THE IMPOSSIBLE PROBABLE:
MODELING UTOPIA IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

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Abstract

*The Impossible Probable: Modeling Utopia in Early Modern England* examines three full-length utopias, Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis*, James Harrington’s *Oceana*, and Margaret Cavendish’s *The Blazing World* in order to provide a new theory of Early Modern utopianism that takes both its imaginative and philosophical commitments into account. I demonstrate that through their use of fictional elements, Early Modern utopian writers were able to consider society as a complexly integrated whole, making models of social laws and the patterns of interrelation between institutions.

In developing a philosophy that treats both the state and nature as capable of systematic interpretation, Bacon made a new conception of society possible. Through adopting a comparative technique hinging on the use of written evidence, he was able to imagine a civil sphere structured by analyzable patterns that could be studied across nations and eras. Yet his *New Atlantis* reveals that increased opportunities for interpretation bring increased dangers of misinterpretation to social life. James Harrington’s Civil War utopia *Oceana* builds on Bacon’s thought, developing an intricate form of social model in which fiction provides the possibility of representing the progress of an imaginary state through time. Finally, in the aftermath of the Civil War and Restoration, Margaret Cavendish’s utopia *The Blazing World* reflects on the metamorphoses of a society during a period of drastic change, skeptically reevaluating the use of models in understanding social order.
Introduction

Everyone knows that in literature, form and content are never really distinct; that form, as Samuel Beckett put it, is merely “the concretion” of content.\(^1\) But utopian writers often appear to test the limits of this critical platitude, presenting their readers with texts in which form and content seem bound in the most volatile of unions.

Utopianism, particularly Renaissance utopianism, is an amphibious genre, half fantasy and half social theory, and because these two genres are typically so remote, articulating their idiosyncratic relation is one of the most pressing tasks for scholars of utopian literature. What can a social theory gain from the depiction of mystical pillars of light, as in Bacon’s *New Atlantis*; comic speeches by blustering young noblemen, as in Harrington’s *Oceana*; or menageries of philosophical animals, as in Cavendish’s *Blazing World*? And conversely, what can a literary narrative gain from minute descriptions of ballot laws or the administrative hierarchies of research institutions?

Quite a lot, I will argue. Bridging the insights of recent work on utopianism as a form of political theory, including that of J.C. Davis, and as a literary genre, including the research of Fredric Jameson, in *The Impossible Probable* I demonstrate that the two modes are vitally interconnected in seventeenth-century utopias. Francis Bacon and his followers envisioned society as a complexly integrated whole, structured by underlying laws and patterns. Such a vision was both realized and refined through social models, which used fictions to reveal the operation of laws and correlations that could not simply be seen in the world at large. To conceive of society as a unified and rule-governed

sphere in the seventeenth century was, then, as much an effort of imagination as an effect of analysis.

It may seem perverse to begin a discussion of Renaissance utopianism with Francis Bacon rather than with Thomas More, when every mention of the subject invokes the legacy of the latter. But it was Bacon whose conception of progress in the natural sciences, tentatively extended to the social sciences, set the pattern for seventeenth-century social theory and consequently for utopian literature. In The Impossible Probable, I focus on Bacon’s own utopian thought and two of the most interesting responses to it: James Harrington’s sophisticated refinement of modeling techniques, and Margaret Cavendish’s insights into the challenges international relations pose for self-contained social models. This micro-tradition, and the theories derived from it, by no means exhausts the possibilities of Renaissance utopianism. But it does represent a crucial moment in the history of the idea of society to which later thought, including the nascent discipline of sociology, the development of the novel, and the utopian tradition itself, are all indebted.

For all its historical importance, in contemporary literature social models are more likely to be the province of sociology than of utopian fiction, a genre that over the course of the last century has withered practically to insignificance. What is lost with the decline of utopianism is a form that allows its readers to imagine lucidly how different institutions and organizations interact to form an integrated whole, and therefore to envision their systemic rearrangement. Fredric Jameson has argued that such forms are in principle impossible in late capitalist society: “if individual experience is authentic, then it cannot be true; and that if a scientific or cognitive model of the same content is true,
then it escapes individual experience.”

Our society, in this account, eludes any attempt to create vivid yet truthful models as a result of its relentless complexity. One contention of this thesis is that from the point of their emergence in the seventeenth century, social models never reflected social reality in a straightforward way. Utopias, the first social models, were as much imaginative as inductive, as much constructed as found—indeed, they were one by virtue of being the other. Any future utopian social model will have a similarly oblique relation to social reality, but it may, like the utopias of Francis Bacon, James Harrington, and Margaret Cavendish, find a source of insight precisely in such obliquity.

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I. Francis Bacon

For a few months in the spring of 1617, Francis Bacon ruled England. James had appointed him Lord Chancellor in March, and then promptly departed for his first visit to his native Scotland since being crowned King of England. In James’ absence, a large share of the business of state fell to Bacon, who received ambassadors, sat in Chancery, and even offered advice to the absent monarch. Few philosophers have been as close to the center of power as Bacon, and few politicians have striven so industriously to systematize the knowledge acquired through their positions: here, at least, knowledge and power really did meet in one.

Until his unhappy final years, Bacon stayed close to the epicenter of English politics. He was, after all, born there in 1561, as the son of the Lord Keeper Nicholas Bacon. His career took him to Gray’s Inn, where he became a reader of law at twenty-six; Parliament, to which he was elected at nineteen; Star Chamber, where he was a clerk; the courts, as solicitor-general and attorney-general; and finally to the King’s Council as Lord Chancellor. In the brief intervals in his busy political career, he began drafting the Great Instauration, his six-part plan for the advancement of natural philosophy. These two great pursuits, the practice of politics and the study of nature, consumed the majority of Bacon’s sixty-five years; it is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that they should occasionally seem to mirror one another within his writing. Both rely on a complex bureaucratic system for the acquisition of knowledge, on the meticulous recording of facts, and on their methodical interpretation. In both, that is, the practical exercise of
power is achieved through knowledge, and knowledge is produced and disseminated through texts.

But given that words are so notoriously unreliable a medium, how does knowledge get into texts—and how can it emerge back out of them? In a first chapter, I discuss Bacon’s use of analogy as a technique that provides a partial answer to the question by serving as intermediary between perception and reason, focusing on his discussion of philosophical method in the *Novum Organum* (1620). In a second chapter, I consider the complex case of what Bacon calls “civil knowledge,” that is, the knowledge of society. How is it possible to extract elegant precepts from the wilderness of variables that govern social life? How, that is, is it possible to know things about society at all?

A century prior to Bacon, Machiavelli provided one answer to this question, in demonstrating that no *arcana imperii* were, in fact, too arcane to be written down. The most deeply-buried secrets of state could, in his view, be discovered more easily by an expert interpreter of history standing at the periphery of power than by the prince at its dead center. These kinds of secrets were not the contingent details of whether a given monarch would make a French or a Spanish or a Bohemian match, but the methods of operating the gears and levers that made states move. Bacon, whether engaged in business of state at Whitehall or Westminster, or alone in his lavish gardens at Gorhambury, always kept the latter object in mind. Yet precisely this propensity got him into trouble: while James was in Scotland, Bacon, searching for the deeper spirit of his directions, occasionally ignored their letter; interpretation led to misinterpretation, and inevitably to his royal master’s rebuke.
In a final chapter, I focus on Bacon’s utopia, the *New Atlantis*, to discuss precisely this problem: the problem of misinterpretation. The perfectly systematized model society Bacon envisions is a product of texts; even if it exists in the world as well, its structural coherence will only be visible within written documents. Bacon imagines a world made interpretable—it is no coincidence that he wrote three separate texts with variants of the title “On the Interpretation of Nature”—but if everything can be interpreted, conversely, everything can be misinterpreted. In a society in which knowledge and power are tightly aligned, both the opportunities for misinterpretation and its stakes rise.
Chapter 1: The Torch of Analogy

Poor Lord Chandos: in revelatory moments he perceives an intense meaning in the material world, in “mute and sometimes inanimate beings,” but in between such flashes of illumination he lives “a life of scarcely credible emptiness,” suffering from a boredom and indifference that he is barely able to conceal. In the meantime, abandoning books, he dreams feverishly of “a language in which mute things speak.”

Lord Chandos is, of course, Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s creation, the fictional author of a letter purportedly addressed to Francis Bacon in 1603. But though “The Lord Chandos Letter” is a fiction, Hofmannsthal’s suggestion that Baconian philosophy is a response to a perception of a language implicit in material reality is by no means absurd. The problem of how things can be made to speak, and how observers can interpret that language, is at the center of Bacon’s thought: the world he envisions is one made legible, whose operation can be understood as the interminable combination and recombination of an alphabet.

In the following chapters, I will show how Bacon’s conception of a legible world extends to the civil sphere and discuss some of the consequences of this view for political theory and utopian thought. But I want to begin by describing how Bacon suggests the language of things ought to be perceived in the first place, that is, how interpretable structures can be discerned in the natural world, focusing on his distinctive use of analogy as a technique for connecting perception and intellect.

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“I have thought of a kind of grammar,” Bacon writes in *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, “which should diligently inquire, not the analogy of words with one another, but the analogy between words and things, or reason.” Reason, in Bacon’s brilliantly compact formula, is not merely attained through analogy, but is essentially analogical. Elsewhere he retreats from this position, introducing analogy as a minor component of the inductive method—not reason itself, but merely one of reason’s many instruments. Though Bacon’s scholars have generally adopted this latter, more restricted view of analogy, his own practice provides a case for taking analogy as fundamental to his method. No less a theorist of method than John Maynard Keynes found his contribution in precisely this domain: “Bacon’s great achievement, in the history of logical theory, lay in his being the first logician to recognize the importance of methodical analogy to scientific argument and the dependence upon it of most well-established conclusions.”

In demonstrating the scope and function of Bacon’s use of analogy, I will show that his philosophical method and literary style are much more closely intertwined than they are usually taken to be. The distinction between Bacon’s method of invention and his mode of presentation—as Lisa Jardine describes it in a book so entitled, between “discovery” and “the art of discourse”—is often drawn rigidly. Even scholars who do not explicitly reinforce the distinction between Bacon’s style and method regularly do so implicitly by failing to take the figurative and formal dimensions of his writing into account. In examining Bacon’s use of analogy, however, this distinction rapidly becomes

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untenable, for analogy is both a vehicle for conveying ideas and an engine of discovery, the technique by means of which the language of things can be discerned and formulated, presented and represented. Reality itself may have not only a grammar, but a style.

Analogy holds such a key place in Bacon’s thought in part because of the way he formulates the problem the Great Instauration is meant to solve. Natural philosophy suffers due to the imperfect “commerce between the mind and things,” brought on by the inability of the “naked intellect” to comprehend the world adequately. In Bacon’s etiology of the state of knowledge, then, the ultimate source of sickness is psychological. Among the mind’s many infirmities, I want to focus on just one: the gap between intellection and sensation. Both the sense and intellect are independently flawed, but it is the disjunction between them, and the tenuous nature of their communication, that produces the need for analogical reasoning.

In his most ambitious tract on method, the Novum Organum, Bacon offers an extended investigation into the form of heat. It is intended to serve at once as an explanation and a practical demonstration of his method, and consequently provides a clear illustration of the patterns of reasoning that underpin his approach. Eleven aphorisms into its second book, he proposes that we “take the investigation of the form of heat by way of example,” and arrives, many pages later, at the ‘first vintage’ or provisional interpretation: “heat is an expansive motion, but restrained and struggling by way of the lesser parts,” which rises upwards, and “is not altogether sluggish” (Novum

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Organum, 271). Even within the progress from the statement of the problem to its striking conclusion, it is possible to see the gap between sense and intellect asserting itself. In finding an explanation for heat in the motion of matter, there is a way in which the phenomenon with which Bacon began, the common sensation that made us call fire, sunlight, and boiling water alike hot, remains unexplained. Instead, the mode of explanation has shifted away from sense perception and toward an explanation grounded in inferred physical behavior.

Bacon’s protégé Thomas Hobbes characteristically put his finger on the point of conceptual tension in his predecessor’s account. In a discussion of heat in De corpore, Hobbes makes a distinction between something that is hot, and something that is heat-producing. Because we understand the idea of heat through our own perception of it, we can know with a reasonable degree of certainty that the sun, or a flame, is heat-producing, “yet we doe not perceive that it is it selfe Hot.”\(^9\) Hobbes, accordingly, undertakes to explain why certain things cause the feeling of heat in humans and the rest of the animate world, suggesting that our own perceptual experience must be the key to understanding the phenomena of nature. Though Hobbes’ treatment of heat is indebted to Aristotle and the Italian philosopher Bernardino Telesio, it is also a response to Bacon.\(^10\)

The gap between sensation and explanation has reappeared as an area of interest in contemporary philosophers’ treatment of the problem of consciousness. As David Chalmers writes, “heat is naturally construed as the cause of heat sensations,” but “we

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\(^10\) Bacon’s choice of heat as a subject is no doubt partly a response to Bernardino Telesio, who saw heat and cold as the active principles of nature (matter formed a third, passive principle).
have no good account of heat sensations”—hence the paradoxical result that “we end up explaining almost everything about a phenomenon except for the details of how it affects our phenomenology.” Hobbes, whose formulation resembles Chalmers’, differs from Bacon on the question of how secure any leap from sensation to physical explanation can be, for Hobbes’ peculiar brand of Pyrrhonism insists that our perceptions are the only thing we have access to, making natural philosophy an exercise of elaborate speculation.

The fact that Bacon’s account moves from sensation to knowledge—or at least to a hypothesis, that may, later on, be refined into knowledge—does not suggest that the obstacles to such a shift went unnoticed. If Bacon believed that true and certain knowledge could be derived from perceptions, it was not because he thought that the process was natural to the mind, or easy for it. He too noted a disjunction between the basic perceptible quality and the thing itself, stating that they differ as “that relative to man from that relative to the universe” (Novum Organum, 237). His method was designed precisely to encounter and overcome this discrepancy. It was nothing less than a programmatic description of the transmutation of sense into rational knowledge: “In fact I mean to open up and lay down (muniamus) a new and certain pathway from the perceptions of the senses themselves to the mind” (Novum Organum, 53). Heat, Bacon’s phenomenon of choice a particularly interesting phenomenon in the Elizabethan age in precisely this respect. Before the calendar glass had become a thermometer, and the comparison of differing levels of heat had become temperature, heat was of necessity primarily a quality relational to human perception.

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Bacon wrote at the cusp of the transition to measuring heat with instruments, and his discussion tracks contemporary changes in a number of respects. He remarks, for instance, that air could register changes in temperature with greater sensitivity than human touch, for “the air’s sense, as far as hot and cold is concerned, is so subtle and exquisite that it far surpasses our faculty of touch” (*Novum Organum*, 251). Yet even as such an observation rejects human sense as the instrument *par excellence*, it continues to rely upon sense as a paradigm, though one that has been transferred from agent to instrument. Bacon’s tendency to regard heat as a sensation is also evident in the initial instances of heat with he begins the discussion, for the list includes such items as spices, vinegar and acids, and “keen and bitter colds,” which “cause a certain burning sensation” (*Novum Organum*, 219), as well as typical exemplars like the sun’s rays and bodies rubbed vigorously. Such borderline cases involve materials that are not, themselves, hot, but that induce the *sensation* of heat. What this list reveals is that Bacon is undertaking to explain a mental quality or experience, which is slowly and gradually transfigured into a formal explanation.

I have suggested that the necessity of effecting this transformation lies less in the natural world than in the partitioned mind. But what, precisely, is the structure of the

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13 Bacon’s differentiation between sense and perception appears in *Works*, 7:239; see also Daniel Heller-Roazen’s discussion of Campanella and Bacon in *The Inner Touch* (New York: Zone Books, 2007). For the Renaissance use of the idea of intelligible species, see Leen Spruit, *Species Intelligibilis: From Perception to Knowledge*, vol. 2 (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1995), especially chapters VIII (pp. 159-222) and XI (pp. 353-419).
psyche that demands such interpretative mobility? Though Bacon’s psychology has been discussed in a number of studies, including Karl Wallace’s 1967 Francis Bacon on the Nature of Man and more recently, in Graham Rees’ work on Bacon’s pneumatology, it has rarely been at the center of scholarly debate. Yet because Bacon’s method is designed to accommodate the mental infirmities diagnosed in his psychology, his views on the basic structure of the mind are well worth adumbrating. In this field as elsewhere, one obstacle lies in the fact that his ideas are distributed across a series of texts written over the course of three decades, which if not exactly inconsistent, do not strive for an ostentatious uniformity. At various points, for example, Bacon provides both functional and physical accounts of mental operations, which overlap and intersect without precisely coinciding. According to Bacon’s functional account of the soul, as he explains in the De Augmentis Scientiarum, there are “three faculties of the rational soul,” reason, imagination, and memory. 14 But the rational soul, which is not a corporeal substance, constantly interacts with the vital spirit, which is, and which therefore necessitates a discussion in terms of its physical composition. Spirits, Bacon writes in his History of Life and Death, are “compounded of the natures of flame and air,” and are the “craftsmen and workers who do everything that happens in the body.” 15 Bacon’s vital spirit, very much a material substance, if a fine and tenuous one, provides a point of contact between the body and the rational soul, connecting perception and reason in the process. The spirit

14 The faculties of the soul as a whole, he claims later in the same text, “are well known; understanding, reason, imagination, memory, appetite, will; in short all with which the logical and ethical sciences deal” (Works, IV.398).
is not simply a medium, however, but in humans, is “the instrument of the rational soul” (Works, IV.398). Bacon’s answer, then, to the question of the connection between the divinely infused rational soul and the perishable flesh relied on the vital spirit as an active intermediary.16

Viewed from the perspective of function rather than form, the important question did not have to do with the physical composition of mind and body, but with the relation between the perceptual and intellectual faculties. Bacon’s contemporaries generally acknowledged, following Aristotle's account in De anima and De sensu, that there was a distinction between these two mental arenas.17 The perceptual faculties, which included memory and imagination, were common to all animals, and inextricably involved with bodily experience, while the intellectual faculties—reasoning, planning, contemplation and so on—were not. This cleavage in the processes of the mind made it necessary to ask how faculties on either side of the divide were able to communicate at all, much less with such apparent ease. Bacon's answer, an old and acceptable one, was that imagination shuttled information from perception to reason and back again: “sense sends all kinds of kinds of images over to the imagination for reason to judge of, and reason again when it

16 In this respect, he has evidently drawn heavily on the thought of the Italian naturalist philosopher Bernardino Telesio (1509–1588), to whom he devotes an extended discussion in De Principiis atque Originibus. Telesio’s psychology emphasizes the role of spirit in receiving sense impressions, which are taken to be quite literally impressions left on the spirit by the external world. But Telesio’s psychology insists on the material basis of perception far more dogmatically than Bacon’s, which is content to make use of faculty psychology and unsystematic observations drawn from personal experience, and ethical and political texts, where convenient. For Telesio’s discussion of perception, see De Rerum Natura Iuxta Propria Principia (Naples: 1586), Book VII, pp. 257-312. See also Cees Leijenhorst, “Bernardino Telesio (1509-1589): New Fundamental Principals of Nature” in Philosophers of the Renaissance, ed. Paul Richard Blum, (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), pp. 168-180.
17 See, for example, the discussion of the senses in Helkiah Crooke’s Mikrokosmographia, intended as a popular treatment of the human body, London, 1615.
has made its judgment and selection, sends them over to imagination before the decree be put in execution” (Works, 4.405-6). In this account, imagination is a kind of mental courier.

In neither Bacon’s functional nor physical psychology is the passage from the body and the senses to the rational soul and reason an entirely reliable one. If the spirit is not merely a medium but also an instrument, it cannot be expected to perform its work properly without a certain amount of guidance. And imagination, the faculty responsible for transmitting the impressions received by the senses to reason, likewise requires direction. The mind’s failure to function precisely and effortlessly may, of course, be a result of the fact that it is irrevocably fallen, as many of Bacon’s commentators have remarked. But while this is no doubt so, it is also the case that Bacon does very little to imagine the mind in its prelapsarian state, for the helps he provides rather accommodate than repair the mind’s flaws. It is better, perhaps, to think of the Edenic state, in places blurring pleasantly into the myth of the Golden Age, as a rallying cry in Bacon’s thought than as an idea likely to influence the content of the new philosophy. Adam, after all, would hardly have known what to do with some of the curiosities the members of Salomon’s House invent, which not even the most daring exegete could claim had example in Eden.

In Bacon’s thought, sense and reason delimit the field of human inquiry. In the essay “Of Truth” the pair is made to bracket all of creation, for “The first creature of God, in the works of the days, was the light of the sense; the last, was the light of

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Yet the division between the two is as important as their reciprocity. Gilbert Watts, one of Bacon’s earliest interpreters and translators, understood the importance of this divide, and was well aware that one of the central ambitions of Bacon’s method was to bridge this rift. In the well-known frontispiece of the 1620 *Instauratio Magna*, a ship is shown sailing between the Pillars of Hercules, once thought to mark the limits of the known world. Watts borrowed the image of the ship for his 1640 translation of *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, but various iconographic adornments were added to it, among them two globes at the top of the page, each with a spindly hand somewhat awkwardly extended to clasp the other’s. Inscribed beneath them are the words *MUNDVS VISIBILIS* and *MUNDVS INTELLECTUALIS*. The image seems to be referring to Bacon’s desideratum of a restored “COMMERCICE OF THE MIND AND OF THINGS,” found in a text originally published as an introductory note to the *Novum Organum*, but appropriated by Watts for his edition of the *De Augmentis Scientiarum*. But by referring to the *mundus visibilis*, Watts locates both spheres in relation the mind: there is the visible world, the world that can be seen, and the intellectual world, the world that can be comprehended; both occur in relation to the human faculties, and the problem of their commerce must, therefore, be worked out within the walls of the mind.

