a metaphysical tradition that Marx wanted to combat. However, in the 1960s Louis Althusser assumed that Spinoza was “the only direct ancestor of Marx” and interpreted Spinozism as a materialist philosophy (Louis Althusser, Étienne Balibar, *Lire le Capital*, vol. I, Paris: F. Maspero, 1996, p. 128. First ed. 1968). Due to the limited scope of this article, it is not possible to offer here a detailed examination of this much studied and debated question. For a recent survey and an interpretation, see Bernardo Bianchi, “Marx’s Reading of Spinoza: On the Alleged Influence of Spinoza on Marx,” *Historical Materialism* 26/4 (2018), pp. 35–58.

<sup>74</sup> Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, p. 124.

can be separated and understood “independently of each other.”<sup>75</sup> In this way, Descartes maintained that the only substance belonging to physics is matter, the foundation of being and of knowing. If physics has no ties to metaphysics, material activity can only come from matter itself. This is how we can understand why Marx—following Renouvier—stated that Cartesian physics “endowed matter with self-creative power and conceived mechanical motion as the manifestation of its life.”<sup>76</sup> The French materialist school followed the path of Descartes’s mechanical physics in opposition to his metaphysics. Marx seems to point out that it was the pre-existing anti-metaphysical attitude which they had “by profession” that led them to embrace Cartesian mechanicism. Among them, Marx highlighted Regius (Le Roy), La Mettrie and Cabanis. On the other hand, Marx pointed out that as early as the seventeenth century there were materialists who opposed the metaphysics of Descartes, such as Gassendi and Hobbes—both taking up ideas of the ancient atomism of Democritus and Epicurus.<sup>77</sup>

Marx’s narrative is akin to his materialist view of history, according to which the imposition of theoretical materialism was made possible by the anti-metaphysical and anti-theological practice that characterized the eighteenth-century intellectual French atmosphere. In this reading, Marx evoked a thought he attributed to Voltaire. Thus, the primacy of being over thinking explains historical changes. For that reason, metaphysics came to an end at the time when the replacement of Malebranche and Arnauld by Helvétius and Condillac began. Again, Marx argued that there is a parallel between early modern materialism and that of his own time. Pierre Bayle and Feuerbach in each period are the main actors who provoked the fall of the metaphysics of their time. Both began by questioning theology and later ended up by definitively objecting to metaphysics. In particular, Bayle’s criticism of theology led to the idea of a society of atheists, somehow foreseeing the events that would soon occur in France.<sup>78</sup>

The place of Bacon in this history appears, as noted above, in the English materialist school. Despite the fact that the school is said to take its form as an anti-metaphysical philosophy thanks to Locke’s contribution, Bacon is later described as the

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<sup>75</sup> Renouvier, *Manuel de philosophie moderne*, pp. 342–343.

<sup>76</sup> Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, p. 125.

<sup>77</sup> Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, pp. 125–126.

<sup>78</sup> Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, pp. 126–127.

“real progenitor” of this school.<sup>79</sup> The theoretical body contained in Locke’s *Essay on Human Understanding* (1690) was necessary to give systematic form and foundation to the materialist practice. Far from being the fruit of Spinozism, materialism is “the natural-born son of Great Britain.”<sup>80</sup> The first signs of English materialism are found in the nominalism of Duns Scotus and Ockham, which reappeared in Bacon and Hobbes. This connection between nominalism and materialism is borrowed from Renouvier’s account, and fully agrees with the cosmological claim of Bacon’s thesis A2 (“[N]othing really exists in nature besides individual bodies, carrying out pure, individual acts according to law”).<sup>81</sup>

In this context it raises the question of the possibility of thinking matter. In this peculiar account of materialism, Marx presents Bacon’s philosophy as follows:

