

R. Lupton, Ronald Corthell, Graham Hamill, among many others, Cefalu takes Stephen Greenblatt as representative of psychoanalytic criticism despite the fact that Greenblatt argued against the applicability of psychoanalytic notions of self-hood after the publication of *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*. The result is an inadequate discussion of hazily defined “Freudian” approaches to religious selfhood in the period.

Despite the shortcomings of the Epilogue, the book as a whole is quite remarkable. It displays a profound and illuminating knowledge of English theological traditions, especially for a book that is primarily intended as a work of literary criticism. It offers original and more often than not persuasive readings of major literary works in the period. As a result, I am certain it will come to shape our understanding of the complex relations between Reformation moral theory and soteriology.

Stephen A. McKnight. *The Religious Foundations of Francis Bacon's Thought*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006. xi + 193 pp + 2 illus. \$37.50. Review by STEVEN MATTHEWS, THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA, DULUTH.

The title of Stephen McKnight's most recent book, *The Religious Foundations of Francis Bacon's Thought*, may seem odd to those acquainted with the many books and articles which insist that there are no genuine religious foundations to Bacon's philosophical writings. It is precisely this literature that McKnight has in his sights as he seeks to “offer a corrective to the persistent view of Bacon as a secular modern, who dismisses religion in order to promote the human advance of knowledge” (9). By contrast, McKnight argues “that Bacon's vision of reform or instauration is drawn from the Judeo-Christian scriptures, particularly the Genesis account of the Creation and the Fall; from apocalyptic expectation of renewal in the Old Testament; and from soteriological themes in the New Testament” (3). In addition, “Bacon's Christian ideas are augmented and transmuted by related themes and imagery found in the *prisca theologia*, a highly elastic collection of Neoplatonism, Hermeticism, alchemy, magic, and Jewish esoteric traditions” (3).

McKnight's method is one of "close textual analysis" in which he examines a broad selection of Bacon's works from 1603 to 1626 and identifies recurring, central themes which are decidedly religious in nature and express Bacon's own unique theological perspective. Rather than dealing with specific arguments that Bacon was not a sincere Christian, McKnight allows the words of Bacon to speak for themselves and establish a powerful counter-image of Bacon as one who believed that "science" was an act of worship and a divine calling. Although one may debate individual points that McKnight makes along the way, the reader is confronted with a niagara of textual evidence from a wide range of sources, which demonstrates that those who would separate religion from natural philosophy in Bacon have read very selectively indeed.

McKnight begins at the end of Bacon's life with the *New Atlantis*. McKnight takes exception to the interpretation of Howard White in *Peace Among the Willows* when White assumes that Bacon is attempting to supplant religious hope with a "secular dream of material comfort" (11). Such a cynical approach to the text fails to recognize the great lengths to which Bacon has gone to blend natural philosophy and the Christian religion into a single activity among the Bensalemites. Bacon's utopian community is one in which science and the Christian religion function together as the vehicle for the blessings of God to descend to mankind. The inhabitants of the island, and particularly the wise oligarchs of the scientific society of Solomon's House, foster an attitude of pious humility as the most important key to their accomplishments. This explains their isolation where secular interpretations of the *New Atlantis* cannot. Bensalem's isolation functions in the text as a means to guarantee that scientific knowledge is not turned to the ends of pride and domination (which caused the downfall of Atlantis) but that it remains guided by the Christian virtues of charity and piety. The daily work of Solomon's House is framed by regular prayers and times of worship (26). In support, McKnight provides the reader with a careful analysis of the elaborate Christian and esoteric imagery of the *New Atlantis*, most of which has been ignored or glossed-over by previous interpreters of this text. This chapter represents one of McKnight's important contributions to Bacon scholarship, for in addition to supporting the thesis of the book it provides a careful guide to certain neglected passages of the *New Atlantis* with all of the imagery intact.