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19 The essay “Of Truth” first appears in the 1625 essays, in which it replaces “Of Religion” as the opening piece. Brian Vickers discusses the relation between light and reason in this passage, arriving, through a complex series of associations, at Bacon’s image of the mirror, and hence sense perception, in Brian Vickers, *Francis Bacon and Renaissance Prose* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968). While it is of course the case that the signification of ‘light of sense’ is simply visible light, it is also true that the syntactic parallel between ‘light of sense’ and ‘light of reason’ encourages us to think of the relation between sense and reason as such.

20 These prefatory materials tended to be printed with *De Augmentis* after its publication, since it was intended to form the first part of the *Instauratio*, while the *Novum Organum* formed the second, though it was published first. Francis Bacon, Watts edition, p. 2; *commercium istud* Mentis & Rerum, p. 2, Rees’ edition of *Novum Organum*. 
In addition to the metaphor of commerce, Bacon uses another, gentler image to discuss the proper relationship between world of the senses and of the intellect: that of marriage. In the preface to the *Novum Organum*, Bacon writes that through his method, he has “solemnized a true, lawful, and enduring marriage between the empirical and rational faculties (whose protracted and inauspicious divorce and mutual rejection has caused so much upset in the human family)” (*Novum Organum*, 20). As in Watts’ interpretation, this image can slip between the pairs sense/reason and world/mind; in his *Distributio operis*, Bacon writes that once he has “made clear what may be assigned to the nature of things and what to the nature of the mind” he will have “adorned and decked out the marriage bed of the mind and the universe” (*Novum Organum*, 37). The clasped hands of the globes in Watts’ translation of the *De augmentis*, then, may well represent not so much a pact as a betrothal.

What method is capable of effecting a marriage of true minds between the bitterly divided human faculties? The answer is implicit in the question—it is, of course, an analogical method. The importance of analogy to Bacon’s method accords with his inductive approach: the relation between similitude and induction is venerable and well-documented, and would have been perfectly familiar to any educated Elizabethan; Cicero, for instance, treats induction as an instance of the larger category of similitude in his *Topica*.  

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21 “There are several arguments from similarity which reach their goal by means of several comparisons in the following way: If a guardian has to keep faith, if an associate, if someone who has formally accepted responsibility, then an agent has to do the same. This procedure, which arrives at its aim from several instances, may be named induction, which in Greek is called *epagoge*; Socrates made extensive use of it in his discussions,” Cicero, *Topica*, ed. and trans. Tobias Reinhardt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 42.
often invoked in medical treatises, especially those with a Paracelsian tinge, in which comparisons between parts of the body, or parts of the body and other substances, tended to provide the underlying rationale behind treatments. In our own age, analogy has been identified as one of the characteristic procedures of the Renaissance mind time and again. Yet in order to account for the centrality of analogy to Bacon’s philosophy, it is necessary to do more than appeal to an unstructured notion of similitude. By using recent discussions of analogical reasoning in cognitive theory, as well as by paying careful attention to the relationship between the distinct valences of analogy within Bacon’s own language, it is possible to describe the precise role and extent of analogical structures.

The classic formulation of analogy, discussed by Aristotle, is the pattern A:B::C:D, where the relation of A to B is identified with the relation of C to D. This formula, as a number of theorists of analogy have shown, is rather too schematic to cover all cases; still, it does make evident the fact that most analogies find their basic similarity

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22 See Philip Barrough, “the crises of tumours besides nature doe followe the analogia of the humours whereof they be conflated or engendred (Guido affirming the same) which analogia, we here declare to be a propertie, or proportion, a nature, or a likenes of substaunce, which they call forma *specefica* & *occultia*, a speciall and hidden forme” in *The methode of phisicke*, (London, 1583), p. 210; Joseph Du Chesne, “And this is the true and vital anatomie of blood, which by manifest demonstration we haue shewed, that it hath a great analogie, proportion and resemblence with wine” in *The practise of chymicall, and hermetical physicke*, trans. Thomas Timme, (London, 1605), no page numbers.

in ordered relations between parts—that is, by way of the likeness of their structures.\textsuperscript{24}

This aspect of analogy is particularly vivid in Bacon’s prose, in which analogies often take the form of tableaux, tiny landscapes whose distinct components stand in complex relations to one another, as Brian Vickers has demonstrated so adroitly.\textsuperscript{25} When Bacon declares, again and again in his writings, that the sort of knowledge that is sought only for immediate material gain is like Atalanta’s golden apples in that both lead those who pursue them off the true course of the race, he is drawing a parallel between the shared function two rather dissimilar types of objects perform in similarly structured situations. And when he offers mankind a filum labyrinthi in the tract so entitled, the relation between the inductive method and the magic thread of Daedalus would hardly be intelligible without the encompassing labyrinth, whose perplexity is meant to resemble the confused state of human knowledge. That the labyrinth of Daedalus, along with its thread, appears in De sapientia veterum, in which it is taken to refer to the intellectual difficulties raised by the inventors of mechanical devices, which they alone can resolve, suggests that Bacon had an exceptionally clear eye for analogical structures, which then could be and were reused with varied content.

Analogy, then, typically relies on structural similarity, and not merely local resemblances. But this account makes an ambiguity in the process of inventing analogies apparent, which might otherwise be overlooked. It is simply this: is an item seen, its structure discerned, and the set of objects in the world scanned for another item with a similar structure—or are two items seen, their similarity intuited, and a perception of a

\textsuperscript{24} See, for example, David Burrell, Analogy and Philosophical Language (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).

\textsuperscript{25} Brian Vickers, Francis Bacon and Renaissance Prose, op. cit. See in particular Vickers’ discussions of motifs of shipwreck, gardening, and light.
higher order, shared structure attained through their comparison? Needless to say, both accounts seem viable as description of the derivation of analogies, at least in some cases.

In many instances, an author no doubt has a sense of higher-order structure corresponding to a particular situation or object, and casts about the world for the relevant kind of image or scene to illustrate the original idea. To discuss analogy this way is to conceive of it as a component of the transmission of texts, and Bacon treated it accordingly in his *Colours of Good and Evil*. In this respect, Bacon was very likely influenced by Erasmus’ book of ready-to-hand analogies, *Parabolae sive similia*. Erasmus’ text offers a compact list of analogies drawn from Seneca, Plutarch and Pliny, among others. In some instances, Erasmus draws his analogy or similitude entirely from his classical source; in others, he draws only the first half of the similitude from a source, and invents the second. In particular, he tends to draw picturesque reports about gemstones, flora and fauna from Pliny for which he then invents moral or political applications. Because of this method of composition, it is possible to see the order in which the process of constructing an analogy occurs quite clearly: he begins with an object or idea, pulls some kind of structure out of it, and then finds a political or moral analogue that corresponds more or less neatly.

Erasmus’ use of analogy might have had a particular resonance for Bacon in light of his use of images drawn from natural philosophy. In his dedication, Erasmus gestures toward the value of natural philosophy for the seeker of analogies: “I have not chosen what was ready to hand, nor picked up pebbles on the beach,” he writes. Truly

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26 Bacon’s *Colours of Good and Evil* is a tract that offers its readers maximally effective analogies and rhetorical tricks for making something seem either desirable or the reverse. It was initially appended to Bacon’s essays, but he reproduces it in his *De Augmentis Scientiarum*. 

worthwhile analogies, on the contrary, “must be unearthed in the innermost secrets of nature, in the inner shrine of the arts and sciences, in the recondite narratives of the best poets or the record of eminent historians.”

It is difficult to know whether Erasmus’ treatment of natural philosophy as a waste ground to be plundered on behalf of eloquence would have amused Bacon—who was certainly not above the practice himself—or irked him. In any case, he was familiar with Erasmus’ *Parabolae*, and approved of it enough, at least, to borrow some of its analogies, as David K. Weiser has demonstrated.

In considering analogy as a component of discovery, however, it seems that the sequence must be reversed. Someone who is hoping to discover nature’s underlying forms, the principles that structure physical behavior, cannot have a structure already in mind and then cast about for an object that matches it, as Erasmus did; he or she must, rather be able to extract a higher-order structure from a perceived but perhaps not fully articulated resemblance between two sets of circumstances. Analogy, in such an instance, is a necessary though not sufficient component of induction.

Of course, things are not really so simple. If we can arrive at a theoretical distinction between different processes of analogy, in practice, it is often impossible to classify individual analogies one way or another. In a frequently-cited example, the idea of a wave *as such* did not exist before the discovery of sound waves—upon which, the

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28 David K. Weiser notes the Erasmian provenance of several of Bacon’s well-known figure of speech, including his men whose wit “work[s] upon itself, as the spider worketh his web, then it is endless, and brings forth indeed cobwebs of learning, admirable for the fineness of thread and work but of no substance or profit,” in “Bacon’s Borrowed Imagery,” *The Review of English Studies*, vol. 38, no. 151 (1987), pp. 315-324. I believe Bacon’s well known image of the obelisk in *Novum Organum* may also have been inspired by a series of two of Erasmus’ analogies.
general idea of a ‘wave,’ extracted from the particular matter in which it occurs, became possible. But whether the picturesque example of waves traveling across the sea suggested the wave form to Chrysippus, credited as the first to suggest that sound travels in waves, or whether he chose waves as a kind of metaphor suited to clarify a conception he had already formed, is likely to remain a matter of contention.  

It is not merely that we are incapable of inferring the hidden sequences of the authorial mind once they have been collapsed into a single instant on the page. The problem is, I believe, deeper: the two modes of analogy are often not even conceptually discrete. On the contrary, a thinker is likely to hesitate between two analogs, deriving a sense of a shared structure from their resemblance, while at the same time adjusting the parameters or boundaries of the analogs themselves in order to bring them into conformity with the structure that connects them. Bacon’s use of analogy is everywhere characterized by such a vacillation between analogs and structure.

Analogy’s formal ambiguity, its tendency to toggle between objects and structure, helps to explain how it is uniquely qualified to bridge the gap Bacon discerned between sense and reason. In moving between a perception of likeness to an idea of structure and

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30 David J. Chalmers et al. present a similar perspective in “High-Level Perception, Representation, and Analogy” in *Journal of Experimental & Theoretical Artificial Intelligence*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (1992), pp. 185-211. They argue, "It is useful to divide analogical thought into two basic components. First, there is the process of situation-perception, which involves taking the data involved with a given situation, and filtering and organizing them in various ways to provide an appropriate representation for a given context. Second, there is the process of mapping... It is by no means apparent that these processes are cleanly separable...” but he concludes that “the perceptual process is conceptually prior.” The latter conclusion seems questionable; the ‘inductive’ element of analogy clearly cannot be prior in certain circumstances, as in the search for rhetorically effective imagery.
back again, analogy intersects with both, connecting images and ideas. In this respect, Baconian analogy operates in a way that is related to the enumerative induction Bacon dismissed as “a childish affair” (*Novum Organum* I.105), but is by no means identical. Because analogies may be drawn between exceedingly disparate sets of objects or situations, they are capable of revealing deeply buried commonalities and affinities, as opposed to classical induction, which, at its best, Bacon took to be merely capable of yielding a universal proposition vitiated by its reference to superficial phenomena. Baconian induction is, in fact, meant to uncover causes; as Katherine Park writes, “the idea of cause became the implicit touchstone for identifying a significant analogy.”

Baconian analogy clearly draws on both kinds of analogical process. When Bacon assembles lists of like items for inspection, he typically has something more than an unmediated perceptual resemblance in mind. There is generally at the very least a sense of the boundaries of the phenomenon and its likely effects implicit in the composition of the list—that is, a nascent sense of the structure of the phenomenon the list is supposed to help illuminate. This process works reciprocally to the one outlined above, for it allows cognitions to return to sense-perception, shaping and delimiting the perceptual information that is admitted for the purpose of the investigation. It is precisely the reciprocity between the two processes that gives Bacon such confidence in the reliability of the passage from consciousness to cognition and back, for the progression extends over a prolonged period of mutual modification and alignment, gently harmonizing two disparate but linked types of information.

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To demonstrate how analogy works in Bacon’s method, I want to return to the discussion of heat in Book II of *Novum Organum*. Bacon accords analogy or similitude a discrete place as one of the prerogative instances, the ideas or examples that can give shed particular light on phenomena, referring to “Instances of Correspondence or Proportionate Instances” which I have also grown used to calling *Parallels, or Physical Resemblances* (Similitudines)” (*Novum Organum*, 289-91). Mere physical parallels, he suggests, “although they do not do much for the discovery of forms, they none the less most usefully display the fabric of the parts of the universe, and perform a kind of anatomy on its members, and accordingly take us as if by the hand to axioms noble and sublime, especially those concerning the configuration of the world” (*Novum Organum*, 291). Yet if we examine Bacon’s method, we will see that analogy, taken more broadly, plays by no means so minor a role. As Sophie Weeks writes, for Bacon “[k]nowledge of forms depends on the detection of analogous instances that cut across the whole range of matter's manifestations.”

Bacon’s discussion of heat begins with the construction of three tables: first, there is the “Table of Essence and Presence,” which lists a number of objects in which the nature of heat is typically present, including the bodies of animals, flame, sunlight, and so forth. In this first table, items are selected because of a basically perceptual affinity, the presence of heat. Still, even in this table, an idea of heat extending past its sensation is

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33 Katherine Park notes, “Thus Bacon's tables of absence and presence, with which he proposed to organize the information in his natural histories, were essentially tables of perceived sensible similarity and dissimilarity.” I would suggest that dissimilarity, however, plays a surprisingly trivial role in the process, since the only relevant dissimilarity is the binary between being hot and not being hot.
already present. It is evident in number twenty-four on the list, spirit of wine, which is included because it tends to act like heat; Bacon offers as an example the fact that an egg white dropped in spirit of wine will harden, as it would if exposed to heat. The role of analogy is, however, more apparent in the next two tables, the Table of Absence in Proximity and the Table of Degrees.

Bacon constructs the Table of Absence in Proximity by matching most of the items listed in the Table of Essence and Presence with one or more corresponding items that he takes to be similar, yet are not hot. To the sun’s rays, Bacon subjoins the rays of the moon; to boiling liquids, the same liquids in their natural states; to fiery solids, such as heated iron, he tentatively juxtaposes glowworms and rotten wood. (A few items on the first list, such as animals and ‘objects rubbed violently’ are given no negatives.) Such analogs are not selected purely through some unmediated perception of likeness—after all, given the nearly inexhaustible range of objects in the world, how could they be? That this is so is particularly evident in the instances where analogs are difficult to come by, and only tentatively proposed. When Bacon suggests that the closest comparison for glowing, fiery bodies are glowworms and rotten wood, he does so with an idea that the type of light they emit is of importance, that is, he evidently has an idea of desired composition or features that leads him to those particular analogs.

In order for the Table of Absence in Proximity to be effective, the appropriate analogs must be selected based on some sense of a shared nature that is not heat. This is not, however, to suggest that the construction of the Table of Absence in proximity is a merely formal exercise; on the contrary, Bacon expects the relation between the items in that table and the Table of Essence and Presence to reveal definitively, with the help of
experimentation, the precise characteristics of the variable to be eliminated. The role of analogy, even in the Table of Absence in Proximity, is not confined to providing sample analogs based on a preexisting idea of a nature to be eliminated, but also is expected to lead to a deeper idea of the structure of that nature: the analogy between the rays of the sun and the moon, for example, is not merely offered as an argument against the naturally heat-containing properties of light, but the depth and extent of that parallel is meant to be thoroughly tested, as, for example, by subjecting the moon’s rays to magnification (known, as Bacon points out, to increase the heat of the sun’s rays).

While the Table of Absence in Proximity relies, by its very nature, on the selection of appropriate analogs from a preexisting category, the third and final table, the Table of Degrees, in which objects are ranked from neutral with respect to heat to hottest, is intended to allow the investigator to derive a sense of the characteristics of a shared nature—that is, heat—from a variety of examples that share only the perceptual characteristic of being hot. Unlike the Table of Absence in Proximity, then, the Table of Degrees relies on a movement from sense perception to an idea of structure, rather than vice versa. Within this relatively short space, when the form is only just beginning to be intuited, it is possible to see a fluctuation between a use of analogy that moves from a reasoned (albeit, at this stage, thinly reasoned) idea of a structure or category to a derivation of objects that fit in that category, and from a sensory perception of similarity to a reasoned idea of structure. Bacon’s method requires many other devices—chiefly the use of negative examples—but it is the use of analogy that provides a connection between sense and reason, and that makes it possible to derive the true forms of nature, which necessarily traverse the divide between the two.
Despite Bacon’s expectation of the ultimate success of his method, it would be a mistake to think that the problematic divide between sense and reason is ever eliminated—that is, that the two faculties are effectively sutured together. The mind’s infirmities are solved outside it, on a higher order of analysis, where the characteristic aptitudes of different faculties meet, as it were, in time rather than in space, through the operation of a deliberately protracted process. “The information of the senses is sufficient,” Bacon suggests in *Valerius Terminus*, “not because they err not, but because the use of the sense in discovering of knowledge is for the most part not immediate” (*Works*, 3.240). Bacon is always inclined to emphasize the gradations in the process of discovery; his method is designed to reveal the progressive element in events that, to an incautious observer, are apt to appear instantaneous. This process is made possible by the use of charts and lists, of collections of material and its systematic analysis—both in the laboratory and on the page. Bacon’s technique of *experientia literata*, literate experience, explained in *De Augmentis*, refers to a more narrowly delimited process of discovery. But his method as a whole is also a way of making experience literate in a more general sense, of conjoining sense and reason on the page.

The fact that it is difficult to isolate the use of analogy as an inductive technique and legitimate component of discovery from the use of analogy as a means of illustration and therefore as part of the process of transmission indicates that the demarcation between Bacon’s method of discovery and his method of presentation is far from absolute. Bacon, in his programmatic statements on method, advocated keeping these two elements distinct. But in practice, so long as natural philosophy had to occur on the page as well as in the laboratory, it was impossible that they should be. As Stephen Gaukroger
observes, in the thought of Bacon and his contemporaries, “we should not draw the contrast between poesy and philosophy too finely.”34 Bacon’s method, then, is literary as well as literate: it not only relies on writing, but also on its creative use, and, as we shall see, its interpretation.

One of Bacon’s severest critics, the reactionary philosopher Joseph de Maistre, would attack his use of figurative language and analogy on the grounds that it was evidence of a woefully material mind: “His thought seems, if it may be expressed this way, to be incorporated and embodied with the objects that uniquely occupy him. Any abstract impression, any verb of intelligence that contemplates itself, displeases him. He dismisses as scholastic nonsense any idea that does not present itself to him in three dimensions.”35 Despite Maistre’s acerbic tone, I do not think Bacon would have disagreed with his assessment. Thought incorporated with objects would make, on the whole, an acceptable slogan for Baconianism—for reason is, after all, the analogy between words and things.

34 Stephen Gaukroger, Francis Bacon and the Transformation of Early-Modern Philosophy, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 55. Gaukroger observes, “In short, while there is a sense in which, having decided in favour of the practical or active life, one then pursues questions of knowledge and virtue in the context of various models of practically-oriented intellectual activity, in which philosophical and poetic models (as opposed to mathematical or theological models, for example) predominated…it is not simply a question of making a clear-cut distinction between a philosophical or a poetic/literary model,” 57.

35 Joseph de Maistre, An Examination of the Philosophy of Bacon, ed. and trans. Richard A. Lebrun, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1998) p. 30. Maistre’s analysis, which is extraordinarily thorough, deserves far more attention than it has been given.
Chapter 2: Civil Knowledge

“Civil knowledge,” Bacon wrote in *The Advancement of Learning*, “is conversant about a subject, which of all others is most immersed in matter, and with most difficulty reduced to axioms,” (*Works*, 5.32). The subject of this chapter is Bacon’s ‘civil knowledge’, that vast and heterogeneous field of inquiry that includes questions of government, population, employment, and property, that encompasses warfare and diplomatic relations, trade and the regulation of currency—and implies a certain kind of answer to each question. Whatever the method by which such answers are reached, their form will be definite and unambiguous: *civil knowledge* is not political philosophy, and it is certainly not ad hoc political prudence. *Knowledge*, in Bacon’s precise diction, implies a field that employs harder, more verifiable facts than either political philosophy or prudence, facts that can be abstracted into axioms—a term colored with both legal and geometrical meaning.

Bacon’s passing reference to the difficulty of acquiring civil knowledge suggests two interlinked questions: first, what does it imply about the structure of the political or social sphere to suggest that it is knowable in Bacon’s sense? What kind of axioms could be valid with respect to it? What kind of laws could provide its underlying structure? In the four centuries intervening between the publication of *The Advancement of Learning* and the present day, innumerable attempts have been made to answer this question—yet
it remains open.\textsuperscript{36} At issue, in both Bacon’s day and our own, is the extent to which an analogy between nature and society, or between natural and social processes, holds. Yet if in our own era, the question is the entirely asymmetrical one of whether social laws mirror natural ones, in Bacon’s thought, the two analogs were more evenly balanced. The state provided the original figure of law, which was returned to it in an altered form after being sifted through the fine mesh of philosophical method. The first half of this chapter, then, follows the recent surge of critical interest in political and legal sources of Bacon’s method in order to investigate the precise quality of the analogy between civil and natural knowledge in his thought.

The second question Bacon’s statement raises is predicated on an answer to the first. Given an idea of civil knowledge, what method of research could begin the difficult task of pulling axioms up out of the recalcitrant matter in which, we are told, they are so thoroughly immersed? Because Bacon never wrote a manifesto for civil science—a task left to his amanuensis, Thomas Hobbes—the answers to this latter question must remain at least partially speculative. Yet there are clues scattered throughout his writing, and here, as in the last chapter, analogy will again be a central concept, both in discerning and describing Bacon’s practice.

Scholars of Bacon’s thought have not always agreed that he considered civil knowledge to be capable of a systematization along the lines he proposed for natural philosophy. Markku Peltonen, for example, has suggested that “Bacon's different writings did not form a consistent and coherent system.”\(^{37}\) Elsewhere Peltonen has argued that, far from advocating a fully methodized civil philosophy, “it seems as if the idea of a theoretical part of civil philosophy did not even occur to him…”\(^{38}\) Such skepticism is a natural consequence of Bacon’s attitude toward politics, which is, as Peltonen notes, above all a practical one. Yet Bacon’s texts contain a number of passages that suggest a more ambitious conception of political knowledge. In such passages, the natural world and the political world reveal analogous structures, capable of illumination by a single method.