The real progenitor of English materialism and all modern experimental science is Bacon. To him natural philosophy is the only true philosophy, and physics based upon the experience of the senses is the chiefest part of natural philosophy. Anaxagoras and his *homoeomeriae*, Democritus and his atoms, he often quotes as his authorities. According to him the senses are infallible and the source of all knowledge.<sup>82</sup> All science is based on experience, and consists in subjecting the data furnished by the senses to a rational method of investigation. Induction, analysis, comparison, observation, experiment, are the principal forms of such a rational method. Among the qualities inborn [*eingeborner*] in matter, motion is the first and foremost, not only in the form of mechanical and mathematical motion, but chiefly in the form of an impulse, a vital spirit, a tension [*Trieb, Lebensgeist, Spannkraft*] or a “*Qual*”—to use a term of Jakob Böhme’s—of matter.<sup>83</sup> The primary forms of matter are the living, individualising

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<sup>79</sup> This judgement was repeated in the twentieth century in the influential Marxist interpretation of Benjamin Farrington, *Francis Bacon: Philosopher of Industrial Science*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1951, preface to the English edition. On the Marxist reception of Bacon, see Ladis Kristof, “Francis Bacon and the Marxists: Faith in the Glorious Future of Mankind,” in G. L. Ulman (ed.), *Society and History: Essays in Honor of Karl August Wittfogel*, The Hague: Mouton, 1978, pp. 233–257, and Keller “Deprogramming Baconianism,” pp. 122–123.

<sup>80</sup> Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, p. 127.

<sup>81</sup> Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, p. 128; Renouvier, *Manuel de philosophie moderne*, p. 321.

<sup>82</sup> Bacon did not have this blind confidence in the senses. He claimed that “the sense fails us in two ways: for it either deserts or deceives us.” He proposes helps for the senses to remedy this situation (experiments and instruments). See Francis Bacon, *Distributio operis*, OFB XI 33.

<sup>83</sup> In a recent study, Erik van Ree points out that this description of Baconian matter as an inherently active and self-moving entity agrees with Marx’s conception of an impassionate, self-creative nature. See Erik van Ree, “Productive Forces, the Passions and Natural Philosophy: Karl Marx, 1841–1846,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 15/3 (2020), pp. 274–293.

forces of being inherent in it and producing the distinctions between the species. [...] In Bacon, its first creator, materialism still holds back within itself in a naive way the germs of a many-sided development. On the one hand, matter, surrounded by a sensuous, poetic glamour, seems to attract man's whole entity by winning smiles. On the other, the aphoristically formulated doctrine pullulates with inconsistencies imported from theology.<sup>84</sup>

We know that Marx read several of Bacon's works (at least *De augmentis scientiarum*, *History of Henry VII*, *Essays*).<sup>85</sup> By 1837 he had read *De augmentis scientiarum*, apparently in the original Latin. He referred to Bacon's account of the separation of physics from theology in an article published in the *Kölnische Zeitung* in 1842, by paraphrasing a passage from this book. In so doing he anticipated one of the claims introduced a few years later in *The Holy Family*: "Bacon of Verulam said that theological physics [*theologische Physik*] was a virgin dedicated to God and barren; he emancipated physics from theology and it became fertile."<sup>86</sup>

That notwithstanding, the portrayal of Bacon in the *Holy Family* is heavily indebted to Renouvier's account. The description of Bacon as "first creator" and progenitor suggests the existence of a latent materialism in his philosophy, which was later manifested in his progeny. This interpretation can be recognized in several passages of Renouvier's *Manuel*, that do not attribute materialism directly to Bacon, but to those who relied on his philosophy. Thus, for example, Renouvier maintained that Bacon's school *ends* in materialism and almost in atheism.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, he

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<sup>84</sup> Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, p. 128. Translation slightly modified. Cf. Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Gesamtausgabe (MEGA)*, vol. 1/4, pp. 828–829.