Chapter 2 focuses on the *Instauratio Magna*. McKnight again pays special attention in this chapter to what many have ignored—Bacon’s prayers, scriptural references, and the frontispiece of the work which was sanctioned by him to convey a particular message to his audience. The careful analysis of the frontispiece is another of McKnight’s significant contributions to the discussion. However, when McKnight goes on to discuss the parallels in the frontispiece of the *Sylva Sylvarum* we may well ask whether Bacon had anything to do with that engraving, since the version used is from a text which was published after Bacon’s death. Nevertheless, McKnight demonstrates that the Instauration, or recovery of human mastery over creation, was, for Bacon, a restoration of the power and benefits which humankind possessed in Eden. His own era had been appointed by divine providence as a period when humanity and God would cooperate and human mastery of nature would be restored. McKnight draws some significant parallels in this chapter between Bacon’s understanding of human power over nature and that of Pico della Mirandola (65-9). The intent of this section “is not to claim that Bacon derives his views directly from Pico” but that Bacon, “like many of his contemporaries, drew upon Neoplatonic and Hermetic materials as complements to Christian Theology” (69). If Bacon never came out in his writings and endorsed the traditions of the *prisca theologia* by name, the parallels are unmistakable. Bacon, then, is depicted in historical context—as a product of intellectual trends, both Christian and esoteric, which were found throughout early modern Europe.

In chapter 3 McKnight turns to the *Novum Organum* and traces the Christian and esoteric themes he has identified in the previous chapters. This chapter takes a more superficial treatment of the text than the previous two. The thesis is borne-out, but a more in-depth analysis might be desirable, since many of the support texts for a much more secular image of Bacon are drawn directly out of the *Novum Organum*. Aphorism 65 of Book 1, for example, is often used to “demonstrate” the incompatibility of “science” and “faith” in Bacon’s writings, but McKnight gives it no special attention. It is bundled together with other aphorisms in the single sentence: “Aphorisms 45 through 70 continue to develop the various attributes of the four forms of idolatry” (81). In light of this, it is important to bear in mind what McKnight repeatedly says he is *not* doing in this book: he is not giving a thorough analysis of all of Bacon’s writings. Rather, he is demonstrating the “central role reli-

gion plays in Bacon's thought" through the "pervasiveness of religious motifs, scriptural references, and biblical doctrines" (151). McKnight is providing a corrective to misinterpretations that would write religion *out* of Bacon's philosophy, and he is laying the groundwork for more thorough analysis by others.

Chapter 4 demonstrates that the religious themes identified by McKnight were present already in Bacon's earliest writings on the advancement of natural philosophy. Here again, McKnight has considered writings that are far too often marginalized. When they are brought to the center, they become part of a coherent constellation of religious ideas which were present throughout Bacon's writings and were central to the entire program of the Instauration as Bacon conceived it. In the conclusion, McKnight identifies four themes which define the Instauration for Bacon: (1) The Instauration was twofold, encompassing both a reformation of religion and a reformation of natural philosophy. (2) This twofold reformation was part of an act of God in cooperation with humanity, which, as prophesied, would usher in a special apocalyptic age. (3) Vocation—Bacon understood himself to be personally called to be the instrument by which the restoration of natural philosophy would be effected. (4) Charity and Piety—these virtues are the result of proper religion and the manifestation of what humanity was created to be from the beginning; they were indispensable for the recovery of human mastery over nature.

McKnight is far from alone in contending that Bacon's faith cannot be separated from his philosophy. John Henry, Anthony Grafton, Charles Whitney, and others have maintained that Francis Bacon was a sincere Christian, had a significant millenarian streak, and that his religious beliefs in some way drove forward his philosophy. But for these authors the point has usually been made in passing and it has not carefully pursued. The misreading of Bacon as unconcerned with religion, if not positively anti-Christian, has persisted for too long. McKnight has done a tremendous service to the scholarly community by putting Bacon's religious themes solidly on the table and demonstrating the consistency and centrality of Bacon's belief system throughout his writings. The discussion must continue, but Bacon's Instauration can no longer be considered apart from its religious foundations.