Bacon provides consistent suggestions of such a conception of politics throughout very nearly the entirety of his philosophical career. The quotation with which I began comes from one of Bacon’s first philosophical works, *The Advancement of Learning*, published in 1605. In *A Description of the Intellectual Globe*, written around 1612, Bacon explicitly claims that his conception of philosophy extends well past the investigation of nature: “beneath the heading of Philosophy I bring together all the arts and sciences, and in short whatever the mind has collected and digested into general notions from its encounters with singulars" (*Oxford Works*, 6.99). Perhaps the clearest evidence for taking

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political philosophy as amenable to the methods of natural philosophy can be found in a passage in the *Novum Organum*, published in 1620, in which Bacon writes,

“Meanwhile let no one hope for great progress in the sciences… unless natural philosophy be extended to the particular sciences, and these in turn reduced to natural philosophy. For hence it comes about that astronomy, optics, music, many of the mechanical arts, and medicine itself, and (which may surprise you) moral and political philosophy (*Philosophia Moralis & Civilis*), and the science of logic have practically no depth but skate over the surface and variety of things; because once these are dispersed and set up as particular sciences, they are no longer nourished by natural philosophy…” p. 127.

The idea is repeated in Aphorism 127. Such passages suggest that in the course of the rapid maturation of his philosophy occurring between the first real statement of his program and the fullest statement of his method, Bacon had not changed his mind about the possibility of a more deeply methodized form of civil knowledge, but on the contrary had consistently viewed the prospect with both interest and optimism. Nevertheless, Bacon’s terse formulations leave a good deal of ambiguity. How far, exactly, was the analogy between the two fields and their two subjects meant to extend?

Much scholarship on Bacon has approached this question through attempts to excavate the juridical and political basis of Bacon’s natural philosophy. Many scholars would agree with Lisa Jardine, for example, in finding it significant that “[l]ike Bacon, Machiavelli claims that he has a new method which will yield the true and universal principles of politics” and that “Machiavelli sets out to establish such general rules as can be extracted from examination of historical examples, assuming the single fact that
human nature has remained the same throughout history” (Jardine, 64). More recently, Julian Martin has found political and legal antecedents for many of Bacon’s innovations in natural philosophy; he has also argued, somewhat more tenuously, that Bacon’s natural philosophy is intended to advance political goals.\footnote{Julian Martin, \textit{Francis Bacon, The State, and the Reform of Natural Philosophy} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Harvey Wheeler’s article, “The Invention of Modern Empiricism: Juridical Foundations of Francis Bacon’s Philosophy of Science,” provides a different perspective on Bacon’s adaptation of legal ideas in \textit{Law Library Journal} vol. 76, no. 1 (1983), pp. 78-120.} Such scholarship has been immensely useful in reconstructing both the intellectual lineage of Bacon’s method and its aims. What I wish to describe, however, is the more reciprocal relation between the two disciplines emerging in those instances, however brief, when they appear as analogs on an equal footing, each capable of shaping the other.

In order to do so, I want to revert nearly two decades from the publication of the \textit{Novum Organum}, the subject of the last chapter, to 1603, when Bacon was no Lord Chancellor, but a mere Queen’s Counsel. That year proved significant for England in general and for Francis Bacon in particular, for overlapping reasons: the ascension of King James to the throne in March gave England and Scotland a common monarch, while his coronation would prove personally fateful for Bacon, who was to become James’ close confidant. In the same year, Bacon’s Great Instauration first began to receive definite outlines, primarily in two short, unpublished texts. The fragmentary \textit{Valerius Terminus}, containing instructions for “the interpretation of nature,” diagnoses the defects of natural philosophy up to Bacon’s own age, and provides a precursor to Bacon’s later, more developed theory of forms in a discussion of whiteness, along with many of the images and injunctions that were to become staples of his writing. And in his short tract,
Parasceve ad Historiam naturalem et experimentalem, or Preparative Toward a Natural and Experimental History, Bacon explained the central place of natural histories within his philosophical project and set out the principles to which such histories ought to conform. It is not on either of these texts, however, that I wish to focus, but on a political tract published in the same year.

At first glance, Bacon’s A Brief Discourse, Touching the Happy Union of the Kingdoms of England and Scotland, appears to be a purely occasional text, and it has usually been treated as such—in the Spedding, Ellis and Heath edition of Bacon’s complete works, for example, it appears interspersed with biography in the series of volumes dedicated to “The Letters and the Life.” The purpose of the tract is to set forth a theory of the unification of states that both justifies the project of political union and provides a consideration of its means, taking into account political obstacles resulting from the wariness with which each state viewed the other.  

Bacon was not the only writer to publish on the controversy surrounding union; he was joined by, among others, the early essayist Sir William Cornwallis, the neo-Tacitean historian Sir John Hayward, and the theorist of international law Alberico Gentili, whose work will be discussed later in this chapter. But Bacon’s tract, though conventional enough in its ends—the endorsement of James’ unification of England and Scotland—is resolutely unconventional in its means.

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In the opening pages of his *Discourse on Union*, Bacon adopts an unusual conceit: he begins with a discussion of the “great affinity and consent between the rules of nature, and the true rules of policy” (*Works*, 10.90), and proceeds to use ideas drawn from natural philosophy to illuminate Britain’s political circumstances. This subject matter marks it as Bacon’s earliest published foray into natural philosophy, albeit an ambiguous one. As such, it warrants consideration alongside Bacon’s two other compositions of the same year, *Valerius Terminus* and the *Parasceve*.

The purpose of the tract, Bacon writes, is to make “the government of the world a mirror for the government of the state” (*Works*, 10:92), in order to display the true properties of ‘perfect mixtures’ or perfect political unions, with particular attention to the factors likely to make the union of England and Scotland a success. Just as in Bacon’s philosophy the globe of the mind is brought to repeat, on its endlessly reflective surface, the image of the terrestrial globe, so here nature becomes a looking glass held up to the state. But there is in fact more than one mirror present. The parallel syntax in “the government of the world” and “the government of the state” demonstrates that the relation of mirroring works in both directions, for the two are already framed by a political term, i.e., ‘government.’ Bacon’s diction implies that if the natural world can reveal things about the civil, so the civil world can provide a set of terms for thinking about the natural. It is because a political realm, with its discrete territory and (at least in theory) consistently applied, universal laws provides a convenient metaphor for thinking about nature as a whole that it is possible for nature, conversely, to provide a set of terms for thinking about the state. Throughout the pamphlet, principles taken from nature are
applied to politics, but they are treated as components of an already politicized nature, so
that the question of priority of influence becomes impossible to settle.

Several of Bacon’s scientific interests emerge in his discussion of political union. The importance he places on forms in his later work is implicit in his analysis of perfect as opposed to merely temporary unions; he writes, “compositio is the joining or putting together of bodies without a new form: and mistio is the joining or putting together of bodies under a new form” (Works, 10.94). As an analysis, Bacon’s statement appears to be plainly Aristotelian, referring to the discussion of mixture in De generatione et corruptione I.10; yet it is possible to see, in the attention he pays to composition, a hint of his later concept of form, which relies on the proportion, size, and movement of matter. He seems to be imagining the citizens of states as so many particles, whose mixture is, at least in part, an entirely literal one, for the intermarriage of the Romans and the Sabines forms his chief example of peoples who unite into a single political entity. Is Bacon, here, drawing on a concept of natural form beginning to emerge during his earliest reflections on natural philosophy? Or is he using the opportunity provided by the analogy between nature and civil society as a way of polishing and revising his ideas about each?

A passage from Valerius Terminus suggests that the latter idea was one that Bacon was fully prepared to entertain. In the eighth chapter, “Impediments of Knowledge in Handling it in Parts” he writes,

Nevertheless I that hold it for a great impediment towards the advancement and further invention of knowledge, that particular arts and sciences have been disincorporated from general knowledge, do not understand one and the same

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thing which Cicero’s discourse and the note and conceit of the Grecians in their word CIRCLE LEARNING do intend. For I mean not that use which one science hath of another for ornament or help in practice, as the orator hath of knowledge of affections for moving, or as military science may have use of geometry for fortifications; but I mean it directly of that use by way of supply of light and information which the particulars and instances of one science do yield and present for the framing or correcting of the axioms of another science in their very truth and notion.

Bacon intends this discussion of knowledge to have the broadest possible scope: later in the same chapter, he suggests that moral philosophers would benefit by revising their notion of the good itself in the light of investigations into natural appetites. Different disciplines, then, can be advanced by being brought into analogy with one another—an idea given a fuller treatment under the concept of *experientia literata* in *De Augmentis*. Given such a perspective, there is reason to take Bacon’s claims to discover principles of civil knowledge through a comparison with nature as more than a mere rhetorical ploy—as well as to trace the analogy in the opposite direction. It is especially fitting that a tract on union should provide an important locus in the development of Bacon’s conception of knowledge, for the unification of the deeply divided intellectual globe is one of the central purposes of *Valerius Terminus*. The composition of the two texts, both products of 1603, may well have occurred in tandem.

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43 Bacon writes, “So if the moral philosophers that have spent such an infinite quantity of debate touching Good and the highest good, had cast their eye abroad upon …they should have found out this quaternion of good, in enjoying or fruition, effecting or operation, consenting or proportion, and approach or assumption; they would have saved and abridged much of their long and wandering discourses of pleasure, virtue, duty, and religion” (*Works*, 3.229-30).
Comparisons between disciplines, then, can provide suggestive ideas for how the investigation of each might proceed. To make the comparison between nature and society is already to think of society—and possibly, also, nature—in a different way. Assisted by the analogy between the two spheres, it is possible to imagine society as a whole, a universe with its own forms and laws. Political society, like nature, that other unimaginable whole, is conceivable as a sphere only through its reflection in other spheres and realms of knowledge, as well as, finally, in the mind that represents it. The idea of its totality is perhaps only a convenient fiction, but it is one that makes it amenable to systematic study by demarcating boundaries, which can be further subdivided into digestible pieces, and which can lead to coherent research programs.

The comparison between nature and society may also help to establish underlying conditions for the study of each, including some of the ideas and methods that frame and precede analysis. Comparing the two spheres allows Bacon to extract first principles, those universal truths that precede the process of induction. In the dedication of the Discourse on Union to James I, Bacon writes, “every thing in nature, although it have his private and particular affection and appetite… yet nevertheless when there is a question or case for sustaining of the more general, they forsake their own particularities and proprieties, and attend and conspire to uphold the public” (Works, 10.91). The principle, which is considerably indebted to Hooker for its formulation, can be seen to be a general rather than local rule precisely because of its application in multiple spheres.\footnote{Hooker writes, “another law there is, which toucheth them as they are sociable parts united into one body; a law which bindeth them each to serve unto others’ good, and all to prefer the good of the whole before whatsoever their own particular, as we plainly see they do, when things natural in that regard, forget their ordinary natural wont; that which is heavy mounting sometimes upwards of its own accord, and forsaking the centre of the}
The framework civil and natural knowledge share indicates that politics is capable of the same intensive analysis as that intended to illuminate nature. Hints of this conception emerge throughout Bacon’s *Discourse on Union*. In describing what makes previously separate entities one, he must inevitably discuss the characteristics that unify an individual entity, giving it internal coherence and distinguishing it from its environment. In order to describe a unified society, Bacon has to enumerate the crucial features that inevitably characterize any society: he must, in his own terms, describe its form, or at least the features that can comprise forms. Such features will be the equivalent of motions, arrangements, and hidden sympathies and appetites of matter in natural philosophy. Bacon writes, “Now to speak briefly of the several parts of that form, whereby estates and kingdoms are perfectly united; they are (besides the sovereignty itself) four in number; Union in Name, Union in Language, Union in Laws, and Union in Employments” (*Works*, 10.96). Laws, Bacon goes on to explain, “are the principal sinews of government” and they are “of three natures; *Jura* (which I will term freedoms or abilities), *Leges*, and *Mores*” (*Works*, 10.97). Such essential objects of civil knowledge, the components that define a given society, clearly admit of systematic study.

At the conclusion of the eight chapter of *Valerius Terminus*, Bacon writes, this note leadeth us to an administration of knowledge in some such order and policy as the king of Spain in regard of his great dominions useth in state; who though he hath particular councils for several countries and affairs, yet hath one

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earth which to itself is most nature, even as if it did hear itself commanded to let go the good it privately wisheth, and to relieve the present distress of nature in common,” in his *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, in *Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, ed. William Speed Hill and Georges Edelen (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1977-), 1.3.5. Bacon’s reworking of this image, which makes use of the contrasting pulls of gravity and magnetism, is considerably more coherent.
council of State or last resort, that receiveth the advertisements and certificates from all the rest.

The pursuit of knowledge, Bacon suggests, should take its administrative structure from the example of imperial Spain. Bacon would draw on politics in developing an idea of the organization of natural philosophical institutions throughout his writing, giving the subject prolonged treatments in the *Novum Organum*, *De Augmentis*, and *New Atlantis*. He would not, however, articulate the reverse case, the debt of political thought to a methodized natural philosophy, in anything like similar detail but would restrict himself to mere allusions to its possibility. As a consequence, the task of writing discourses outlining a systematized study of civil philosophy was left to his successors, notably Thomas Hobbes, James Harrington, and William Petty. Nevertheless, such political philosophers acted at least in part on Bacon’s hints as to form and content, the fuller discussion of which is the subject of the next section.

Where Does Civil Knowledge Come From?

Bacon was one of the first writers to use the phrase “civil knowledge” in English, though in so doing, he was merely translating the old phrase *scientia civilis*. The expression was found in Cicero and adopted by Renaissance humanists, who often used it interchangeably with the better-known *ratio civilis*. Both phrases indicated a humanist orientation toward political life in a broad sense, including not only the treatment of

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government, but also many of the commonplace interactions citizens might have with one another within that nucleus of sociability, the city. *Scientia civilis*, then, was a generous rubric to begin with; but in taking it up, Bacon emphasized and extended its breadth of field still further. Civil science, he informs his reader in *The Advancement of Learning*, is divided into three parts: the arts of conversation, negotiation, and government, also called “wisdom of the behaviour, wisdom of business, and wisdom of state.” The second of these arts, according to Bacon, “hath not been hitherto collected into writing,” though he finds distant precedents in both *Proverbs* and Cicero’s *De petitione consulatus*. Bacon thus casts the net of civil science even more broadly than his contemporaries, emphasizing its claim to treat man in the aggregate as thoroughly as possible and expropriating much of the traditional territory of moral philosophy in the process.

‘Civil knowledge,’ then, is a new take on an old subject, which in places begins to resemble a original discipline drawn from diverse sources. The originality of Bacon’s sociology—it warrants the term—as a subject has for the most part escaped notice, very likely as a result of his Ramist method of presentation in *The Advancement of Learning* and *De Augmentis*. Such a method, which takes a given field or knowledge as a whole and shows how it branches into progressively smaller subfields, is typically understood as a method of division—and with good reason. Yet in some cases, it may prove to be precisely the reverse, that is, a method of composition in which smaller, received areas of knowledge are fused into original higher-order disciplines. One may just as easily begin at the branch as at the root. Though ‘civil knowledge’ owes both its name and a good deal of its content to Renaissance humanism, nevertheless, because Bacon attempts to unify
previously discrete fields and to disaggregate previously integrated ones under its aegis, it is ultimately just this sort of discipline.

Civil knowledge is defined by its common subject, the “actions of society” (Works, 5.32), but its different subfields share more than this. All three are designed to illuminate the methods of shaping the behavior of groups of people. Bacon quotes Cato as saying that the Romans “were like sheep, for that a man might better drive a flock of them, than one of them; in a flock, if you could but get some few of them to go right, the rest would follow” (Works, 5.32). States, Bacon writes later on the same page, “as great engines are moved slowly and not without great efforts,” which gives them a certain inertia and predictability that men taken individually lack. Bacon’s essay “Of the True Greatness of Kingdoms or Estates,” which he includes in full in De Augmentis, is entirely concerned with shaping national character. In his view, the character of the people is the foundation of a state’s “greatness,” or its military power. Bacon, like Plato, Aristotle, and Machiavelli among others believes that the constitutional and legal structure of a state has an overwhelming bearing on its the character of its citizens. Other social elements, including the inhabitants’ professions, also play a role in influencing national character: “It is certain, that sedentary and within-door arts, and delicate manufactures… have in their nature a contrariety to a military disposition” (6:449). Finally national culture itself is essential, for “above all, for empire and greatness, it importeth most that a nation do profess arms as their principal honour, study, and occupation” (6:449). The factors contributing to a state’s greatness are diverse, but they are all capable of being engineered, or at least edged in the right direction. In all of the subdivisions of civil science, skillfully applied pressures yield predictable reactions.
Yet learning to apply such pressures and to correctly diagnose the situations in which they can be used is by no means a straightforward matter. The problem of systematizing the civil sciences is bound up with such difficulties: in order to use a maxim of government or negotiation, the civil actor must grasp the contours of a given situation, including the motivations and characters of all of the people or groups involved. It is inevitably a complex and imprecise process, albeit an indispensible one. “These informations of particulars, touching persons and actions,” Bacon writes, “are as the minor propositions in every active syllogism; for no excellency of observations (which are as the major propositions) can suffice to ground a conclusion, if there be error and mistaking in the minors.” Or as he puts it in the sentence with which I began this chapter, “Civil knowledge is conversant about a subject, which of all others is most immersed in matter, and with most difficulty reduced to axioms” (*Works*, 5.32). Civil knowledge is not the most resistant to systematization, as many later writers would suggest, because human action lacks fixed or predictable principles. Several of Bacon’s proposed natural and experimental histories, including the histories of the affections and of warfare, suggest precisely the reverse. It is, rather, that the situations in which one might apply such precepts are vastly more complicated than those in which one might attempt, for example, to induce the form of whiteness, or the form of heat. Civil knowledge’s unique immersion in matter, then, is a result of the fact that there is no exact analogue to the laboratory for human affairs.

There is no exact analogue—but there is a loose one. That loose analog, I want to suggest, is the state itself, which in Bacon’s thought occasionally seems to take on the character of a vast information engine, ceaselessly applying laws to its experimental
subjects, attaining results, gradually modifying its practice over time, and so on. The state
may be, among other things, the entity that has a “monopoly of legitimate physical
violence,” as Max Weber so influentially asserted.46 But as the word “legitimate” implies,
it does not strike blindly; violence is coupled with knowledge. To suggest that Bacon
viewed the state as a knowledge-gathering or knowledge-producing entity may seem to
be merely extending a Foucauldian notion of the disciplinary state backwards in time.
This would not, in itself, be such an odd idea: as critics have pointed out, the highly
monitored and methodized society depicted in the New Atlantis is as ambitious a
panopticon as anything the nineteenth century could dream up.47

What I want to suggest, however, is the related but distinct idea that the state is a
kind of experimental institution, through which the effects of law and policy, the rules of
civil science, are inevitably tested and observed. Bacon seems to suggest something of
the kind in his essay “Of Innovation,” in which he writes, “it is good also not to try
experiments in states, except the necessity be urgent, or the utility evident.” In the
opening clause of his sentence, Bacon appears to oppose innovation, but by its final
clause, it is clear that the restriction he proposes is not a stringent one: so long as an
experiment is obviously useful, it may be tried. Who, readers might ask, proposes to
introduce a political change that does not at least purport to be useful?

Again, in the essay “Of Boldness,” Bacon refers to the possibility of performing
experiments on the state: “as there are mountebanks for the natural body, so are there
mountebanks for the politic body; men that undertake great cures, and perhaps have been

46 Max Weber, “Politics as Vocation,” The Vocation Lectures, ed. David Owen and Tracy
lucky, in two or three experiments, but want the grounds of science, and therefore cannot hold out.” By ‘experiment,’ Bacon means the introduction of a new idea or order, but he is well aware of the parallel use of the phrase in natural philosophy, and indeed, seems to draw the reader’s attention to this sense of the word deliberately in his reference to “the grounds of science.” That Bacon recycles words and phrases compulsively is no argument that he is unaware of his repetitions: on the contrary, he seems always to be listening for the echoes of his own voice.

In suggesting that Bacon’s state is to some extent an institution engaged in a continual and inevitable process of experimentation, I am proposing the converse of the increasingly common view described above, namely that Bacon’s program for a collaborative natural science draws elements from his observation of the bureaucratic organization of the state, particularly its legal structure. What makes the state capable of sustaining a complex and ongoing analogy with natural philosophy is not only its use of laws and its relatively high level of internal organization, but also, perhaps primarily, its ability to observe the effects of its own operations, and to alter those operations over time in response. The state is, as it were, a self-regulating machine. Insofar as Bacon was able to apply his legal and political training to the study of nature, it was because he saw the laboratory and the state as possessing a common function in terms of their relation to knowledge.

The history of the state, then, in providing a record of actions and consequences, underpins the study of civil philosophy. Scholars have noted the correspondence between political histories and civil knowledge on the one hand and natural histories and natural knowledge on the other. George Nadel has argued that such histories provide the raw
matter for inductions about psychology: “we should not try to learn anything directly from these historical portraits, but should abstract the basic features of which all human dispositions are an arrangement, and thus arrive at scientific and accurate rules ‘for the treatment of the mind.’” The parallel between the use of history in natural and civil philosophy may, however, be even closer than this. If the history of the state’s operations is the history of its alterations—its innovations or experiments—such history may be already be much closer to the kind of experimental history of the kind Bacon recommended for the study of natural phenomena than has been suspected.