<sup>85</sup> In a letter to his father of November 1837, Marx mentioned that he read *De augmentis scientiarum* (see *Collected Works of Marx and Engels*, vol. 1, Karl Marx 1835–1843, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975, p. 19). In addition, references to the *Essays* and *The History of King Henry the Seventh* are found in *The Capital*, Book I, ch. 27. *The German Ideology* (1845) mentions passages from Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* (Part III, Section 1.A) dealing with Bacon. See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, in *Collected Works of Marx and Engels*, vol. 5, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975, pp. 172–173.

<sup>86</sup> Karl Marx, Leading Article in No. 179 of *Kölnische Zeitung* (July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1842), in *Collected Works of Marx and Engels*, vol. 1, p. 191; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Gesamtausgabe (MEGA)*, vol. 1/1, Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1975, p. 188.

Cf. Bacon, *De augmentis scientiarum*, SEH I 571: "*Causarum finalium inquisitio sterilis est, et tanquam virgo a Deo consecrata nihil parit.*"

<sup>87</sup> Renouvier, *Manuel de philosophie moderne*, p. 40: "*En fin, toute philosophie fondée sur les senses et l'observation avait l'immense défaut de n'embrasser guère que les sciences naturelles, et de laisser, par conséquent, la métaphysique entre les mains de l'autorité [...], ou de conclure au matérialisme et presque à l'athéisme. Bacon par son école en fournit la preuve.*"

considered that in Bacon there is a “contempt” for contemplation and pure understanding, and a preference for action. This attitude is said to be both the root of England’s “industrial greatness” and also of its “materialism” and “moral despair.”<sup>88</sup>

Renouvier echoed the French controversies on Bacon of his time and even mentioned de Maistre.<sup>89</sup> Like de Maistre, he thought that empiricism was strongly connected with materialism. Bacon’s philosophy is said to be based “in the senses and observation” and to have “the great flaw” of every empiricist approach: to end in materialism and almost in atheism.<sup>90</sup> But, unlike de Maistre, he was not preoccupied with a defense of Catholicism, believed that Bacon’s philosophy was “eminently religious,” and he kept a respect for metaphysics. In Bacon, the legitimate goals of natural science are imposed by the Biblical revelation. This religious and metaphysical commitment does not entail, however, an impediment to a reduction of knowledge to physical causes. For, according to Renouvier, Bacon was firmly engaged in reducing every philosophy to natural philosophy.<sup>91</sup>

The same interpretative pattern is reproduced by Marx. In Bacon there is a conjunction of empiricism and a reduction of every knowledge to physical causes. They together paved the way to the materialism fully developed by his followers. Like Renouvier, Marx stated that Hobbes was the author who systematized Bacon’s materialism for the first time and purified it from his “theist” elements (related to the theses C of my reconstruction). Taking up the Baconian principle according to which all knowledge has its origin in sense-experience, Hobbes materialized everything: ideas, perceptions, the words and their meanings, the human passions, power and freedom. Later on, Locke supplied “proof for Bacon’s fundamental principle,” namely “the origin of all human knowledge and ideas from the world of sensation.”<sup>92</sup> Locke’s British followers (Collins, Dodwell, Coward, Hartley and Priestley) eliminated all the theological and metaphysical residue found in his system, in order to develop a full-fledged anti-metaphysical position. It is interesting to notice that, perhaps because he

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<sup>88</sup> Renouvier, *Manuel de philosophie moderne*, p. 150: “Dans ce mépris de Bacon par la science pure, qui cependant élève l’intelligence de l’homme vers la divinité, on reconnaît la source de la grandeur industrielle et aussi celle du matérialisme et du désespoir moral en Angleterre.”

<sup>89</sup> Renouvier, *Manuel de philosophie moderne*, pp. 36 note 2, 133.

<sup>90</sup> Renouvier, *Manuel de philosophie moderne*, p. 150.

<sup>91</sup> Renouvier, *Manuel de philosophie moderne*, pp. 139–141.

