

Francis Bacon

Francis Bacon (1561 – 1626) was an English lawyer, philosopher, and scientist. He was tutored as a youth and traveled to France, Italy, and Spain, acting as a minor diplomat. During these travels, he learned languages and studied politics. After the death of his father, Bacon studied law at Gray's Inn, which was an English law association. In 1582, he became a lawyer.

Throughout the 1580s and early 1590s, Bacon worked in minor political offices, such as the legislature in the British county Dorset and then in Somerset. In 1596, Bacon became a member of Queen's Counsel. This was a select group of lawyers that conducted court work on behalf of the ruler. At the time, Queen Elizabeth I was ruling. The Queen died in 1603, and James I became king. The new king knighted Bacon that same year.

For the next decade, Bacon was favored by the King and his court, but he experienced difficulty with personal debt. In 1618, King James appointed Bacon Lord Chancellor, a high position in the government. However, in 1621, a committee under the guidance of Parliament charged Bacon with twenty-three counts of corruption. Bacon was fined and removed from office.

Following his difficult career in law and politics, Bacon dedicated himself to writing and studying. Since his youth, Bacon had been interested in philosophy, particularly in advancing human knowledge. He had great admiration for the Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle. Bacon sought to improve the methods used in philosophy. He understood the function of the scientific method and how it had helped the natural sciences. He wanted to do the same for philosophy.

One of his first published works was a collection of essays. In these essays, Bacon wrote freely about his thoughts on politics, science, and philosophy. These were popular works. Though they were first published in 1597, he revised and rewrote many of them for a new edition in 1625.

In 1605, Bacon wrote *The Advancement of Learning*. This work was one of the first in which he began to develop his theories for improving human learning. Bacon felt that philosophers had become very set in their ways since the Middle Ages. The Enlightenment period was showing great promise in the expansion of the sciences, and Bacon wished to continue this advancement. He expressed new ideas that involved creating new methods that would increase the effectiveness of learning. He wanted to encourage students to reexamine their insights and try to expand on their ideas without always relying on old-fashioned customs and theories.

Bacon listed three problems that he found to be common amongst students that were learning. He called them vanities. The first was the problem of scholars who had theories and ideas that did not have any evidence or proof. This habit made the scholars sound important, but their theories were not backed up by any real scientific thought.

Name _____

Date _____

Francis Bacon (Cont'd)

The second problem Bacon argued against was the habit scholars had of arguing repeatedly about petty and insignificant details. Bacon felt that such argumentation did not help to advance human learning. The third problem Bacon identified was a habit scholars had of writing very beautiful phrases and making long, poetic statements, but failing to focus on knowledge. Bacon argued that scientists were acting more like poets than men of learning because their theories lacked substance and rigor.

In 1620, Bacon published *The New Organon*. This work was a series of aphorisms. An aphorism is a concise statement or truth. In this work, Bacon tried to improve upon the method used in logic. He believed that he was providing a better tool for scholars to use in advancing their studies. Bacon argued against scientists who were guilty of wishful thinking and against scientists who believed in superstition. Bacon maintained that if errors like these could be removed, the future of science would be improved. Throughout his life, Bacon was a forward-thinking futurist who always believed in the positive aspects of human knowledge. He was an encouraging figure who sought new remedies to solve problems that he saw in human intellectual life.

Francis Bacon Questions

Multiple Choice:

1. Francis Bacon greatly admired the Ancient Greek philosopher:
 - a. Socrates
 - b. Plato
 - c. Aristotle
 - d. Pythagoras

2. Francis Bacon is considered a:
 - a. Lawyer
 - b. Philosopher
 - c. Scientist
 - d. All of the above

3. Francis Bacon was mainly concerned with:
 - a. Economic state of England
 - b. Methods of improving human learning
 - c. Criminal system in England
 - d. Poetry

4. Francis Bacon published:
 - a. Collection of Essays
 - b. The Advancement of Learning
 - c. The New Organon
 - d. All of the above

5. List three vanities that Bacon found common amongst students that were learning:

True or False:

- ___ 6. Aphorisms are concise statements or truths.
- ___ 7. In the *Advancement of Learning*, Bacon wanted to improve upon the methods used in logic.
- ___ 8. In his work *The New Organon*, Francis Bacon discussed the merits of scientists who focused on wishful thinking and believed in superstition.

Francis Bacon Answers

Multiple Choice:

1. Francis Bacon greatly admired the Ancient Greek philosopher:
 - a. Socrates
 - b. Plato
 - c. **Aristotle**
 - d. Pythagoras

2. Francis Bacon is considered a:
 - a. Lawyer
 - b. Philosopher
 - c. Scientist
 - d. **All of the above**

3. Francis Bacon was mainly concerned with:
 - a. Economic state of England
 - b. **Methods of improving human learning**
 - c. Criminal system in England
 - d. Poetry

4. Francis Bacon published:
 - a. Collection of Essays
 - b. The Advancement of Learning
 - c. The New Organon
 - d. **All of the above**

5. List three vanities that Bacon found common amongst students that were learning:

The habit that made the scholars sound important, but their theories were not backed up by any real scientific thought

The habit scholars had of arguing repeatedly about petty and insignificant details, which did not help to advance human learning.

The habit scholars had of writing very beautiful phrases and making long, poetic statements, but failing to focus on knowledge, substance, and rigor

True or False:

- T 6. Aphorisms are concise statements or truths.
- F 7. In the *Advancement of Learning*, Bacon wanted to improve upon the methods used in logic.
- F 8. In his work *The New Organon*, Francis Bacon discussed the merits of scientists that focused on wishful thinking and believed in superstition.