History is merely the beginning of philosophy in Bacon’s framework, the broad but unrefined base of the pyramid of knowledge. Bacon provides only hints about the method that could provide secure axioms of civil knowledge; nevertheless, it is clear from the accumulation of instances and examples throughout the *Essays*, as well as from his natural philosophy, that such a process would be comparative. In this respect, Bacon’s writings paralleled the relatively new discipline of comparative law, whose practitioners included Francisco Vitoria, Balthazar Ayala or Jean Bodin. In particular, the writings of Alberico Gentili (1552-1608), an innovative legal scholar and philosopher who moved very much in Bacon’s orbit, present an interesting point of comparison. Gentili, an Italian who became Regius Professor of law at Oxford at the precocious age of thirty-five, shared a number of acquaintances with Bacon, including Tobie Matthew and Robert

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49 Richard Tuck mentions their probable connection in his *The Rights of War and Peace*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 17, but does not explore its significance for Bacon’s work. Daniel R. Coquillette, the author of the only book-length study of Bacon as a lawyer, has also discussed their connection in *Francis Bacon* (Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh Press, 1992).
Devereux, the second earl of Essex—Gentili’s son, Robert, was Essex’s godson. Both men participated in his councils, and both lived in Gray’s Inn during the same period.\textsuperscript{50} Gentili, whom Anthony à Wood would describe as “the most noted and famous Civilian, and the grand ornament of the University in his time,” could hardly have escaped Bacon’s attention.\textsuperscript{51}

Gentili’s writings, including his work on embassies, \textit{De legationibus libri tres} (1585), and his magnum opus \textit{De jure belli libri tres} (1598) were taken seriously by his contemporaries both in England and abroad. In addition, they had a lasting impact on international legal theory: \textit{De jure belli} is an important and obvious influence on Hugo Grotius’s \textit{De jure belli ac pacis}, leading some scholars to suggest that Grotius’ title of the father of international law might be bestowed with equal propriety on Gentili.\textsuperscript{52} In his prolegomena to the volume, Grotius writes that past philosophers of war “lacked the illumination provided by History,” until “Attempts to supply the deficit were made… with their masses of examples organized in accordance with some definitions by Balthazar Ayala and, especially, Albericus Gentilis. I know that others may be helped by his diligence, and I admit that it has helped me.”\textsuperscript{53} In Grotius’ assessment, then, Gentili’s importance lay in his method, with its reliance on historical example to derive definitions and laws that would hold for all international wars.

\textsuperscript{50} Essex’s own thoughts on warfare, and war with Spain, are presented in \textit{An Apologie of the Earle of Essex} (London, 1600), which is dedicated to Anthony Bacon. Gentili was admitted to Gray’s Inn in 1600, where Bacon had been elected as a reader in 1588.


\textsuperscript{52} After a long period of neglect, Gentili’s work began to receive attention again at the end of the nineteenth century, with T.E. Holland’s reappraisal of his importance in his inaugural lecture as the Chichele Chair in International Law at Oxford.

In the first chapter of his De jure belli, Gentili asserts that unlike conventional political philosophy, which deals with internal problems, “military science and the law of war are not confined within the bounds of communities, but on the contrary always look outward and have special reference to foreigners.” As a result of its orientation outward, the study of the law of war is necessarily comparative, extending across communities and centuries. In Gentili’s estimation it is also a thoroughly secular pursuit, as his maxim *Silete theologi in munere alieno*, ‘Let the theologians be silent in matters outside their competence’ suggests, a slogan frequently quoted by Carl Schmitt, who accords Gentili an important place in legal history. As a result of their shared orientation, Bacon and Gentili’s writings reveal correspondences at several points. Gentili’s discussion of religious warfare in De jure belli, for example, demonstrates parallels to Bacon’s treatment of the question in his Advertisement Touching an Holy War. More strikingly, Gentili’s *De unione regnorum* (1605), a tract on the question of union, demonstrates a

55 Schmitt quotes Gentili’s slogan five times in *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, trans. G.L. Ulmen (New York: Telos Press, 2003). He writes, “A true jurist of this transitional period, Gentili, formulated the battle cry and coined what may be considered to be the slogan of the epoch in terms of sociology of knowledge: *Silete theology in munere alieno*” p. 121. And later in the same text, “The state was established as the new, ration order, as the historical agency of dethelogization and rationalization. The first stage of its juridical self-consciousness was attained in the thinking of two jurists: Bodin and Gentili” p. 159.
56 In the ninth chapter of De jure belli, on the question *Whether It Is Just to Wage War for the Sake of Religion?* Gentili’s answer is that it is not, an opinion with which prior theorists, including Francisco Vitoria, agreed. It would, Gentili writes, be permissible to wage war on those who had no religion whatsoever. Should any such people exist—and Gentili maintains that they do not—they would be outside the law of nature, which “will not protect those who have no share in it” (35). It is adherence to the law of nature, and not religion, that serves as the test of whether offensive war can be made on a people who pose no direct threat to a state. In his Advertisement Touching an Holy War, Bacon reaches the identical conclusion: war can be made against “such routs and shoals of people, as have utterly degenerate [sic] from the laws of nature” (*Works*, 7.36).
remarkably close resemblance to Bacon’s treatment of the question. Like Bacon, Gentili uses Aristotle’s discussion in *De generatione et corruptione* to discuss the mixture of two states, arriving at a very similar formulation.\(^57\) His marginal citation, however, is not to Bacon, but to his own prior discussion of union in the case of conquest in his *De jure belli*. The passage in that volume, though very different from Bacon’s work, shows a similar set of constitutional requirements for perfect union.\(^58\) Did Gentili plagiarize Bacon’s tract on union? Was Bacon influenced by Gentili’s prior discussion of union in *De jure belli*? Or did the two men’s work simply dovetail as a result of a method centering on the legal and formal comparisons of societies?

Like his natural philosophy, Bacon’s civil philosophy relies on the use of a comparative and analogical method. The prerequisite for such comparisons, as in natural philosophy, is their record in writing. The state may produce its own experiments and, to some degree, its own records, but those records must be assembled and organized, must be continually consulted and made to produce rules of increasing order and subtlety. It was in the spirit of this process that Bacon made repeated offers to King James to write a methodized digest of the laws of England, “For that the laws of the most kingdoms and states have been like buildings of many pieces, and patched up from time to time according to occasions, without frame or model” (*Works*, 13.362). The reformation of the law parallels the reformation of natural philosophy: in a 1622 letter to Lancelot Andrewes, then Bishop of Winchester, Bacon writes that he has in “the work of my

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\(^{57}\) In *De unione regnorum*, Gentili writes, *Imperfecta adhuc mixtio, non ex omnibus miscibilibus facta, & in unam formam non redacta: itaque nec duratura.*

\(^{58}\) See *De jure belli*, 3.11, “Of Change of Religion and Other Conditions” in which Gentili discusses changes that a conqueror may make to the culture of the people over whom he is victorious, a set of considerations that approximates his later discussion of the conditions of a successful union.
Instauration had in contemplation the general good of men in their very being, and the dowries of nature; and in my work of laws, the general good of men likewise in society, and the dowries of government” (Works, 13:187-88). Laws and policies, once systematized, are fed back into the restless engine of the state.

Taking an analytic view of politics will inevitably lead the state itself to be reshaped along more methodical lines—to be, one might say, edited and rewritten. In a 1620 letter, Bacon proposed that James establish permanent commissions tasked with dealing with standing political problems, including a “Commission for introducing and nourishing manufactures within the realm, for the setting people a-work, and the considering of all grants and privileges of that nature” (Works, 13.71) and a “Commission for the better proceedings in the plantations of Ireland” (Works, 13.72). Here again the role of writing proves to be crucial. Bacon writes, “For the good that comes of particular and select committees and commissions, I need not commonplace; for your Majesty hath found the good of them; but nothing to that that will be when such things are published” (Works, 13.71). “Published,” here, means primarily made known—but it also no doubt means published in the modern sense, that is, printed and disseminated.

I began this section by discussing the breadth of Bacon’s conception of civil knowledge. I have been focusing on only a third of that field, the domain of government, because the state alone is capable of making experiments and attaining results on a large scale. Bacon’s conception of civil knowledge, however, tends toward a far more complete conception of social interactions than the rubric of politics can encompass. In his framework, society itself is made literate, not in the usual sense in which its members learn to read en masse, but in the sense that it itself is understood by means of a textual
record and remodeled through an analytic attention to that record. As a result of such processes it becomes subject, in a radically new way, to interpretation, with all the advantages and inconveniences that eminently fallible technique carries with it. The particular difficulties attendant on treating society through its textual representation or model will form the subject of the next chapter, on Bacon’s *New Atlantis*. 
Chapter 3: The Misinterpretation of Reality

Toward the conclusion of *De Interpretatione Naturae*, a short tract explaining the reasons for undertaking a reformation of natural philosophy written around 1603, Bacon suggests that he does not intend to publish the entirety of his research: “those parts of the work which have it for their object to find out and bring into correspondence such minds as are prepared and disposed for the argument, and to purge the floors of men’s understandings, I wish to be published to the world and circulate from mouth to mouth: the rest I would have passed hand to hand, with selection and judgment” (*Works*, 2.87). Bacon concedes that such esoteric teaching is generally “an old trick of impostures,” but in the case of his philosophy, he argues that “the formula itself of interpretation… will thrive better if committed to the charge of some fit and selected minds, and kept private” (*Works*, 2.87). There is no evidence that Bacon ever circulated any of his work secretly, though several texts written in the same period, including *Valerius Terminus* and *Temporis Partus Masculus*, contain hints that the new natural philosophy will be fully revealed only to initiates. As his work on the Great Instauration progressed, Bacon seems to have abandoned the idea of concealing or reserving elements of his thought except, perhaps, to the extent that writing in Latin constituted an inevitable mechanism of filtration. For those scholars who see Bacon as an esoteric or even a Rosicrucian thinker, however, the appearance of openness in his later writings is deceptive. According to a common argument, he never abandoned his belief in the necessity of secret teaching, but simply threaded such teachings into the texture of his published writings, visible to those who knew how to look for them, imperceptible to the vast majority who did not—with
one exception. If, to such scholars, esoteric ideas form a submerged current beneath the whole of Bacon’s writing, they well to the surface in the overtly arcane pages of Bacon’s final publication, the *New Atlantis* (1626).

It is not difficult to understand why the *New Atlantis* should be at the center of speculation as to whether Bacon’s philosophy is intentionally enigmatic. Together with the *Sylva sylvarum*, with which it was published shortly after Bacon’s death, it is at once his most and least accessible text. Both were written in English, apparently with a general audience in mind, and this gambit appears to have been successful: the volume was his most popular work throughout the seventeenth century. Yet the *Sylva sylvarum* has a perplexing, not to say bizarre, organization: it consists of ten “centuries” of one hundred experiments each, some of them arranged in patterns according to subject, others inserted apparently at random, interspersed with occasional methodological reflections. William Rawley, Bacon’s chaplain and amanuensis, notes that the structure of the work is intentionally rough in order to “unloose mens minds” and to give others a useful example of a natural history, “which if the method had been exact, many would have despaired to attain by imitation.” Yet Rawley also suggests parenthetically that “he that looketh attentively into [the particulars], shall find that they have a secret order.” Rawley’s explanation suggests that the *Sylva sylvarum* is not obscure despite being addressed to a popular audience, but because of it: the loose organization meant to be a concession to

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59 The esoteric teaching in general turns on Bacon’s secularism or atheism; the list of scholars who have asserted something of the kind is long, but see in particular Howard B. White, *Peace Among the Willows: The Political Philosophy of Francis Bacon* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968); Jerry Weinberger, *Science, Faith and Politics: Francis Bacon and the Utopian Roots of the Modern Age* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).
the abilities of average readers is precisely what permits the construction of a hidden order.

The *New Atlantis*, meanwhile, advertises its popular appeal in every sentence. Its narrative skeleton, its luminous images drawn from the theater, its glamorous inventions all converge to create a text clearly written to delight as well as instruct, or perhaps to delight as a prelude to instruction. Yet within its pages, there are episodes that seem inexplicable or at least highly incongruous, interpretive knots that scholars’ attempts to untie have, in the end, only tightened. Such cruxes have seemed, to some scholars, to be *instantiae crucis*, ‘instances of the fingerpost’ or road signs, designed to point the path to the correct albeit concealed meaning.  

Others, of course, have seen such explanations as largely illusory, insisting that the *New Atlantis*’ undeniable eccentricities are due simply to the freedoms of imaginative fiction. Is the *New Atlantis* a fulfillment by other means of Bacon’s position on the use of esoteric doctrine in the *De Interpretatione Naturae*? Or was his rejection of that early view unswerving, even in his strange last writings?

I want to argue for a position that takes the interpretive difficulties of the *New Atlantis* as real and as recalcitrant, without, however, gesturing to a secret teaching. In order to do so, I want to situate the *New Atlantis* within the framework of Bacon’s

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61 Paul Salzman, for example, argues that “the *New Atlantis* is richly allusive at the level of genre, gathering together, as it does, a wide range of narrative possibilities” in “Narrative Context’s for Bacon’s *New Atlantis*” in *Francis Bacon’s New Atlantis*, pp. 28-47.
thought on analogy, politics, and interpretation, drawing on the argument of the preceding chapters. In the first chapter, I described how analogy—and only analogy—connects the intellective and perceptive faculties by allowing the mind to move between objects in the world and the higher-order structures that define their resemblances. Because analogy occurs in language, primarily in writing, it also has the effect of connecting words and things: analogy makes language concrete and objects intelligible. It makes the physical world subject not merely to observation but to interpretation—the “interpretation of nature” that was the theme of so many of Bacon’s writings. In a second chapter, I showed how Bacon’s conception of civil science was defined in part through a mutually influential comparison between the spheres of nature and society: the laws of the state provided a model for the laws of nature, which in turn helped to make the idea of underlying social laws intelligible. Such laws, being deeply “immersed in matter,” are extremely difficult to uncover; perhaps only the state has the ability to make social experiments on a large scale. By consulting political history, a kind of artificial experimental history, social laws can begin to be abstracted, and the state can be reshaped along more methodical lines in accord with the principles derived from its own record. Like nature, society becomes fully interpretable through Bacon’s method.

The world Bacon both describes and brings into existence, then, is a radically interpretable one, in large part because it is thoroughly literate. “And yet so far mental effort has had a much more important part to play in discovering than has writing, and indeed experience has yet to be made literate,” Bacon complained in the Novum Organum; but “no discovery should be sanctioned save that it be put in writing” (Novum Organum, 159). Bacon elaborates on this surprisingly categorical statement in
aphorism following by suggesting that not only should the written word be used in natural philosophy, but its full possibilities should be employed, including the use of “appropriate tables of discovery” (Novum Organum, 161). Such devices play an important intellectual role in Bacon’s method. They make the raw data of experience quite literally legible, and in so doing, allow it to be analyzed, refined, and compared across events and categories. Writing is not an incidental but an essential component of the Baconian method.

Bacon does not expect that the gradual refinement of ideas through the comparisons and distinction allowed by writing will be an easy process. But to an unavoidable extent, it is a necessary one. For Bacon, a meaning has to be adapted each time it passes between thought and language, since words are a kind of image, existing at a more concrete level than reason. Interpretation, then, is necessary feature of all communication. Understanding “analogy between words and reason” (Works, 3.401) requires, therefore, the use of the imagination, which bridges sensible and rational experience, and this is doubly true of written language, which consists in a literal sense of images.

Writing, then, allows the world to be interpreted; by the same token, insofar as the world is depicted in letters, it requires that the world be interpreted. The interpretation it demands is inherently risky, particularly when the interpretive process involves language: in Bacon’s thought, words are merely the “the footsteps and prints of reason” (Works, 3:401), that is, the imperfect impressions of ideas whose precise contours they neither map nor instantiate. Bacon’s distrust of words is one of the better-known facets of his thought, particularly as it appears in his discussion of the Idols of the Marketplace in
Novum Organum. Scholars interested in this aspect of Bacon’s thought have tended to focus either on its implications for his theory of language, or more narrowly, for his own prose. But it is as important for reading as it is for writing. One obvious consequence of the strained relations between language and thought is that not only is it difficult to convey meaning into language without any alteration or loss, but it also proves difficult to extract meaning back out of language. Interpretation allows, in some cases even invites, error. The scientific enterprise Bacon envisions, in which the progress of knowledge occurs not only in minds but also between them, not only inside the confines of the skull but also within the wider radius of the printed page, offers vast possibilities for knowledge. But it also offers equally broad—or broader—opportunities for error.

In setting forth a hermeneutics of fables in the preface to his Wisdom of the Ancients (1609), Bacon acknowledges the ease with which it is subject to misinterpretation. “I know very well what pliant stuff fable is made of,” he writes, “how freely it will follow any way you please to draw it, and how easily with a little dexterity and discourse of wit meanings which it was never meant to bear may be plausibly put upon it” (Works, 6.695). Fables have, to a superlative degree, the ambiguity characteristic of all language. But there is a crucial difference, for such ambiguity is an intentional rather than accidental feature of fables and parables. They “have been used in two ways, and (which is strange) for contrary purposes,” Bacon writes, for “they serve to disguise and veil the meaning and they serve also to clear and throw light upon it” (Works, 6.698). Bacon’s statement is, in its way, a theory of fiction, which is able to make an

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author’s insights startlingly vivid, but in grounding that vividness in the recalcitrant
solidity of images, characters, and narrative, produces new sources of ambiguity. Arthur
Gorges, the first translator of the *De Sapientia Veterum*, compared it to More’s *Utopia*.63
In the introduction to his translation of the *De Sapientia Veterum*, he wrote, “the first,
under a mere idea of a perfect State government, contains an exact discovery of the
vanities and disorders of real countries; and the second, out of the folds of poetical fables,
lays open those deep philosophical mysteries which had been so long locked up in the
casket of antiquity.”64 To Gorges, “the parallel of their spirits” is so obvious that “it will
be said of them, as in former times pronounced of Xenophon and Plato, *Fuere aequales.*”

If Bacon’s exposition of fables seemed to Gorges to parallel *Utopia*, his own
utopian work, written more than a decade later, surely takes on some of the
characteristics of a fable. In Bacon’s framework, then, all fables offer heightened
possibilities for interpretation and misinterpretation—indeed, doctrines or ideas are cast
as fables for precisely this reason. In the *New Atlantis*, this technical feature of the genre
becomes one of the work’s central themes. The argument of this chapter is that many of
the text’s cruxes are designed precisely to draw attention to such difficulties of
interpretation. If some of its deepest puzzles seem to lack a resolution, it is because
Bacon is exploring the problems, as well as the possibilities, of both a world and a society
made thoroughly literate. In this respect, my argument follows David Colclough’s
assertion that the *New Atlantis* is “a fable about knowledge and about reading, about the
past and the future, far more than it is a description of an ideal 'feigned

63 Gorges was primarily known as the translator of Lucan’s *Pharsalia*; as such, he was
sensitive to the valences and interpretations of classical literature.
commonwealth.” But unlike Colclough, for whom the New Atlantis is “at least in part the model of the ideal Baconian mind” (Colclough, 67, emphasis mine), I focus on the problems and errors surrounding interpretation, which hedge Bensalem’s superficially ideal model with uncertainties.

By virtue of its genre—the fable—the New Atlantis immediately poses interpretive difficulties for its reader, but Bacon, relentlessly compounding obstacles, sets himself the challenge of depicting an island situated in an epistemological framework far outside the reader’s own. The difficulties begin from the title onward: the New Atlantis is not the name of the island depicted within the text, which is called Bensalem. The phrase “New Atlantis” forms, rather, a characterization of the kind of society depicted and the text in which that society is situated. It is meant to send the reader to Plato’s Critias, in which he describes the geography, society, and government of the island of Atlantis.

There are some fairly apparent reasons Bacon would have positioned his imaginary island beside or perhaps against Plato’s: like the Critias, the New Atlantis is a text describing a fictional society appended to a longer text on natural philosophy; and like the Critias it depicts a society with an extraordinary material prosperity. But I think Bacon would also have expected his readers to consider the location of the island depicted in the Critias.

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67 It is also worth noting that the Critias was handed down in incomplete form—an argument, albeit far from a decisive one, for treating the New Atlantis as an intentionally fragmentary work.
Plato’s narrative tells the story of the residents of Atlantis, who, despite being given a perfect state, courtesy of their benefactor and progenitor Poseidon, decline from their moral eminence, to the point of leading a war “between those who dwelt outside the Pillars of Heracles and all who dwelt within them” (Critias, 71), in which the Hellenes, preemminently the Athenians, ultimately triumphed. After the conclusion of this war, Atlantis “disappeared in the depths of the sea. For which reason the sea in those parts is impassable and impenetrable, because there is a shoal of mud in the way; and this was caused by the subsidence of the island” (Timaeus, 12). Bacon, so faithful to his metaphors that many of them acquire an enduring and almost independent life across his works, could hardly have been unaware of the iconographic significance of a war waged by those without the Pillars of Hercules on those within. A comparison of the narrowly bounded classical geography to the limits of classical, and classically derived, knowledge, appears in several of his works, as when he poses the rhetorical question to James I in The Advancement of Learning, “for why should a few received authors stand up like Hercules’ Columns, beyond which there should be no sailing or discovering, since we have so bright and benign a star as your Majesty to conduct and prosper us?” (Works, 3.321). Most importantly the analogy seems, as it were, to have hypostasized into the famous frontispiece of the Instauratio magna in which a ship is shown sailing through the Pillars of Hercules from the perspective of their far side, a perspective that implies that Bacon has already crossed that imaginary threshold, taking his readers with him.68

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68 See Hans Blumenberg’s interpretation of this frontispiece in The Legitimacy of the Modern Age, trans. Robert M. Wallace, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1985), “The pillars of Hercules, which are presented on the title page of the Instauratio magna as already being transcended by shipping traffic are indeed a fateful boundary (columnae
Bacon’s reference to Atlantis must, I think, be read in the context of that image. Like Plato’s Atlantis, Bacon’s *New Atlantis* is the representative of everything that is outside a set of classically conceived boundaries, only in the latter case, the boundaries are intellectual rather than material. In the case of the frontispiece, the fact that the boundaries have already been traversed is relatively unproblematic. Because a description must always be at least a measure or two ahead of the thing it describes, it stands to reason that the viewer, having already crossed the Strait of Gibraltar, should look back on the ship from a superior vantage. If Bacon is claiming he has taken the first step toward discovery as he understands it, we see no reason to disbelieve him. But the distance between the reader’s state of knowledge and that depicted in Bensalem is no single step: it is a vast gulf, and one that Bacon has suggested elsewhere will take centuries to traverse.69 If Plato’s Atlantis was situated just past the edge of the known world, Bacon’s is countless leagues beyond it both literally—it is located in the South Sea—and metaphorically.