<sup>92</sup> Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, p. 129.

wanted to highlight the English character of this materialist school, Marx deliberately omitted Gassendi, who was included among Bacon's followers in Renouvier's history.<sup>93</sup>

With regard to the impact of the English Baconian materialist school in France, Marx claimed that French authors "civilized" English materialism, by introducing into it the eloquence, the grace and the temperament of their nation. Condillac was the one who endorsed "Locke's sensualism" to refute the metaphysics of Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz and Malebranche. This path was also endorsed and deepened by Helvétius, La Mettrie and D'Holbach. While the first one applied the foundations of materialism to the social life, the latter two integrated the English approach with Cartesian mechanical physics, developing materialist physics and morality. This is how this line feeds the ideas of nineteenth-century socialism and communism.

Why was important for Marx to define the figure of Bacon as "the real progenitor of English materialism and all modern experimental science"? I think that the young Marx valued Bacon's philosophy as the first historical model of the articulation of theory and praxis the Marxian political agenda was tending to: a materialist conception of being that conceived matter as a self-moving and active entity (theory) plus the promotion of the transformation of the material conditions of life through human intervention on nature (praxis). Several years later, in his mature work, *Capital* (1867), Marx emphasized this latter aspect of materialism and celebrated the philosophical projects of the two initiators of the early modern materialist strains, Bacon and Descartes, for they "anticipated an alteration in the form of production, and the practical subjugation of Nature by Man."<sup>94</sup>

## *Conclusion*

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<sup>93</sup> Another nineteenth-century French historian that noted the ties of Gassendi to Bacon was Joseph-Marie Degérando, who placed Gassendi before Locke in "line of the succession" of the Baconian school. Given the dominance of the epistemological paradigm, these ties were for a long time disregarded by the scholarship. See Joseph-Marie Degérando, *Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie, relativement aux principes des connaissances humaines*, 3 vols., Paris: chez Henrichs, 1804, vol. II, pp. 366–367; Silvia Manzo, "Empirismo y filosofía experimental. Las limitaciones del relato estándar de la filosofía moderna a la luz de la historiografía francesa del siglo XIX (J.-M. Degérando)," *Revista Colombiana de Filosofía de la Ciencia* 16, 32 (2016), pp. 11–35. For a recent study on Gassendi and Bacon, see Élodie Cassan, "The Status of Bacon in Gassendi's *Syntagma Philosophicum* History of Logic," *Societate și politică* 6/1 (2012), pp. 80–89.

<sup>94</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, in *Collected Works of Marx and Engels*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996, vol. 35, p. 393, note 2.



Like all receptions, the nineteenth-century reception of Bacon was determined by the anxieties, interests and ideologies of those who revered, criticized or condemned him. To use Brian Vickers's words, the many facets ascribed to Bacon and the different trends of Baconianism are "mirrors of each age."<sup>95</sup> For many post-revolutionary actors, the debate on materialism was a key issue. That is why the Baconian philosophy was interpreted in light of it. Authors of different persuasions searched in that rich philosophy for what could serve to enforce their positions in intellectual debates and/or political crusades. What was primarily at stake were not so much the new ways of gaining knowledge, but above all the new forms of political organization, and the cultural crisis that the bourgeois European society was experiencing.

Against this background, de Maistre and Marx made ideological use of Bacon's thought for the benefit of their own agendas. They portrayed Bacon, for better or worse, as the father of materialism and placed him at the beginning of a materialist lineage which had not only theoretical, but also practical significance. While Marx's historical materialism claimed that the practical fight against religion was the cause of the theoretical construction of French materialism, de Maistre's approach claimed that it was precisely the nefarious materialist ideas that lead to the political, moral and religious troubles of the Revolution of 1789. For that reason, their reception transformed the meaning of Bacon's materialist theses by reading them from a perspective that was alien to Bacon. While Bacon's materialist theses were related to natural philosophy and the philosophy of mind, de Maistre and Marx attributed to them dimensions neither envisaged nor wanted by their author. Indeed, their construction of Bacon's figure as the leader of a materialist lineage ascribed to his philosophy a revolutionary import that was contrary to Bacon's actual leanings, who defended the *status quo* and was far from promoting political upheavals or religious dissidence. This contrast shows how different the contexts were within which materialism was conceived and valued across the centuries, and how far philosophical and scientific discourses may be transformed by their receptions, to the point that in many cases they could hardly be embraced by their authors.