Bacon’s great nineteenth-century editor James Spedding observed the difficulty of gaining a proper vantage point on Bensalem, and especially its chief institution, Salomon’s House, and in the process put forward a reason for the fact that the *New*...
Atlantis was an unfinished work. Bacon, he argued, was able to describe the institutional structure of the new science, but not its results:

Nor could he give a particular example of the result of such investigation, in the shape of a Form or an Axiom; for that presupposed the completion, not only of the Novum Organum, but (at least in some one subject) of the Natural History also; and no portion of the Natural History complete enough for the purpose was as yet producible. Here therefore he stopped; and it would almost seem that the nature of the difficulty which stood in his way had reminded him of the course he ought to take; for just at this point (as we learn from Dr. Rawley) he did in fact leave his fable and return to his work (Works, 5.350).

In a general sense, Spedding’s theory is not only ingenious, but also highly plausible. Bacon’s utopia is clearly shaped by the gap between the knowledge he claims for it and the knowledge he is able to represent; and no doubt that gap helped to inspire Bacon himself, as it was meant to inspire others, to make every effort to further the progress of natural philosophy. The dynamic does not, of course, only arise with the discussion of the works of Salomon’s House, but is present from the first.

Bensalem is a deeply unfamiliar place. Because Bacon is describing a world full of objects unknown to his European visitors or readers, his literary method requires the use of analogies to a degree unusual even within his highly figurative prose. How can one describe a strange fruit which none of one’s readers have seen? It is “like an orange, but of color between orange-tawny and scarlet, which cast a most excellent odor.” What kind of plant garlands the chair of state in which the tirsan, or father, sits during the feast of the family? It is “an ivy somewhat whiter than ours, like the leaf of a silver-asp.” Even
the most banal of objects requires illustration by means of simile: the hat of the father of
the House of Salomon is “like a helmet, or Spanish Montero.” Tracing the New Atlantis’
similes gives a new sense to Bacon’s dictum that “there is no proceeding in invention but
by similitude” (Valerius Terminus, 3:217), for as the New Atlantis demonstrates, it
applies to literary inventio as well as scientific invention.

Bacon’s method of narration contributes to infusing the epistemological chasm
between Bensalem and Europe with imaginative significance. By revealing the society of
Bensalem from the perspective of an outsider, who is only gradually initiated into its
institutions and mores, the reader is able to experience the disjunction between the state
of knowledge in each place (which must, of course, be taken on faith), and to participate
in the slow process of explanation by which the two draw ever so slightly closer to
alignment. 70

The structure of the society of Bensalem unfolds through a series of explanations
given by different characters, beginning with the governor of the Strangers’ House,
proceeding to the Jewish merchant Joabin, and concluding with the Father of the House
of Salomon, who describes the structure of the organization he represents. Through his
use of a first person narrator whose sole function is to observe, to listen, and to record,
Bacon makes discovery itself the structuring principle of his narrative.

70 Scholars have, of course, noted the inverted relationship between European and New
World knowledge, and the pains Bacon takes to reveal the ignorance of his mariners.
Julie Robin Solomon, for example, writes, “The technological superiority of the
Bensalemites forces a re-reading of European intellectual self-satisfaction. In the New
Atlantis, Bacon has his Bensalemite spokesperson carefully explain their sources of
knowledge in order to disabuse the Spanish sailors of their misapprehensions about
magic” in Objectivity in the Making: Francis Bacon and the Politics of Inquiry,
Yet even as Bacon encourages the reader to identify with the narrator’s emerging awareness of the island, he drives a wedge between that narrator and his English audience. His nameless sailors appear to be citizens of England’s most formidable enemy, Spain: they are sailing from Peru, as the narrator announces in the opening words of the book, and they speak to the residents of Bensalem in Spanish. His purpose in making his protagonists residents of a country the English disliked and feared is far from clear; indeed, it is perhaps the text’s first interpretive crux—or at least the first following the title. Claire Jowitt has suggested it is a kind of rebuke, intended to show “that James’s lacklustre policies have allowed foreign rivals to seize the initiative.” Jowitt’s theory is persuasive; besides, given Spain’s nautical reach, mere probability would suggest that any ships drifting into the vicinity of Bensalem would be Spanish. But there is an additional reason that Bacon might have given the mariners their nationality. No critic has remarked that if all of the conversations in the *New Atlantis* are conducted in Spanish, what we are reading must be a translation. Yet if we are to pursue the story’s narrative logic rigidly, every speech by the father of the House of Salomon, or by the Jewish merchant Joabin, or by the Governor of the Strangers’ House must have been translated at some point between their utterance and our perusal of the text. Of course, it would be

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71 It is possible that Spain may have an additional connection to Bensalem: the governor of the Strangers’ House’s remarks that it has been thirty-seven years “since any stranger arrived in this part.” As Bacon was writing the *New Atlantis* in 1624-25, it is possible that he was referring to the ships of the Spanish Armada, which after its 1588 defeat, he writes in his Considerations Touching a War with Spain, “wandered through the wilderness of the northern seas; and, according to the curse in the scripture, ‘came out against us one way, and fled before us seven ways’” (*Works*). The possibility is enhanced by the parallel between the scattered Armada and the ship at the beginning of the *New Atlantis*, which finds itself forced north by winds, and placed “in the midst of the greatest wilderness of waters in the world” (*Works*, 5:359).

72 Claire Jowitt, p. 142.
absurd to suggest that we ought to try to infer some distant ur-text from the *New Atlantis* as it was written; instead, I want merely to point to one more impediment to interpretation, or one more opportunity for it, within this puzzle-box of a book.

In the remainder of this chapter, I want to discuss several instances in which the intertwined processes of interpretation and misinterpretation are made thematically central. The first occurs within the relation by the governor of the Stranger’s House of the conversion of Bensalem to Christianity, an episode that has attracted more bitterly opposed readings than any other in the book. Its outlines are simple: the governor of the Strangers’ House, in response to the mariners’ question, relates how one night about twenty years after the death of Christ, the residents of Bensalem saw off the east coast of the island “a great pillar of light; not sharp, but in form of a column, or cylinder, rising from the sea, a great way up toward heaven; and on the top of it was seen a large cross of light.” The citizens go toward it in boats, but “when the boats were come within about sixty yards of the pillar, they found themselves all bound, and could go no further” until a member of the House of Salomon declares that, by virtue of his knowledge of nature, he is able to discern the difference “between divine miracles, works of nature, works of art and impostures, and illusions of all sorts.” The pillar of light is, he claims, a true miracle, and he prays that God will “prosper this great sign, and to give us the interpretation and use of it in mercy” (*Works*, 5:372), at which point his boat alone is freed, and he finds an ark containing a letter from the Apostle Bartholomew, and a copy of the Scriptures. Upon opening them, “everyone read upon the Book and Letter, as if they had been written in his own language” (*Works*, 5:373).
It is an extraordinary tale, to be sure, but it is encased in an extraordinary narrative, and the reader has no particular reason to be skeptical—that is, until he or she encounters a passage toward the end of the *New Atlantis*. In describing his institution’s research facilities, the Father of the House of Salomon includes in the list a description of “houses of deceits of the senses; where we represent all manners of feats of juggling, false apparitions, impostures, and illusions” (*Works*, 5:409), and of “perspective houses” in which they make “all multiplications of light, which we carry to great distance, and make so sharp as to discern small points and lines. Also all colorations of light: all delusions and deceits of the sight.” In these passages, Bacon draws attention to the ability of the members of the House of Salomon to engineer precisely the same kind of spectacle as the pillar of light that effected the conversion of Bensalem. At the very least, the reader may well wonder how the Father of the House of Salomon who testifies that he is witnessing a true miracle, and not a work of art or illusion, can be quite so sure. Bacon’s illuminate cross might as well be a textual crux, blazing away in the margins of the page.

Noting this odd feature of the narrative, some readers have concluded that the members of the House of Salomon are perpetrating a fraud, inculcating religion to augment their own power; Jerry Weinberger, for example, registers a suspicion that “the revelatory miracle and even the gift of tongues… are artful fabrications of the Bensalemite scientists.”\(^3\) As a result, such scholars have read the *New Atlantis* as a deeply secular work, proposing a state in which religion itself is controlled by a cabal of scientists. To read the miracle in this way is, I believe, to get its formidable difficulties.

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right, but to mistake their significance. Though the contradictions apparent in the episode are real, such contradictions can scarcely counterpoise the preponderance of evidence for Bacon’s theism. But neither can they simply be dispelled by gesturing toward his typical stance toward religion. What has happened, instead, is that Bacon has narrowed the distinction between divine revelation and mere charlatanism to a knife’s edge thinness. The line is real and definite, but it is extremely fine; as a result, interpreting events correctly is exceedingly difficult, and correct analyses will appear ungrounded at best or false at worst to outsiders. We simply do not have access to the necessary evaluative criteria.

The difficulties of interpretation multiply throughout the episode. Even the copy of the Scriptures found in the ark beneath the pillar of light is not so straightforward an emblem of ideal reading as it might at first seem. The governor of the Strangers’ House relates that “There was also in both these writings, as well the book as the letter, wrought a great miracle, conform to that of the apostles, in the original gift of tongues,” that is, that the Scriptures prove to be universally and effortlessly legible, to “Hebrews, Persians, and Indians, besides the natives.” Yet the fact that each person sees the text as written in his own language suggests not only a parodically easy act of interpretation, but also the extent to which interpretations, even correct ones, tend to proliferate in direct proportion to interpreters. There is no original text: there are only translations.

Several other passages in the *New Atlantis* focus on the inherent riskiness of interpretation. All of Bacon’s characters are compulsive interpreters, whether they have adequate grounds for their claims or not. Three thousand years ago, the governor of the Strangers’ House informs his guests, “the navigation of this world… was greater than at
this day” (Works, 5:375). He can offer no definitive reason why it should have been so, however, but only an hypothesis: “whether it was, that the example of the ark, that saved the remnant of men from the universal deluge, gave men confidence to adventure upon the waters; or what it was; but such is the truth” (Works, 5:376). His brusque “what it was” underscores the uncertainty attached to his theory. The inhabitants of Bensalem are continually explaining the phenomena they present, offering interpretations of their fictional world—which is, in fact, comprised of such explanations, for it is by means of their descriptions that it is revealed. The Jewish merchant Joabin, who describes some of the matrimonial customs of Bensalem, shows a similar disposition. He claims that “the people thereof were of the generations of Abraham, by another son, whom they call Nachoran; and that Moses by a secret cabala ordained the laws of Bensalem which they now use” (Works, 5:391), which the narrator dismisses as “Jewish dreams.” Yet Bacon does not omit to relate them despite their evident falsity within the world of the text.

In this respect, the correction by the governor of the Strangers’ House of Plato’s myth of Atlantis warrants particular attention. The governor refers to the Critias, “the narration and description which is made by a great man with you,” proceeding to qualify some of its features, including Plato’s relation of island’s divine origin, as “poetical and fabulous.” Yet the governor maintains that the fable does have elements of truth: there was an empire of Atlantis, he informs his auditors, as well as two others called Coya and Tyrambel, all “mighty and proud kingdoms in arms,” which made war on the rest of the world and were punished by divine vengeance. By placing his fiction in the same sphere as Plato’s, Bacon adds an veneer of authenticity to his own myth with the suggestion of independent verification. But in criticizing Plato, he manages to strip away the more
overtly mythical elements from his text, creating an illusion of historicity. Through the
governor’s revelations, Bacon creates a scenario in which Plato’s dialogue is like the
myths explicated in the *Wisdom of the Ancients*: it contains a kernel of historical truth
encased in poetical fabrications. It is no coincidence, then, that the adjective the governor
applies to certain aspects of the *Critias* should be “fabulous”—that is, like a fable. The
*New Atlantis*, then, is a fable that demonstrates the critical interpretation of fables.

At the very summit of the hierarchy of the House of Salomon, Bacon has placed
three “interpreters of nature” who “raise the former discoveries by experiments into
greater observations, axioms, and aphorisms.” But Bacon’s fable of interpretation is not
only concerned with the interpretation of nature. It also reflects on the difficulty of
interpreting societies, even as it offers a model set of institutions. Rawley refers to the
*New Atlantis* as “a model or description of a college, instituted for the interpreting of
nature.” But though Rawley suggests that Bacon planned to delineate the political
structures of Bensalem as well as its philosophical institutions, the aim of describing a
“model college” sets the *New Atlantis* closer to political description than one might
expect. In a 1622 letter to King James proposing that he be commissioned to make a
digest of the laws of England, Bacon described the works a monarch might perform:

Such as are the foundations of Colleges and Lectures, for learning and education
of youth; likewise foundations and institutions of Orders and Fraternities, for
nobleness, enterprise, and obedience, and the like. But yet these also are but like
plantations of orchards and gardens in plots and spots of ground here and there;
they do not till over the whole kingdom, and make it fruitful, as doth the
establishing of good Laws and Ordinances; which makes a whole nation to be as a well-ordered college or foundation (Works, XIV.359-60).

The nation ruled by a just and consistent set of laws is a college writ large; what the two share is the property of being “well-ordered,” a phrase that should be taken literally. They are “well-ordered” because they were given good orders, that is, established with a set of well-considered and coherent rules. The fact that Bacon includes this analogy in a letter proposing that he compose a systematized, written version of England’s laws suggests that such well-ordered societies, either on a large or small scale, will be governed by written laws.

Bacon’s New Atlantis is obviously more than just a model of the House of Salomon—the depiction of multiple establishments and attitudes, including Bensalem’s familial organization and its rules concerning foreigners, make it clear that Bacon’s scope is wider than a single institution. But insofar as it is concerned with the representation of the House of Salomon, it parallels the kind of social model capable of depicting a whole society. If this is so, the interpretation of nature and the interpretation of society share more parallels than is commonly noted. Harvey Wheeler has, in fact, suggested very plausibly that the three interpreters of nature in the House of Salomon are based on the “the three Chief Justices of the highest common law courts.” But by making both nature and society subject to interpretation, the contingent elements of each process only become more apparent: in a thoroughly legible world, the distinction between interpretation and misinterpretation may be dangerously narrow. Obstacles to interpretation can become opportunities for it—and vice versa.

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74 Harvey Wheeler, p. 103.
As a project designed to represent society by reference to the institutions that compose it, the *New Atlantis* has a predecessor in Thomas Smith’s 1583 *De Republica Anglorum*, published eighteen years after his death. Smith held a degree in law from the University of Padua, became the first Regius Professor of Civil Law at Cambridge, and was later an ambassador and secretary of state. His *De Republica Anglorum* is a description of the political structure of England; as he wrote to his friend Walter Haddon, “I have set forth almost the whole of its form,” writing “in a style midway between the historical and philosophical.”⁷⁵ In the concluding sentences of his work, Smith declares that his “chart or mappe” of government is “not in that sort as Plato made his common wealth… nore as Syr Thomas More his Utopia feigned common wealths, such as never was nor never shall be, vain imaginations, phantasies of Philosophers to occupie the time and to exercise their wittes.”⁷⁶ Yet the fact that he feels obliged to differentiate his own treatise from such “vain imaginations” demonstrates that they could seem like similar exercises, as they indeed were in many respects. It is, then, notable that one of the functions Smith proposes for his book is that it will allow comparisons to be made between states—“this being as a project or table of a common wealth truely laide before you, not fained by putting a case: let us compare it with common wealthes, which be at this day in esse, or doe remaine discribed in true histories, especially in such points wherein the one differeth from the other, to see who hath taken the righter, truer, and more commodious way” (Smith, 144). Like Bacon and Gentili, Smith realizes that the

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state must be depicted in writing before it can be subject to comparison. The ways Smith describes his treatise are telling: it is a “chart,” “mappe,” “project” or “table.” These analogies all relate to ways in which the world can be represented either in symbols or in writing, and in which its representation can be organized visually on the page.

Bacon’s descriptions are far removed from Smith’s. While Smith records the legal implications of marriage and the generation of children according to English common law, Bacon sketches a system designed to maintain the family in its ideal incarnation. Yet for Bacon as for Smith, a written description is requisite to arrive at a further level of understanding. In this respect, Bacon’s method resembles the one he proposes for natural philosophy, which also relies on written accounts. But in the New Atlantis, Bacon makes the problems, as well as the advantages, of this technique one of his central themes, meditating on them to playful effect. It is no coincidence, then, that in the final paragraph of the New Atlantis, the father of the House of Salomon tells the narrator, “God bless thee, my son, and God bless this relation which I have made. I give thee leave to publish it for the good of other nations; for we here are in God’s bosom, a land unknown” (Works, 5:413). To publish, here, refers to the promulgation of his relation, but it also clearly refers to its printing—the end presupposes its inevitable means. As in Bacon’s letter on commissions discussed in the previous chapter, the two processes are scarcely even intellectually distinct. What is striking about this injunction is not merely the fact

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77 It is worth noting that Gentili, like Bacon, was thought to have written a utopia: although Mundus alter et idem is now considered to have been written by Joseph Hall, until the twentieth century, Alberico Gentili was thought to be an equally likely contender for its authorship, demonstrating again the relationship between the comparative turn in political philosophy and utopianism.
the father of the House of Salomon concludes his relation by recommending that it be printed, but that he skips a step in the process. He does not say, and does not need to say, that the narrator may write his relation down, despite its memory-taxing length. That omission is a sly allusion to the fact that the narrative exists always and only in writing—which is, perhaps, one reason why the *New Atlantis* is so fixated on the problem of interpretation: it is self-consciously textual throughout. Bacon expects his reader to vacillate between imaginative immersion and ironic reserve, between taking the text as a fictional world and the fictional world as a text. Indeed, the many instances in which interpretation and misinterpretation are both thematically and formally central necessitate such a stance.

Bacon’s idea received a final coda nearly half a century later. In his continuation of the *New Atlantis*, the anonymous R.H. set out to interleave the monarchical government disquietingly absent from Bacon’s pages. In the midst of the text, R.H. treats his readers to a display of pageantry in honor of the inventor Verdugo, who appears dressed in a vestment “of a grassgreen satin,” crowned with golden laurels, and “mounted on a high Triumphal *Chariot* of gilt *Cedar.*” What has the curiously-named Verdugo done to deserve these, the kingdom’s highest honors? The faithful Joabin explains: he has “found out the way of making Linnen cloath, and consequently paper of *Asbestinum* or *Linum vivum* that fire shall not consume the writing” (R.H., 54). The ultimate

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79 “Verdugo” means executioner in Spanish; it was also the surname of a Spanish general and governor of Haarlem and other provinces, Francisco Verdugo, during the Dutch Revolt. Neither would have had particularly positive associations.
invention in this thoroughly textual world is a object by means of which writing is made imperishable.

Like R.H., Bacon’s successors in political and social philosophy were far more interested in the problems and possibilities of textual representation than the natural philosophers with whom his name is most closely associated. Using an idea of knowledge derived with only minor modifications from Bacon’s writing, they developed new literary forms that served, simultaneously, as new methods of acquiring social knowledge—one of which, the social model developed by James Harrington in his Interregnum utopia Oceana, is the subject of the following chapter.
II. James Harrington

“The prose of Bacon, Harrington, and Milton, is altogether stiff and pedantic; though their sense be excellent,” David Hume opined in the easy cadences of his own Augustan style.\(^\text{80}\) Less than a century later, Percy Shelley would more than reverse Hume’s verdict on Bacon’s style: “Lord Bacon,” Shelley declared flatly in his “Defence of Poetry,” “was a poet.”\(^\text{81}\) Milton’s prose works, which scarcely required it, received the enthusiastic imprimatur of Thomas Macaulay around the same period: “They are a perfect field cloth of gold,” and “to borrow his own majestic language, ‘a sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs and harping symphonies.’”\(^\text{82}\) Of the trio, only Harrington’s style has received no reassessment; indeed, if Hume’s judgment of Harrington now seems surprising, it is likely on account of the second clause of his sentence rather than the first.

Yet Harrington was not unconcerned with style. He was, in a minor way, a poet; he published translations of six books of the \textit{Aeneid} and two of the \textit{Eclogues} as well as a few original compositions, and his interest in poetry, in Aubrey’s account, dates from his youth. Until 1647, when he was thirty-six, he seems to have done little else apart from engaging in literary and historical study. The eldest son of a gentry family in Lincolnshire, he might be said, like Marvell’s Cromwell, to have been thrust by history “from his private gardens, where / He lived reservèd and austere,” into the very center of political events. Through the connections of his influential relatives, in 1647 he was

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appointed gentleman of the bedchamber to Charles I, with whom he developed a close relationship. He was dismissed in 1648, and little else is known about his life until the publication of the political treatise *Oceana* in 1656 brought him celebrity. His ensuing career involved the promulgation and elaboration of the ideas contained in that text; not only did he publish a number of other books and pamphlets, he also led a club known as The Rota, dedicated to the discussion of his own strain of republicanism, whose members included John Aubrey, Henry Neville, and Samuel Pepys.

With the Restoration, the Rota dissolved, and Harrington’s writings no longer had any immediate application to the English state. They remained influential throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, and more recently, scholarly interest in the classical republican tradition has led to a minor resurgence in their reputation. Yet the aspect of Harrington’s texts with which I began, their literary technique, has in no way benefitted from this revival. The purpose of this section is to suggest that this omission has led scholars to neglect what is in fact Harrington’s most vital innovation: the development of complex social models. Though no one is likely to refer to Harrington’s prose as a “sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs,” he is nevertheless the inventor of a substantially new literary form, whose complex afterlife extends through succeeding centuries, including our own.
Chapter 4: Why Not Narrative?

Any political theory current in England before 1649 was tested by the events of that year. If Bacon held that state was engaged in a continual and inevitable process of experimentation, as I argued in a previous chapter, no experiment could have been more radical than the one conducted on a cold Tuesday late that January. After a nearly a decade of civil war, Parliament convened a High Court of Justice to try its monarch, Charles I. In lieu of entering a plea, Charles claimed that the court had no legal authority over him; despite his protests, sixty-eight commissioners nevertheless sat in judgment on his trial and, after a week, convicted him of treason. He was executed on the thirtieth of January. Charles’ execution was, to use Bacon’s language, an *instantia crucis*, a crucial instance, the result of which could direct political thought into any one of a number of sharply diverging courses.

The decade leading up to the execution of Charles, during which the civil wars were fought, and the decade following, in which various forms of non-monarchical government were precariously erected and violently demolished, were revolutionary years in more ways than one. The energetic and increasingly desperate search for enduring principles in the political sphere had its analog in the intellectual sphere, as experimental philosophy flourished across disciplines. Political thinkers, catalyzed by the conditions of their environment, produced works of a degree of philosophical ambition unprecedented in English political thought, including *Leviathan* (1653), Gerrard Winstanley’s *The Law of Freedom* (1652), and the subject of this chapter, James Harrington’s *Oceana* (1656). Sheldon Wolin has argued that “what converted the model
of science and mathematics into an exciting possibility” for political philosophy “were the tumultuous conditions of seventeenth-century England,” for “the act of annihilation with which political philosophy began had, in an age of civil war and revolution, an implicit foundation in reality.”

New science, new government, and the new science of government were all deeply if subtly linked in the revolutionary decades spanning the sixteen forties and fifties.

In a culture in which natural philosophy was becoming increasingly intellectually attractive, more and more people turned to the works of Francis Bacon. The sixteen forties saw a remarkable surge in the number of printed editions of his works, as his influence steadily expanded. By the sixteen fifties, the late Lord Chancellor’s reputation had soared to vertiginous heights: he was not only “the eloquent[e]st that was born in this Isle,” and “for humane learning his ages miracle,” but indeed the “great Oracle of this age.” In one pamphlet Bacon was granted literally oracular, or at least prophetic status: "A new remonstrance of the free-born people of England... Together, with a prophecy of Sir Francis Bacon includes a poem he cites in his essay “Of Prophecy,” which he claims is generally thought to refer to the Spanish Armada. A new remonstrance, however, treats the prophecy as Bacon’s own, darkly auguring the English Civil War.

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Christopher Hill has argued that Bacon’s thought had a broad if diffuse influence on English Parliamentarians during the Civil War. “The new science,” Hill writes, “combined respect for law with a willingness to innovate that must have helped the radicals to shake off the dead weight of tradition and precedent which hamstrung early Parliamentarian political thinking.”

In some Parliamentarian texts, a connection to Baconianism remains tentative or implicit; in others, it is vivid and unambiguous. In *An humble motion to the Parliament of England concerning the advancement of learning* (1649), a title that echoes Bacon, John Hall writes, “if we… looke upon Commonwealths, how easie will it be to observe, that as they flourished under the verdure, so have they withered under the decay of Learning.”

In Hall’s view, the health of science and of the state are integrally connected. If one could be said to drive the other, Hall’s grammar implies that it is science, not the state, that serves as the motive force.

Bacon’s influence on James Harrington, like his influence on John Hall, is readily apparent. Harrington cites Bacon’s essay “Of the True Greatness of Kingdoms or Estates” on the first page of *Oceana*, and draws heavily on his *History of Henry VII* in his analysis of the shifting patterns of wealth and power in sixteenth-century England. J.G.A. Pocock and Markku Peltonen have both discussed Bacon’s impact on Harrington. For Pocock, Bacon is both an historiographic influence, and a conduit, if a relatively minor one, for the Machiavellian and Neo-Tacitean ideas essential to Harrington’s full-fledged

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88 John Hall, *An humble motion to the Parliament of England concerning the advancement of learning, and reformation of the universities* (London, 1649), pp. 7-8. Hall echoes Bacon’s language throughout, as when he writes, “I perceived that it was better to grave things in the mindes of children, then words” (Hall, 34), or urges “the discovery of a new world of knowledge” (Hall, 21).
classical republicanism. In Peltonen’s view, Bacon’s thought plays a far more important role: “[n]ot only did James Harrington ground his social analysis in the Oceana on Bacon’s interpretation, but Bacon’s Of the true greatnesse of the kingdomes and estates provided together with Machiavelli the whole point of departure of the book.” For both scholars, however, Bacon’s influence on Harrington is part of the wider, largely continental tradition of civic humanism in which both men were immersed and which both advanced in England.

Neither Pocock nor Peltonen sees Bacon as the progenitor of a scientific political philosophy—or at least one of its earliest evangelists—or Harrington as an inheritor of the vast ambitions of that enterprise. Yet it is precisely this aspect of Bacon’s influence that I wish to trace in Oceana. In so doing, I approach it from a different angle than those scholars who are primarily interested in Harrington’s place within the classical republican tradition: rather than focusing on the kind of state Harrington recommends for England and the kinds of political institutions he views as generally most successful—the normative component of his political philosophy—I concentrate on his political epistemology. Approaching Harrington’s thought from this angle draws questions that are typically peripheral to discussions of his work to the center of debate. How, for example, is it possible to know things about politics within Harrington’s framework? What method should political theorists use to examine their object of inquiry? How can political theory explain facts about the world, particularly the one inescapable fact of the age, the execution of the king and abolition of the monarchy?

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90 Markku Peltonen, “Politics and Science: Francis Bacon and the True Greatness of States,” p. 299.
In the following chapter, I will describe Harrington’s great formal, literary and intellectual innovation, the social model. But I wish to begin by setting his thought against other attempts to explain the English Civil War, that is, by demonstrating what it is not—and why not. In the 1650s, under the struggling parliamentary government and the Protectorate, a number of historians attempted to place the Civil War into an historical framework. These authors shared Harrington’s context and, to some extent, his ambitions; like him, they wrote not only in order to make sense of their recent past, but also to define the goals and possibilities of a future that must have seemed the very blankest of *tabulae rasaes*. Their chosen genre was, by and large, historical narrative, a form that not only exerted considerable pressure on the explanations they offered of the Civil War, but that also shaped their idea of what it meant to explain political events at all. Harrington’s rejection of this genre was in part a consequence of his acute analysis of its intellectual and formal biases, as well as its intrinsic limitations.

The analysis of causation is a formal as well as theoretical and empirical problem, for the devices by means of which causal sequences are represented shape their delineation: syllogism differs from law which differs from narrative. Narrative, as what Louis O. Mink calls a “primary cognitive instrument,” might seem to obey a logic fluid enough to permit practically any combination of elements, and support any set of propositions. But such an appearance is deceptive; narrative is a more rigid framework than it initially seems to be, and any particular choice has the ability to constrain others.

In Roland Barthes’ well-known formulation, narrative “institutes a confusion between

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consecution and consequence, temporality and logic.”

Insofar as it provides causal accounts, narrative serves as an explanatory mode. But narrative, especially historical narrative, does not provide just any kind of causal account: it is perhaps the preeminent mode for explaining anomalous events, for demonstrating the operation of contingency, singularity, and agency in the world. Even within a deterministic framework in which the appearance of contingency was ultimately illusory, such as the strong theological conception of providence held by most Early Modern writers, contingent actions and choices nevertheless played a central role in the analysis of events. While very few people would have maintained that the will was free in the sense of being uncaused or undetermined, in practice the decisions of agents were often the last step in any explanatory architecture. Philip Sidney, surely one of the most acute theorists of the effects of literary form in the Renaissance, made the tendency of historical narratives to represent contingent events the centerpiece of his devaluation of historians’ practice: “the historian, wanting the precept, is so tied, not to what should be but to what is, to the particular truth of things and not to the general reason of things, that his example draweth no necessary consequence, and therefore a less fruitful doctrine” than that of poets.

The emphasis on contingency characteristic of the prevailing style of historical narrative in the Civil War era had several interrelated formal consequences: in order to demonstrate the effect of a given event within a complex array of possible causes,

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historians made extensive use of counterfactuals. The most effective way of
demonstrating that an action or decision had caused a certain event was by asserting that
the event would not have occurred otherwise; as the philosophers H.L.A. Hart and Tony
Honoré suggest, “verifying the existence of causal connection involves counterfactual
speculation.” Yet though such a technique may seem to imply the creation of a rich,
imaginative counter-history, in practice there was only one real counterfactual: the idea
that the war could have been prevented. As historians speculated about the causes of the
Civil War, they did so against a backdrop of historical continuity and regularity in which
the war had never happened at all. The paradoxical effect of this strategy was a style of
narration in which the more the war was explained, the more improbable it came to seem.
It was the ultimate anomaly: an event that violently disrupted the historical and political
progression of centuries.

The historical writings of the moderate Anglican Hamon L’Estrange illustrate a
number of the characteristics present in discussions of the Civil War. L’Estrange was a
Royalist from an old Norfolk family, who had previously engaged in minor theological
and academic skirmishes about the Sabbath and the ancestry of the natives of North
America. L’Estrange’s history, *The Reign of King Charles*, has a rather misleading title:
it does not cover the entirety of Charles’ reign, but concludes just before the outbreak of
the Civil War in 1641 with a lengthy account of the trial and death of Thomas

legal reasoning, but a similar claim has been applied to causal reasoning more broadly by
philosophers including David Lewis.

95 Hamon L’Estrange, *Americans no Iewes, OR Improbabilities that the Americans are of
that race*. (London, 1652).
Wentworth, Earl of Strafford.\textsuperscript{96} Because L’Estrange’s history focuses on the causes of the Civil War rather than depicting the hostilities themselves, it provides an unusually clear picture of the treatment of causation in Civil War narratives.

At each stage in the sequence of events leading to the execution of Strafford, L’Estrange emphasizes shifting strategies, variable decisions, and chance occurrences in both the Royalist and Parliamentarian parties. In the course his depiction of events, it becomes apparent that for L’Estrange as for many of his contemporaries, the Civil War seemed to be a horrifying accident. The process of giving an account of its origins had, therefore, to involve detailing the collision of a vast number of contingent causes. In his survey \textit{Restoration Historians and the English Civil War}, Royce MacGillivray writes, “It is possible to detect something of L’Estrange’s views on the genesis of the war, though he makes no attempt to give a deliberate and complete account of this part of his subject.”\textsuperscript{97} But there is no real lack of either deliberation or completion. The problem, rather, is the one Coleridge discerned in the character of Iago—a surfeit rather than a deficit of motives.

L’Estrange’s first analysis of the underlying causes of the Civil War occurs before he begins to discuss Charles, when he remarks that due to James’ cowardice, the people have become accustomed to opposing him. Yet, as he remarks in his characteristic blend of neologism and ornate syntax, “those dismall calamities which befel his son, were doubtlesse ampliated by a superfetation of causes” (L’Estrange, 7). As the analysis proceeds, the “superfetation of causes” surrounding Charles’ misfortunes becomes

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{96} Hamon L’Estrange, \textit{The Reign of King Charles} (London, 1655).
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increasingly visible. Cause after cause lines up in a complexly patterned sequence. All are, perhaps, necessary; none, taken singly, is sufficient.

L’Estrange catalogues the innumerable opportunities to halt the progress of war that are narrowly missed. The Short Parliament, for example, “had power, and probably will enough to impede the torrent of the late civill War… a thing not very difficult, much lesse impossible at this time” (L’Estrange, 184), which Charles’ dissolution of the parliament prevents. The Laudian Church and the Royal Prerogative are both, likewise, blamed for the war, for had the king been willing to diminish the claims of either, “in all likelihood he had much quieted the distempers of his subjects, much calm'd their animosities, why not totally gained their affections?” (L’Estrange, 184). By employing such counterfactuals, L’Estrange outlines a plethora of causes behind the onset of the war. But L’Estrange is interested in more than simply establishing causal connections: he suggests, as well, that other events were possible, and offers clues as to what, precisely, those other events were. In doing so, he establishes a norm against which the incidents of the Civil War take on a definite outline.

L’Estrange’s fellow historians, unsurprisingly, agreed in treating the Civil War as a departure from the ordinary course of English history, and one that might have been avoided. Royalists and Anglicans, for reasons both theological and political, were, of course, more likely to adopt such a course. Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, does not merely suggest that the war as a whole might have been prevented, but engages in lengthy counterfactuals about many of its particulars: if the King had promised to refer decisions about Scotland to a parliament to be summoned after the Scots had left England “it is probable, that they would either willingly have left the kingdom or speedily have
been compelled.”98 If the King had put Fairfax, his son, and several of their associates in custody in 1642, as he apparently considered doing, “it was very probable, those mischiefs that shortly after broke out might have been prevented” (V.446). And so on.

Another form of explanation was, of course, available. Many of Harrington’s contemporaries chose to understand the war with reference to a providential framework, to final rather than efficient causes. Providence can, of course, explain any sequence in large outline, and from a perspective sufficiently distant, it is perfectly compatible with local descriptions of other kinds, including secular narrative histories. But a more detailed description of causes and consequences requires, in the case of anomalous events, either a narrative or a miracle; and a miracle is less of an explanation than a deferral of the question to higher authority.

The use of one mode or another occurred on a continuum. The burden of explanation must have seemed, to many, heavy indeed; and those who found recent events very nearly unintelligible could suggest, directly or indirectly, that they were such as were likely to exceed all mortal comprehension. Peter Heylyn, the Anglican controversialist and author of the popular geography and history Cosmographie might be taken as an instance of this type, influenced by Walter Ralegh, whose “excellent History” must have served as one of Heylyn’s templates.99 Among other qualifications, Heylyn was the author of an attack on Hamon L’Estrange’s Life of King Charles. He was also a polemical opponent of Harrington’s—no very great distinction on either side, since both

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99 Peter Heylyn, Cosmographie, (London, 1652), in the introduction.
Harrington and Heylyn engaged in a formidable number of print controversies over the course of the 1650s.

In Heylyn’s own histories, which included a life of Laud—*Cyprianus Anglicus*, written shortly before his death in 1662—and the 1658 *A short view of the life and reign of King Charles*, he defended an interpretation of the Civil War that emphasized the King’s innocence and promoted an uncompromising Anglicanism. As Anthony Milton writes, “Heylyn’s preferred form of writing, as we have seen, was the polemically charged history.”100 In *The Life and Reign of King Charles*, published anonymously, Heylyn dwells on the probity of Charles’ conduct rather than the motivations of his enemies. He had, perhaps, a prudential reason for so doing; the effect, however, is a relation of the war that makes its cause seem very nearly unintelligible. Charles appears as the victim of some inexplicable malignity, a dark cloud that rises on the horizon almost at random. And indeed, Heylyn often compares the war and its individual episodes to the breaking of storms. His writings begin to look like the other side of the providentialist coin: the account that sees a miserable, not glorious, inevitability in contemporary historical events.

But for those historians who wished to explain the Civil War without deferring to providence, the depiction of contingent causes remained necessary. In yet another respect, historians’ narrative mode exerted explanatory pressure: for how can contingency enter into causal sequences in the first place? One answer, of course, is through the actions of agents. Characters were required to introduce anomalies: as the Spanish theologian and philosopher Luis de Molina observed, absent the free choices of

humans and angels, there would be no contingency.\textsuperscript{101} Hamon L’Estrange echoes Molina in reverse: “in things determined in their naturall causalities to certain and definite effects, not only Devils but wise men, where miracle interposeth not, may infallibly divine the products: but in things contingent upon free and voluntary agents, all the Devils in hell can but blunder” (L’Estrange, 90). Necessity, though it may hold all else under its palm, has no claim on free agents.

The bias toward adopting agent-driven narratives is particularly visible, paradoxically, in instances in which no conventional agents are to be found. In these cases the requirement makes itself felt in the form of personifications or quasi-personifications. London, L’Estrange writes, “was luxuriant in wealth never more, and pampered with ease, so as her high repletion brought her into a Cachexy, an ill habit of body, this set her on longing and lusting after strange gods.”

In this respect too, the same propensities are evident in histories composed on either side of the ideological divide. Parliamentarians required characters in order to explain the unusual step they had taken, and Charles and Laud were naturally the actors of choice, with the weight of explanation falling on the unusual quality of their actions. Tom May’s History of Parliament is full of invectives against Charles who, he claims—the usual charge—struck at the root of hitherto-preserved English liberties. “Forty years old was King Charles,” he writes, “and fifteen years had he raigned when this Parliament was called: so long had the Laws been violated (more then under any King).”\textsuperscript{102} It is the parenthetical superlative, here, that is of note as a virtual requirement of the form of

explanation May has chosen. Similar claims occur everywhere in Parliamentarian histories of the period. Only the exceptional quality of the provocation—Charles’ extraordinary lawlessness—could justify the exceptional severity of the response.

Historians’ tendency to depict events as the result of the actions of agents both reinforced and was reinforced by their inclination to view the Civil War an anomalous event, described above. Institutional history may have been very well for describing the ordinary course of affairs, but it was no substitute for characters and agents when describing an anomaly. Depicting events as a result of the actions of agents helped to explain why history had been derailed from its regular course, and in turn, the idea that these events were the result of human decisions helped to reinforce the idea that they could have been otherwise.

These two interlocking tendencies, deeply bound to the genre of historical narrative, in turn produced complex formal effects. As Civil War historians lingered on possibilities, their narratives became increasingly convoluted. At times the difficulty of representing such involved and improbable causal sequences could seem insurmountable: “The things which remain to be unfolded are of so great a weight, of so various a nature, and of so many pieces,” May writes, “that scarce any Historian (I may say History itself) is sufficient to weave together so many particulars” (May, 85-86). Constrained by a similar necessity, L’Estrange claims to be forced to put some of his material in a postscript, “being loth to make a simultaneous meddly of various actions, shuffled together without dependence upon either antecedent or subsequent narrations” (L’Estrange, 88). Likewise, he separates out matters relating to the Scots, for narratives are best “where the series of the story is not enterlined nor disturbed with matters
independent” (L’Estrange, 209). L’Estrange, forced to choose between a coherent and a complete causal sequence opts for the former. But the fact that the two have become dissociated in his text suggests that the immense problem of explaining the Civil War could seem to rupture the narrative structure meant to contain it.

Narrative, with its precarious but persuasive logic, could be a means of suggesting the extreme contingency of the Commonwealth or Protectorate. In doing so, it suggested a more regular course that history might have followed, one that would not, perhaps, have required quite so much explanation. This imaginary history stretched along side the one that had actually taken place, ready to serve as a comparison at every turn. The force of this history that had failed to exist and yet seemed to have, from some perspectives, a greater vividness and solidity than the one that had actually taken place, was to delineate a set of possibilities—not for the vanished past, but for the future.

Harrington’s historiography diverges sharply from that of his contemporaries. His idiosyncrasy in this respect has often been remarked: with his emphasis on long-term, material factors as the engine of political change, he has been an attractive object for Marxist scholars, who have seen in Oceana a perceptive early work in their tradition.103 Others have placed Harrington’s analysis of history in contexts more nearly contemporary with his work, including millenarian thought, the historical analysis of feudalism by scholars like John Selden, and Hobbesian theories of sovereignty.104 Perhaps the closest analog is the Baconian use of natural history as a means of extracting 

103 See, for example, C.B. Macpherson, Possessive Individualism (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1966); Christopher Hill; R.H. Tawney, “Harrington’s Interpretation of his Age” Proceedings of the British Academy 27 (1941).
104 See, for example, J.G.A. Pocock for the first two categories, and Arihiro Fukuda, Sovereignty and the Sword (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), for the last.
axioms rather than as an end in itself. In any case, more than Harrington’s historical method is at stake. For Harrington past is prologue to a greater degree than for L’Estrange, Heylyn, and May—the future of Oceana derives from its history.

*The Commonwealth of Oceana* begins with two preliminaries, first and second. In the first preliminary, Harrington sets out the basic propositions on which his political theory is based:

1. Domestic Empire is founded upon dominion.
2. Dominion is property real or personal; that is to say in lands, or in money and goods.

Lands, or the parts and parcels of a territory, are held by the proprietor or proprietors, lord or lords of it, in some proportion; and such (except it be in a city that hath little or no land, and whose revenue is in trade) as is the proportion or balance of dominion or property in land, such is the nature of the empire.

The situation, however, is not quite as tidy as the initial summary indicates. As Harrington goes on to note, it happens on occasion that, for various reasons, an asymmetry arises between property and empire. Perhaps the political process has simply moved more slowly than the economic one, or perhaps legislation or force has interposed itself into the natural order. When this happens, the foundation of the government is dissolved, and the superstructure may well follow—whether this consequence constitutes
an inevitability, a threat, or an opportunity varies according to which text one reads, and what interpretation one generates.\textsuperscript{105}

The application of this theory first to European, then to English history forms “The Second Part of the Preliminaries.” After Harrington has treated “the origins of modern prudence,” that is, the fall of Rome and the rise of feudalism, he turns to the history of England. It is at this point that the first fictions enter into \textit{The Commonwealth of Oceana}, insinuating themselves innocuously enough in the pseudonyms used in place of proper names. Hence England becomes Oceana; William the Conqueror, Turbo, i.e., whirlwind; Elizabeth, Parthenia, maiden. The obscurity of the pseudonyms varies, but none screens the identity of the person or place discussed, nor is it intended to. These names do, of course, give an indication of what Harrington thinks is the most salient characteristic of a given person or place, usually one that is underscored by a more explicit passage in the history.\textsuperscript{106} The name ‘Oceana’ itself is the most interesting of the pseudonyms, playing on England’s identity as an island nation while invoking the parallel between England and Venice, and perhaps gesturing to Oceana’s utopian antecedents.