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<sup>95</sup> Brian Vickers, "Francis Bacon Mirror of Each Age," in J. Heilborn (ed.), *Advancements of Learning: Essays in Honour of Paolo Rossi*, Firenze: Olschki, 2007, pp. 15–57.

Both de Maistre and Marx (and Renouvier) characterized Bacon's materialism as a kind of proto-materialism, a materialism at a primitive and rudimentary stage.<sup>96</sup> According to de Maistre's harsh criticism, Bacon's materialism was deliberately clandestine, and was part of his general strategy of concealment, hypocrisy and deception. From his perspective, Bacon did not want to show who he really was. Therefore, the evil power enclosed in his writings could hardly be glimpsed. It became fully evident long after in the work of his followers, and in the political effects of his dangerous ideas. For Marx, Bacon's philosophy contains a latent materialism that others developed to its full power, by deriving all the positive consequences of its empirical principle, and by liberating it from religious and metaphysical residue.

Friedrich Albert Lange, in his *Geschichte des Materialismus* (1873), endorsed a similar view. He argued that Bacon could be considered the true "restorer of the materialist philosophy." Lange claimed that it is by chance that "only in the eighteenth century" did the word *materialism* appear for the first time,<sup>97</sup> since the essence of this approach was already contained in Bacon's philosophy. The only thing that would keep us from calling him materialist, Lange argued, is the fact that Bacon devoted himself mainly to methodological issues and maintained an ambivalent reservation on the most important issues (possibly Lange refers to the soul and the final causes). If Bacon admitted the existence of the *anima rationalis*, it was only on religious grounds, since he explained all the psychological functions by referring them to the *anima sensibilis*. His revival of materialism was followed by Hobbes, Locke and the French materialists, and reached the nineteenth century. While the essence of modern materialism began with Bacon, Descartes provided its mechanical aspect. Both trends finally converged into eighteenth-century materialism.<sup>98</sup>

To sum up, these receptions agreed that materialism was *potential* in Bacon and *actual* in his followers. Bacon's quasi-materialist philosophy provided the seeds that germinated in his followers. However, insofar as the most traditional historiographical

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<sup>96</sup> One can add here Feuerbach's claim noted in footnote 66. Feuerbach's account deserves a separated study.

<sup>97</sup> Lange was wrong about the first occurrence of this word. Studies by Olivier Bloch have noted that the term "materialism" was coined towards the second half of the seventeenth century. See Bloch, *Le Matérialisme*, ch. 2.

<sup>98</sup> Albert Friedrich Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart*, 2 vols., Iserlohn: Baedeker, 1873, vol. I, pp. 195-197, 199, 201. Cf. English translation, *The History of Materialism and Criticism of its Present Importance*, trans. by Ernest Chester Thomas, 3 vols., London: Kegan Paul, 1925, vol I, pp. 236-244.

account of early modern philosophy, the so-called “epistemological paradigm,” focused on the problem of knowledge, the materialist import of Bacon’s thought has been often ignored or disregarded. In current scholarship this paradigm has lost its former hegemony, but it has been dominant for such a long time that Bacon’s place in the history of philosophy and science has been very often studied in relation to the so-called “British empiricism.” This explains—at least in part—why Bacon is virtually absent from twentieth-century scholarly studies in the history of materialism. This paper intends to suggest that Bacon’s thought, his reception and his influence on materialist thinkers deserve more attention than they have received during the last decades. That will help us to better understand the origins of modernity and its lasting impact on our own time.

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