\textsuperscript{105} Of the distinction between the meaning of political change in Harrington’s interregnum works versus his sole Restoration political tract, Luc Borot writes, “The main change that occurs between \textit{Oceana} (1656) and the \textit{System of Politics} (1660) is that historical change, which he had once presented as the best auxiliary of the peoples desirous to live in a commonwealth, is later considered as a great potential danger” 152. This judgment squares well with the textual evidence, and takes Harrington’s changed political context into account. See Luc Borot, “Form is the life of the commonwealth” in \textit{James Harrington and the Notion of Commonwealth}, ed. Luc Borot (Montpelier: Publications de l’Universite Paul-Valery, 1998) pp. 151-174, p. 152.

\textsuperscript{106} Harrington’s substitution of \textit{Parthenia} for Elizabeth can be taken as an example—Elizabeth converted “her reign through the perpetual love tricks that passed between her and her people into a kind of romance” (198)—though his pseudonym is, in this case, extremely close to her popular epithet, the Virgin Queen.
Harrington’s history argues that the English Civil War was the result of a long-term historical process, whose ultimate origin was in the Conquest. William, according to Harrington, had the ambition to be an absolute prince, and was spurred on in this desire by the fact that he was free to rule England with the greater license accorded by a colonial regime. But it was a stance that could not be maintained, for the Norman nobility “were no sooner rooted in their vast dominions than they… grew as fierce in the vindication of the ancient rights and liberties of the same as if they had been always natives” (Oceana, 53). Then, of course, there was the crisis in the perpetual conflicts of interest between king and barons which led to the Magna Charta, a document Harrington takes a rather jaundiced view of. For it was by means of this document that John—whom Harrington refers to as Adoxus, “in coming unwillingly to set the government straight… was the first that set it awry” (Oceana, 53).

King and barons, then, were locked in a power struggle from this point forward; each needed the other as an institution, but the monarchs were blind to their dependence, and the nobility needed only the institution, and not the individual who happened to represent it at a given moment. This situation continued until Henry VII effectively stopped the vacillations in the balance by means of the statutes of population, against retainers, and for alienation, which at once allowed the nobility to sell their land, and ensured that there was a population of independent yeomen. The nobility, besides, “of princes became courtiers, where their revenues, never to have been exhausted by beef and mutton, were found narrow, whence followed rackings of rents and at length sale of lands” (Oceana, 55).
By the time Charles assumed the throne, the power, that is, the balance of land, was neither in the monarch nor the nobility, but rather in the people. The people were not, perhaps, consciously aware of the origin of their power, and before Harrington explained it to them, they could hardly be aware of its historical significance—though in 1656, they were unlikely to be ignorant of its bare existence, either. In his polemical exchange with a very reluctant Henry Ferne, Harrington asks “Whether Men as they become richer or poorer, free, or servile, be not of a different Genius, or become new modeld, and whether these things happen not as the ballance changes?” Though Ferne prefers to leave such conceptions to “to the Pipe of Orpheus, or Ovids Metamorphosis,” Harrington’s answer is an emphatic ‘yes.’ The people, with their new-modeled character, cannot help but act as they do. The Civil War was determined, then, from at least the reign of Henry VII, but in fact a good deal earlier, as one party or another had to win the “wrestling match” that the English were so mad to praise as a mixed monarchy, and, inevitably, to destroy itself by its victory.

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108 The pun in ‘new-modeled’ is, of course, intentional, and was very much current in the 1650s; see, for instance, William Prynne’s frequent use of it: the army reformers “and their new Instruments have New-modelled that they now call our Parliaments,” in *Demophilos* (London: Printed for Francis Coles, 1658) p. 54; in a *A seasonable, legal, and historicall vindication and chronological collection of the good old fundamentall liberties, franchises, rights, laws of all English freemen*, he discusses “the Contrivers of our late New-Modelled Governments” (London: Printed for William Prynne, 1655). Even Hamon L’Estrange makes use of the play on words, accusing parliament of wanting “to new-model a Governme” (L’Estrange, 162).
109 This is one point in which Harrington and Robert Filmer agree, not, I believe, entirely coincidentally. Filmer, responding to Philip Hunton’s *Treatise on Mixed Monarchy* in his *Anarchy of a Limited or Mixed Monarchy*, refuses to consider Hunton’s claim that, in a quarrel between the different branches of a mixed monarchy, the people are left to their individual consciences, an acceptable political solution. Nigel Smith remarks, “The response to Hobbes is often to assert the claims of a historical and narrative analysis of society as a whole in which totalities are described as systems or constitutions
The shift occurred, then, “by approaches and degrees.” It was the result of no sudden decision, no one character or act, and as such, it could not very well have been forestalled. If it were ever possible to halt the extended process of change, it was far too late by the time the Civil War, its inevitable symptom, broke out. For “the dissolution of this government caused the war, not the war the dissolution of this government” (Oceana, 56), an idea Harrington thought sufficiently important to italicize. By means of the astonishing causal reversal encapsulated in the preceding sentence, Harrington depicts the war as an extension of an inevitable historical logic, rather than as anomalous and contingent. The war, like the other events Harrington discusses, is part of “the course of nature” (Oceana, 63).

Harrington’s application of his political theory to recent historical events represents a major innovation. Political theories of course could be and were used to explain history; it would be, indeed, unusual to find a work of history that did not have recourse to this mode of explanation. And there were certainly theories explaining long-term shifts in government by means of a general rule—as, for instance, Plato’s. But the scope and detail of Harrington’s application of historical rules to a particular and long-term series of historical events was unique, particularly with regard to the Civil War.

Harrington, by no means behindhand in recognizing his own originality, defends his method under cover of a defense of ancient philosophy against Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes, he writes, criticizes Aristotle and Cicero for deriving their politics not from nature but from their own commonwealths. In response to which, Harrington wonders where else should they have gotten them: it is “as if a man should tell famous Harvey that

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he transcribed his circulation of the blood not out of the principles of nature, but out of the anatomy of this or that man” (*Oceana*, 9).

In alluding to “the principles of nature,” Harrington gestures toward a deeper precedent for his innovation in the philosophy of Francis Bacon. In the last section, I described how Bacon holds out the promise of a method that can extract knowledge from history. “For knowledges are as pyramids, whereof history is the basis,” Bacon writes in *The Advancement of Learning*, and “of natural philosophy, the basis is natural history…”

Even civil knowledge is amenable to a systematization which, like natural knowledge, would rely on the right kind of history and the right kind of historical interpretation. Such a history would by no means resemble the narrative history of Harrington’s contemporaries, since it would not constitute an adequate explanation of events in its own right, but rather would provide material that could be analyzed in order to extract axioms. Bacon’s political principles are not Harrington’s, though in his *History of Henry VII*, he provided a discussion of the alienation of the nobility’s property that proved essential for *Oceana*. But the kind of axioms that Harrington draws from his historical material could well be the basis for a Baconian civil knowledge, loosely construed. If Harrington was thinking along these lines, he would not have been the only one of his contemporaries to do so. In his *Motion for the Advancement of Learning*, John Hall urged that a collection be made of “all such Papers, Letters, Transcripts, and Relations, which should discover the inner side of Negotiations, and events, and the true face of things” for “a judging minde out of many particularities, could draw a better estimate of things, and deduce more certaine, and unquestioned axioms” (Hall, 36).
Harrington’s text provides surprisingly explicit directions concerning the role of history in the search for civil knowledge, since before he proceeds to a description of a new model of government, he provides a fictionalized depiction of its invention. Having reached the year 1653 in his description of English history, he breaks off and begins a new section entitled “The Council of Legislators.” In just over two pages, he depicts the method by means of which the Lord Archon—Cromwell—discovers the ideal form for a new British state: assembling a council of legislators in ‘Alma,’ that is, Whitehall, the Lord Archon assigns them what amounts to a series of research projects, drawn by lot—“the commonwealth of Israel fell unto Phosphorus de Auge; that of Athens unto Navarchus de Paralo” and so on. These “having been opened by her due method… the council upon mature debate took such results or orders out of each one, and out of each part of each one of them” until “there remained no more in the conclusion than, putting the orders so taken together, to view and examine them with a diligent eye, to the end that it might be clearly discovered whether they did interfere, or could any wise come to interfere or jostle one another.” This scene of neatly mechanized invention and discovery might almost occur in the House of Salomon in Bacon’s *New Atlantis*. There, too, a committee gathers and interprets knowledge, though the process of discovery is more complexly regulated.

If the effect of Harrington’s approach to history is to make any alternative to the war unthinkable, this was not, to him and his contemporaries, a matter of historical interest only, or even primarily. The future was very much at stake. The norms from which recent history had diverged provided the surest guide for the state’s safe return to a kind of stability; but the question of what, precisely, these norms were was a matter for
debate. It is easy to associate that idea of a fixed standard with Royalism, and something like conservatism. But the Royalists, obviously, held no monopoly on a sense of the ordinary proceeding of English affairs; people of every persuasion could draw their own unwavering lines, and it was possible to assert, as John Lillburne and others did, that the English constitution had preceded the Norman Conquest, and that the English laws and liberties alone were, therefore, the historical norm, however deeply buried.\footnote{See J.G.A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957).}

If the immediate counterfactuals from which other historians of the war implicitly derived their ideas about how to proceed were, in the scheme presented by the Second Preliminaries, off-limits, where was one to turn for ideas about the future? The answer, as anyone who has read the following section of the *Oceana* can see, is to models, the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter 5: Why Models?

“‘Action,’” thus he soliloquized, ‘is the result of opinion, and to new-model opinion would be to new-model society.’” – Thomas Love Peacock, *Nightmare Abbey*

Harrington’s depiction of the commonwealth of Oceana takes the form of a model. To verify this fact, the reader need simply turn to the heading of the section in which it is described, entitled “The Model of the Commonwealth of Oceana.” Yet though Oceana’s form is specified clearly enough, the character of that form has received virtually no scholarly attention. The most basic questions remain unanswered: why, for example, did Harrington present his political proposals in the form of a model at all, much less one so elaborately detailed, so richly interlaced with fictional descriptions and characters? What would that form have meant to his contemporaries, and what did it mean to him? In the sixteen fifties, the model was by no means the default mode for the innumerable tracts offering political advice to the Commonwealth or Protectorate; few made use of anything that could be called, however loosely, a model, and none of these approximate Harrington’s method. The paucity of analogs suggests, as I will argue over the course of this chapter, that Harrington’s model of Oceana constitutes an innovation. If so, it is one conceived at the intersection of literary form and political theory, that ambiguous and contested territory where cartographers of the intellectual globe have always located utopia.

111 Portions of this chapter were presented at the Utopian Studies Conference in Wrightsville, N.C. in 2009, and at the annual meeting of the Renaissance Society of America in Venice, Italy in 2010.
In the last several decades intellectual historians of the Cambridge School, including J.G.A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner, have led a gradual rediscovery of the classical republican tradition in European and American political philosophy. One consequence of their labors has been a much clearer understanding of Harrington’s place in the history of political thought. Through J.G.A. Pocock’s virtuosic account, Harrington has emerged as an indispensable link between the Florentine and English, and the English and American republican traditions, as well as an original theorist of the relationship between military power, property, and political form; more recently, Eric Nelson’s study of the Greek republican tradition has shown that Harrington is, in some important respects, an heir to the thought of classical Athens. Studies of Harrington’s place in the republican tradition almost invariably focus on the first two preliminaries to Oceana, that is, on portion of the text that outlines his political principles and provides an historical analysis. They have comparatively little to say about his model of an ideal state, which is treated as the mere technical elaboration of the intellectual principles derived in the preliminaries, though it constitutes the bulk of the text—in the first edition of Oceana, the preliminaries cover fifty-one pages to the model’s two hundred and thirty-one.

As a result of this emphasis, Harrington’s use of fictional elements has typically been either ignored entirely or dismissed as insignificant. J.G.A. Pocock, for example, in considering the role of the fictions in Oceana in his introduction to The Political Works of James Harrington, presents two avenues of interpretation, but each is qualified more or less to the point of rejection. The fiction may, he writes, “be nothing more than a mode

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of idealization,” or it may be “a mask of fantasy” adopted “in order to avoid having to take either the immediate political or the imminent apocalyptic world too seriously.”

Neither hypothesis seems adequate to explain the dimensions and prominence of the fiction, suggesting that the form of Harrington’s work is merely one more quirk of a capricious stylist.

The scholarly reaction to Pocock’s characterization of Harrington as a civic humanist has resulted in somewhat greater interest in the text of the model of Oceana. Yet the studies influenced by this trend tend to treat Harrington’s model as a constitutional proposal in a straightforward sense, mining it for statements of principle, while paying little attention to its form and still less to its fictions. J.C. Davis has argued that Harrington is, in fact, best described as a utopian—after Davis’ own, somewhat idiosyncratic definition—and that if he is a utopian, he cannot also be a classical republican, for there is “an antipathy between the classical republic and utopia.”

To support his contention, he turns to the characteristics of Harrington’s proposed state, with the aim of demonstrating that Harrington accords a very slight place to individual volition and development as compared to the power he assigns to the operation of laws and institutions. Jonathan Scott, in delineating Hobbes’ influence on Harrington, has made


\[114\] J.C. Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 207. For Davis, “utopia is a holding operation, a set of strategies to maintain social order and perfection in the face of the deficiencies, not to say hostility, of nature and the willfulness of man. The utopian’s method is not to wish away the disharmony implicit within the collective problem, as the other ideal-society types do, but to organize society and its institutions in such a way as to contain the problem’s effects,” pp. 37-8.
similar observations. In both discussions, the question hinges on the degree of constraint or freedom that Harrington’s constitution permits its citizens, what Pocock referred to as “Harrington’s method of mechanizing virtue” (Machiavellian Moment, 394); in neither is the odd fact that Harrington has given his proposal a fictional form paid more than passing attention.

Yet when Harrington’s contemporary, the formidable theologian, historian and polemicist Peter Heylyn, referred derisively to “the Old Utopia, or the New Atlantis, or the last discovered Oceana,” he was not, surely, referring to the deep institutional similarities, but to the surface fictions all three shared; likewise, Henry More’s acerbic question “Whether Hanging or Drowning be the best waies of Transportation of our late Republicans to the Commonwealths of Utopia or Oceana?” is at least as concerned with ridiculing Oceana on the grounds of its nonexistence as on the organization of its legislature. To Harrington’s contemporaries and to the generation subsequent, Oceana’s utopianism was one of its most salient characteristics, and the primary feature of that utopianism was its representation of an imaginary society. Oceana, Harrington’s editor and biographer John Toland would remark, “is written after the manner of a romance, in imitation of Plato’s Atlantic story.”

The precise design of Harrington’s model, as will become clear later in this chapter, is astonishingly original. Yet that Harrington evinced an interest in modeling

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was, in many ways, typical: in the midst of the prolonged uncertainty that characterized the interregnum period, models of government were sought after by professional politicians and lay intellectuals alike, with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Many found this activity to be the shocking intellectual analog to the military violence of civil war, and for some disapproving spectators, the verbal parallel between the New Model Army and its new model of government was too felicitous, and too revealing, to resist. The indefatigable William Prynne, for instance, made use of it on multiple occasions in discussing “the Contrivers of our late New-Modelled Governments,” and the appalling fact that the army’s “new Instruments have New-modelled that they now call our Parliaments,” referring to the Instrument of Government, the 1653 constitutional document inaugurating the Protectorate. Prynne’s complaint was shared and anticipated at the highest levels; in the posthumously published Eikon Basilike, Charles I—or rather, his ghostwriter—lamented, “they designed, and proposed to Me, the new modelling of Soveraignty and Kingship, as without any reality of power.” Such usage stressed the verbal rather than nominal sense of the word, implying a true re-formation of government by force if necessary, which bespoke either great licentiousness or great liberty depending on the onlooker.

At the same time, another set of associations surrounding models was becoming more prevalent in early-modern England. In experimental philosophy, including medicine and physics, many of the ideas of William Harvey and Galileo took the form of models, as their adherents and imitators perceived. For I. Bernard Cohen, Harvey is the source,

118 William Prynne in, respectively, A seasonable, legal, and historicall vindication and chronological collection of the good old fundamentall liberties, franchises, rights, laws of all English freemen (London, 1655), and Demophilos (London, 1658), p. 54.
not merely of a particularly rich and exciting metaphor, but of many of the concrete proposals in Oceana.\textsuperscript{120} And for James Cotton, Harrington’s fascination with a comparative method of analysis has its origin in Harvey’s thought; Harrington “clearly believed that he had revolutionized the study of political anatomy in the same way that Harvey had transformed the study of human anatomy.”\textsuperscript{121}

In natural philosophy too, models were emerging as an important tool. A.C. Crombie credits Descartes with an important role in this process: “Descartes launched the first and most controversial general theory of models as the attractive scientific fiction of Le Monde” which, Crombie writes, “was evidently itself modeled philosophically on Plato’s Timaeus and in literary genre on the socially critical fictions beginning classically with the Republic and popularized more recently especially by Thomas More, Tomasso Campanella and Francis Bacon.”\textsuperscript{122} In The World, Descartes attempted to demonstrate his theories regarding the physical construction of the universe and the human body in two connected treatises, the Treatise on Light and the Treatise on Man. Harrington could not have read this work: although Descartes began The World in 1629, he ceased to work on it upon learning of Galileo’s condemnation, and the two treatises were not published until more than a decade after Descartes’ death, in 1664 and 1662.\textsuperscript{123} Nevertheless, Harrington might have known of The World from Descartes’ reference to the work in his Discourse

on the Method, published in 1637, and printed in an English translation in 1649, in which Descartes writes that in The World, “in some manner to shadow out all these things… I resolved to leave all this world here to their disputes, and to speak onely of what would happen in a new one, if God now created some where in those imaginary spaces matter enough to compose it” and then, having established laws, he “did nothing but lend his ordinary concurrence to Nature.”¹²⁴

Descartes’ description of the universe in terms of an imaginary model is designed, in part, to circumvent theological and philosophical objections to a fairly unorthodox physics—a device he judged, in the end, to be insufficient to forestall them. Nevertheless, his decision to use a model must have had more than a merely politic purpose, since, after all, the modeling of the new world requires a creation account that is far from the least daring moment in the treatise. The project makes more sense if the process of modeling is regarded as part of the point: the existing world, a more or less finished product, could not be taken as the direct subject of Descartes’ theory if the idea was to demonstrate how it was made by assembling it before the reader’s eyes. Such a project is thoroughly Baconian in its assumption that the test of knowledge is construction and reconstruction, that making a product and making it function reveals all the understanding necessary to humankind—and perhaps all the understanding possible, as well. Hence in his Discourse on the Method, Descartes writes, “in stead of this speculative Philosophy which is taught in the Schools, we might finde out a practicall one, by which knowing the force and workings of Fire, Water, Air, of the Starres, of the Heavens, and of all other Bodies which environ us, distinctly, as we know the several trades of our Handicrafts, we might in the

¹²⁴ Rene Descartes, A Discourse of a Method for the well guiding of Reason, and the Discovery of Truth in the Sciences (London, 1649), p. 69.
same manner employ them to all uses to which they are fit, and so become masters and possessours of Nature.”

At least one of Descartes’ later readers could see, in the effort toward mastery and possession, a work that echoed Bacon in the utopian as well as the scientific sense. In an amusing philosophical adventure story entitled *Voiage du monde de Descartes*, translated into English as *A Voyage to the World of Cartesius* in 1692, the French Jesuit Gabriel Daniel described the psychic voyage of a novice Cartesian to the outer limit of the universe in the company of Marin Mersenne and an unnamed Cartesian devotee. Descartes, it seems, was not actually dead, but had merely found the trick of separating the soul from the pineal gland where it was lodged. Having traveled past the edge of the vortex that drives our planetary system, Descartes has begun to construct a world by following the formula set forth in *Le Monde*. Slyly underscoring the utopian nature of Descartes’ cosmological project, Daniel has his travelers encounter Plato, in the process of establishing his *Republic* on the moon. “As M. Descartes has determined to put the Project of his World in Execution that he framed while he lived on Earth,” Mersenne says, “so Plato will resolve upon the Undertaking that of his Republick, which we shall see fix'd somewhere in those Vast and Desart Spaces above the Heavens, where he will convoy a Colony of Separate Souls, to constitute his Government.” To which the narrator’s other companion replies “That supposed (said my old Gentleman) Lucian had

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125 Compare with, for instance, Bacon’s statement that “I find that even those that have sought knowledge for itself, and not for benefit or ostentation or any practical enablement in the course of their life, have nevertheless propounded to themselves a wrong mark, namely satisfaction (which men call truth) and not operation” in *Of the Interpretation of Nature*.

but ill Intelligence from the other World,” a nod to the other, Lucianic, source of utopian fiction.\footnote{\textsuperscript{127}}

Oceana is a social, not a natural model. There was, in the early-modern period, a literary form devoted to developing models of this kind—that is, the utopian genre, which had, besides, an association with natural philosophy from its very inception.\footnote{\textsuperscript{128}} Plato’s cosmological account, the \textit{Timaeus}, begins with a summary of a dialogue said to have occurred on the previous day—his \textit{Republic}—and concludes by transitioning into the fragmentary \textit{Critias}, which gives an account of the island of Atlantis. Two separate utopian works, then, frame Plato’s cosmology. The association between utopianism and natural philosophy continued into the early modern period: two of England’s Lord Chancellors, separated by just above a century, drew from Plato’s treatises in their respective utopian works. While Thomas More’s \textit{Utopia} drew heavily on Plato’s \textit{Republic}, Bacon referred to Plato’s \textit{Critias} in the very title of his scientific utopia, the \textit{New Atlantis}, which according to his chaplain William Rawley was “a model or description of a college instituted for the interpreting of nature and the production of great and marvelous works for the benefit of men.”\footnote{\textsuperscript{129}} And insofar as natural philosophers represented the universe as a system—a term that only became current in English in the first half of the seventeenth-century, and which Harrington’s last work, \textit{A System of

\footnote{\textsuperscript{127}} Lucian of Samosata (c. 125-180) inaugurated an alternate, but frequently connected, tradition of utopian fiction in his \textit{True History}, in which a fictional society on the moon serves as a means of satirizing Roman culture. Lucian influenced such writers as Thomas More, as well as works like Joseph Hall’s \textit{Mundus alter et idem}.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{128}} One such utopian text was even referred to as a model, at least in its translation by John Hall: Johan Andreae’s \textit{A Modell of a Christian Society}, trans. John Hall (Cambridge, 1647). It was a model of a scholarly society rather than a political one, however.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{129}} William Rawley, in Francis Bacon, \textit{The Works of Francis Bacon}, J. Spedding, R. Ellis, and D. Heath, eds. (Boston: Brown and Taggard, 1857-74 ), 5: 357.}
Politics, made use of—the two discourses had deep and widely perceived structural
affinities.\textsuperscript{130} Theorists of utopianism rarely note the extent to which a formal parallel was
possible between these two genres; but in the seventeenth century, their association was
close and widely perceived. Harrington had, then, not only a philosophical motive for
undertaking to make a model society, but also a set of literary exempla that suggested
how such a model might be constructed.

II.

Even to contemporaries accustomed to the use and discussion of models,
however, Harrington’s Oceana presented a puzzling refinement of the form. Harrington,
as if in anticipation of his readers’ difficulty, made every effort to ease them into the
model gradually. His history of England, which precedes the model in Oceana, is
presented under a particularly diaphanous veil of political allegory, and a few of the
persons who will become characters within the model are first introduced to the reader as
mere pseudonyms. The political allegory ends, however, in 1653, with the dissolution of
the Rump Parliament by Oliver Cromwell, referred to as Olphaus Megaletor or, as Lord
Protector, Lord Archon.\textsuperscript{131} From this point onward, the account veers off into an alternate
reality of Harrington’s devising, with a description of the process by which the Lord
Archon devises and establishes a republic. The resulting republic is presented in the
model, which consists of transcribed ‘orders’—the constitutional laws of the state—and

\textsuperscript{130} See, for example, A.C. Crombie, pp. 1170-71.

\textsuperscript{131} It is worth noting that of all of Harrington’s characters, only Cromwell receives a
Greek name. The other names Harrington uses are primarily Italian in origin, indicating,
probably, that Cromwell alone possesses a sufficiently classical set of virtues to warrant a
Hellenic title. In classicizing Cromwell, Harrington is participating in a common trend,
whose practitioners include, notably, Andrew Marvell and Edmund Waller.
narration describing their institution and effects, written, the reader is told, fifty years after the foundation of the Oceana, while the original debates that accompanied the founding of the state appear interspersed with the constitutional laws, along with a set of fictional characters to voice them. It was, to say the least, an unusual form.

In response to criticisms from both within and without his own party by Matthew Wren, Peter Heylyn, and Henry Vane, among others, Harrington published a number of tracts between 1656 and 1659 devoted to defending and clarifying the principles outlined in *Oceana*. In presenting them to the public anew, Harrington stripped the fictional elements from his ideas, simplifying some of his more complex propositions in the process. There is more than a shade of desperation in Harrington’s ceaseless attempts to find a form for his ideas that would make their practicality obvious, even as the Protectorate unraveled about him. Yet if in the service of this attempt, Harrington abandoned his fictions, he nevertheless continued to make models and to label them as such in several of his treatises, including *The Art of Lawgiving, The Rota*, and *Brief Directions*, albeit on a diminished scale. The repetition of this device suggests that Harrington simply thought in and through the form he had adapted at the beginning of his literary career, a fact that may, perhaps, explain why the characterizations he offered of the model of Oceana in his later texts never provided adequate descriptions of its complex design. Still, if Harrington’s own analyses of his model failed to capture all of its features, they nevertheless suggest, taken cumulatively, the different functions Harrington wished it to perform. Reversing chronology, then, I will use Harrington’s later writings as a way of approaching his earlier *Oceana*, for they display a similar set of problems in an intentionally simplified form.
In 1659, Harrington published a pamphlet entitled *Brief Directions Showing How a Fit and Perfect Model of Popular Government May Be Made, Found, or Understood*, intended as a defense and elaboration of the principles contained in *Oceana*. The very title of this work suggests a problem surrounding the interpretation of the model commonwealth in *Oceana*, for in the phrase “made, found, or understood,” Harrington offers at least two distinct possibilities for thinking about modeling. It is evident that a model of representative government, like the blueprint of a building, may be made; in this sense, modeling is a creative act, oriented toward the future. The successful model will, of course, be required to perform a number of definite functions, but it will also have latitude in the means whereby it does so. A model that is found, however, must be extracted from something that exists or has existed; in this sense, modeling is a method of description. There is, of course, nothing contradictory in advocating the use of both types of model; Harrington, as will become apparent, does so throughout his work. In fact, the exact equipoise between these two concepts of modeling, and the systematic way they are distributed across texts, is one of the more surprising facets of Harrington’s technique. Yet their undifferentiated use in Harrington’s theory, and their amalgamation in his practice, is liable to lead to certain ambiguities.

With one exception, the models in *Brief Directions* are of the ‘found’ variety. That exception, however, is worth noting. The pamphlet contains seven models of commonwealths, each a summary of the constitutional structure of a past or existing state, except for the second model, the complete text of which follows:

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A Second Model of a Commonwealth Propos’d

THAT there be a king without guards.

That the word or command of this king be the law.

That this king stirring out of his palace, it may be lawful for any man to slay him.

IN this model there wants but security, that while the people are dispers’d the king can gather no army, to demonstrate, that either the people must be free, or the king a prisoner (Brief Directions, 585-86).

Reading the model above, one might well be tempted to ask in what respect it can be said to demonstrate its conclusion. Certainly it does not do so in either the logical or empirical sense—it is, rather, a small, self-contained thought experiment. This, too, is indicative of one of the uses to which Harrington puts his models; like narrative, they too are a kind of “cognitive instrument,” forms through which the principles of political organization can be understood.

In the analogies Harrington uses to describe Oceana, there is a similar equivocation between concepts of modeling, for Harrington alternately refers to his model by means of a comparison with an anatomy and with an architectural plan. The former was intended to illustrate his pursuit of natural principles; it had, besides, the advantage of suggesting a link with the work of that English celebrity, William Harvey, as well as with the advanced methods of the Paduan school. The latter suggested not so much a project of discovery as a proposed—if innocuous—innovation. During the Civil War and Interregnum, it was a conceit particularly favored by those with republican

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133 For the former, see The Art of Lawgiving, p. 656; for the latter, see The Art of Lawgiving, p. 659 in Harrington, Works, as well as Harrington’s use of the base/superstructure metaphor within Oceana itself.
sympathies: in the lines “some fall back upon the Architect;/Yet all compos'd by his attractive Song,/Into the Animated City throng,” for example, Andrew Marvell could imagine the unruly members of the commonwealth as the stones of a building, put into place by Cromwell’s direction; Marvell was himself likely influenced by Milton’s use of the same image in Areopagitica. Both comparisons were useful to Harrington, but neither aligns perfectly with his own work; indeed, his use of both suggests fidelity to neither.

It will be apparent, furthermore, that both templates of models, the architectural plan and the anatomy, have very different, even contradictory, ontologies. The cases diverge at two points: the architectural model suggests that Oceana is a consequence of human invention, and not simply of pure discovery, and it suggests, too, that the model is a model of some future entity, whose existence is contingent on its happening to be constructed. It is, in the terminology of Brief Directions, the sort of model that is made rather than found. The anatomy, on the contrary, is an example of a ‘found’ model, revealing the internal structure of a past or present body—or body politic. The divergence between the two is a formal matter, but it is also one with practical stakes, for depending on what one believes Harrington’s paradigm to be, one will answer fundamental questions about his purpose differently: did he intend that his model should be literally applied to England? Did he believe that its realization was inevitable in all points, or only in some, and if so, which?

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134 “The First Anniversary,” in Andrew Marvell, The Poems of Andrew Marvell, ed. N. Smith (London: Longman, 2006), lines 84-86. The allusion to Aeropagitica is explained in Smith’s note to the passage.
Oceana makes reference, too, to a third variety of model, the cosmology. In a less literal but no less exacting manner than Campanella’s Civitas Solis, that city structured in seven rings like a universe in stone, Harrington’s ideal state takes its form from the cosmos. The association between cosmological and utopian works is, as I mentioned above, relatively common, but Harrington allows the parallel to influence the content of his politics. His justification of the principle of rotation of offices, for instance, an idea that attracted the opposition of puritan contemporaries including Milton and Henry Vane, draws on the analogy between state and cosmos, connecting the immortality of both laws and planets with their perpetual orbits. Milton, characteristically, opposed Harrington’s image with another, darker image of his own: “I could wish that this wheel or partial wheel in State, if it be possible, might be avoided; as having too much affinity with the wheel of fortune.”

Harrington’s idiosyncratic diction reinforces the analogy between state and cosmos: Oceana contains civil, military and provincial orbs, a body of magistrates known as the galaxy, and, in a reference to Plutarch (who is himself alluding to Plato’s Timaeus), the Lord Archon sees the constituent parts of the state as revolving spheres (Oceana, 341). Such imagery was not simply a literary device, but constituted a claim for the extension of an ideal order to the government of Oceana, whose fundamental laws would partake in the same incorruptibility antiquity had accorded to the heavens. If, as

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136 Harrington writes, “For the rest (says Plutarch, closing up the story of Lycurgus), when he saw that his government had taken root and was in the very plantation strong enough to stand by itself, he conceived such a delight within him, as God is described by Plato to have done, when he had finished the creation of the world, and saw his own orbs move below him.”
Catherine Wilson has claimed, “a contributing reason for the absence of a law-concept in ancient natural philosophy is that for Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, the distinction between ideal order and rough actuality is conceived as a distinction between celestial and the terrestrial realms,” then Harrington’s “orbs” and “galaxies” constitute a claim for the extension of an “ideal order” to the government of Oceana, as many of its readers have noted: for the fundamental laws of Oceana, are, like the spheres, incorruptible. As one of Harrington’s major influences, the Venetian historian Gasparo Contarini, wrote, laws “do in a manner concurre with eternitie,” a sentiment that holds doubly for an immortal commonwealth.

While Harrington’s references to anatomy suggest the discovery of existing rules, and references to architecture point toward the invention of new structures, the creation of a state on cosmological principles implies both: both the philosopher’s subservience to nature and the godlike power of sovereign creation. “Nature,” Harrington would remark elsewhere, “is the Law as well as the Art of God.” In Harrington’s method of modeling, the political philosopher stands both below and above his creation—like the anatomist, he is the faithful chronicler of the laws of nature, but he is also, like Philip Sidney’s poet, the creator of a golden world, for whom the invention of a fictive nature is an act of pure poesis.

Descartes, as I have shown, made a world partly in order to show its assemblage, with the idea that the process of making it could contribute in a unique way both to his authority with respect to it, and the reader’s knowledge of it. Harrington mimics this procedure, but in a fashion sufficiently subtle that it has gone unnoticed by recent critics—though not, as I shall demonstrate, by his contemporaries. The first action of a commonwealth, according to Harrington, must “be no other than fitting and distributing the materials,” which materials “are the people” (Oceana, 75). It is not, and cannot be, a creation ex nihilo; the people, of course, already exist, albeit in a chaotic form. This is done “by casting them into certain divisions” (Oceana, 75), which the first four orders delineate, though many later ones are required to complete the scheme. Harrington’s division of the commonwealth is at both disassembly and constitution; the revelation of parts is simultaneously the parts’ creation. Through its initial reiterated acts of dividing, Harrington’s method of creation evokes the creation account in Genesis; it is impossible help hearing an echo of “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.”

Harrington’s association of division with creation extends past the limits of Oceana and its defenses: in his Essay upon two of Virgil’s Eclogues and two books of his Aeneis, he writes that Dido, establishing Carthage, “Environ’d by her guards; divides, creates / By word or lot, the honours, Magistrates” a translation of Iura dabat legesque viris, operumque laborem / partibus aequabat iustis, aut sorte trahebat that seems to

140 Though we are told that the people, adequately formed in character by means of a prior shift in the balance, must preexist the state, Harrington’s impulse still seems to be part of a curiosity, particularly strong in Commonwealth writers, about what comes before the beginning. Milton, too, might be taken as illustrative of this tendency.

141 King James Version, Genesis 1:6
indicate a prior association of division and creation in the context of the new state. Nor was Harrington the only one to have seen and developed the political implications of divisions inherent in a hexameral account. Very likely influenced by Oceana, the anonymous author of a 1659 tract entitled Chaos explains, “nothing ever appeared so like the Poets old Chaos as this present Age,” and proceeds to offer a state model in hexameral form. The first day of this model is devoted to “light,” by which is meant “to shew what’s intended for further light to the whole Creation, which is to receive Life and Perfection in the following days, within the time allotted” (Chaos, 6). The second, however, follows Harrington more nearly: it is dedicated to explaining how a census is to be taken, and all lands and property registered. As with Harrington, the division of property, and particularly landed estates and the resulting division of men into classes

She takes petitions, and dispenses laws,
Hears and determines ev'ry private cause;
Their tasks in equal portions she divides,
And, where unequal, there by lots decides.

Harrington’s translation of Virgil is not, of course, an innocent foray into poesy. He is more or less forthright about the fact that his interest in the two translated eclogues (1 and 9) is due to their corroboration of his theory about the flaws in the Roman balance; his translation of the first book of the Aeneid is very likely attributable to its depiction of Dido as New Prince. As he writes in his ‘Epistle to the Reader’, “I have reason’d to as much purpose as if I had rime’d, and now I think I shall rime to as much purpose as if I had reason’d.” For more on Harrington’s translation of Virgil, see Annabel Patterson, Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valery (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), and David Norbrook, Writing the English Republic (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 360-61, and 374-78.

143 A well-willer to the Publique Weale, Chaos: Or, a discourse wherein is presented to the view of the Magistrate and all others who shall peruse the same, a Frame of Government by way of a Republique, (London, 1659).
reproduces the division of the heavens and the earth in a somewhat humbler scale; it is itself a form of creation.  

Yet even Harrington’s introduction of the complex model of the created cosmos, which is at once nature and art, discovered and made, cannot fully resolve the tension between different ideas of modeling within his work. This tension emerges in Harrington’s own description of the invention of his model state. Given that Harrington remarks, “An assembly of men… is not capable of inventing any perfect model or method of government” (Aphorisms Political, 779), one might expect Oceana’s creation myth to be strictly monotheistic—the act of Cromwell’s avatar, the Lord Archon. Instead, as David Norbrook remarks, “the architecture of this new commonwealth is less of a top-down process than the emphasis on one founder at first suggests.” The fact that this scene occurs in a building called “Alma” may be a reference to Spenser’s The Faerie Queene, in which the House of Alma is a castle designed as a model of the human body—telescoping Harrington’s interest in the architectural plan and the anatomy. Yet although the council of legislators devises the model by means of a collaborative and highly regimented process of discovery, Harrington concludes, “and such was the art whereby my Lord Archon… framed the model of the commonwealth of Oceana” (Oceana, 209). If the council discovers the model, the Lord Archon nevertheless remains its author in the Hobbesian sense of the term, for it is by reason of his authority that the constitution of Oceana is proposed to its citizens. Here, again, one sees the familiar

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144 For a discussion of this tract, and particularly of its Harringtonian debts, see J.C. Davis, pp. 243-253.
145 David Norbrook, p. 367.
tension between modeling as a process of discovery and of creation. The interesting thing about this scene, however, is that the relation between the two paradigms is mediated by character and narrative—by fiction.

It is with this section that the fictional elements of *Oceana* begin to serve a theoretically sophisticated purpose. The impossibility of Harrington’s account of the establishment of the model, set three years prior to the publication of *Oceana*, and utterly unlike the foundation of any government then known, ought to attract the reader’s attention, for it indicates that Harrington is not merely using fiction to show the plausibility of the government he proposes. Had Harrington wanted only to propose a new government to his fellow citizens, as many scholars have suggested, he would, in all probability, have made the fiction of its invention and adoption resemble a possible trajectory for his own model, rather than serving as a dramatization of his method. He might, for example, have set it in the future.

It is a commonplace of utopian studies that over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, utopias, no longer easy to place in some undiscovered corner of the ocean, began to be set, instead, in the perpetually uncharted waters of time. Such a shift is necessarily tied to the increasing authority of the concept of progress, through which the future becomes not only the most obvious location for the discovery of an advanced society, but also a kind of engine of discovery in its own right. As Robert Applebaum writes, by the middle of the century, time is “experienced as a *resource*, a

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147 In, for example, Judith Shklar, “The Political Theory of Utopia” in *Utopias and Utopian Thought*. Ed. by Frank Edward Manuel (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966).
scarce resource, usable for solving the problems that history itself has generated, since the future has already begun...“\textsuperscript{148}

The model of Oceana, spanning a fifty-year period that begins three years before the time of the book’s publication and ends forty-seven years after, might, according to this theory, merely be the primitive ancestor of the future-oriented utopia—translated into the future, but not quite far enough. Reading the model of Oceana as a text deliberately set in the subjunctive, however, makes better sense of its structure: the model takes place in a time scheme parallel to Harrington’s own because time itself, as I will show, is a kind of fiction in the model, allowing it to mimic the contingent sweep of history while preserving a repetitive and eternal cyclical movement.

III.

In Plato’s Timaeus, the reader is informed that the sun and moon were the best possible gifts to mankind, not in virtue of anything so pedestrian as mere light, but rather because “our ability to see the periods of day-and-night, of months and of years, of equinoaxes and solstices, has led to the invention of number and has given us the idea of time.”\textsuperscript{149} Two millennia after Plato and a year prior to the publication of Oceana, Hobbes would define “quantity” as tied to physical dimension, making it an attribute of body alone. This idea, though in some ways a natural position for a philosopher defending geometry as the foundational science, involved Hobbes in the claim that quantities less customarily associated with the dimensions of a figure in space, such as quantities of

\textsuperscript{149} Plato, Timaeus, trans. Donald J. Zeyl (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 47a.
time, are, as he put it, “exposed” by line, or by the motion of a body along a line. This is a stronger claim than that time is merely capable of representation by motion along a line—as in the moving hands of a clock—but that, insofar as we wish to consider quantity in time at all, we need to think about it geometrically, that is, spatially. Like Plato and Hobbes, James Harrington was interested in the representation of time. But for Harrington this interest was, to a significant degree, a literary one: his innovation was not in devising a theory of the modeling of time in space, but in the modeling of time in fiction.

In the philosophy of science, it has long been argued that distortions and fictions may enter into models of any kind—all are, more or less, within the scope of Hans Vaihinger’s sweeping as if. Because Harrington intended his fictions and hypotheticals to play a constitutive rather than merely rhetorical role in the presentation of his philosophy, some analyses of the role of fictions in scientific models pertain to his work. In particular, the distinction between structure and simulation, relevant to many models in the social sciences, may be usefully applied to Oceana. In Models as Mediators, Mary S. Morgan and Margaret Morrison note that “models are capable of representing physical or economic systems at two distinct levels, one that includes the higher level structure that the model itself embodies in an abstract and idealized way and the other, the level of

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150 Hobbes writes, Exponitur Tempus, quando non solum exponitur linea quaelibet, sed etiam mobile quod super eam moveatur uniformiter, p. 85.
concrete detail through the kinds of simulations that the models enable us to produce.\textsuperscript{152}

Following this division, it is possible to think of the model of the commonwealth of Oceana as consisting of two phases or levels: one occurs at the level of the structure of the model, conceived as a static entity that is in some way reflective of the world or theories about it, while the other occurs through the model’s operation, its extended simulation of its world.

It is clear enough from the text of \textit{Oceana} that Harrington’s model does contain some such division. The model of Oceana, as was noted above, consists of transcribed ‘orders’—the constitutional frame of Oceana—and past tense narration describing their effects. The orders were, the reader is told, published at the inception of the commonwealth, but with “more brevity and less illustration than is necessary for their understanding, who have not been acquainted with the whole proceedings” (\textit{Oceana}, 210). A description of these proceedings, including the speeches and debates explaining the import of certain political arrangements, supplies this lack. So too does Harrington’s pretext for past-tense narration, his pose of describing the commonwealth “as she hath now given account of herself in some years’ revolutions” (\textit{Oceana}, 210). In noting the distinction between the two elements contained with his work, Harrington writes, “I shall distinguish the orders, as those which contain the whole model, from the rest of the discourse, which tendeth only to the explanation or proof of them” (\textit{Oceana}, 213). Yet whether Harrington regards the narrative passages and the rather florid speeches

interspersed with the orders as part of the model in the narrowest sense, they are an inseparable component of the work as a whole. They do not merely explain the orders, but help, in the fullest sense, to prove them: they demonstrate the orders, as Harrington writes, “practically,” and in so doing, correspond to the phase of simulation within the model.

Harrington, one might say, has separated the structure and simulation of the model grammatically into the present-tense text of the orders, and a past-tense narration that shows them in motion. There is even a distinction in font: the orders, in both 1656 printings, are in black letter. Utopias, of course, nearly always contain some balance of narration and description, of contingent action and fixed precept—More’s Utopia, in particular, makes effective use of this division—while models of various sorts often have some mechanism for demarcating basic structure from function. It is Harrington’s achievement, however, to have synthesized these ideas in order to arrive at a mode whose literary characteristics cleanly organize its components.

Fictions appear in the model, then, in order to show the local and contingent effects of time within the political structure. The structure itself does reflect a kind of time, but it is time as the image of eternity, evoked by the rotation of offices that drives the unceasing, invariable motion of the republic. The laws pertaining to this rotation, those instating the day and manner of elections, are presented in the chronological sequence in which they would be enacted, first those concerning the civil orb—that is, civil government—then the military orb. By way of these orders, the reader is given an almost calendrical sense of the passage of the year: “Every Wednesday next ensuing the last of December, the youth of every parish, assembling, elect the fifth of their number to
be their deputies” and “Every Wednesday next ensuing the last of January, the stratiots, assembling at the hundred, elect their captain and their ensign” and “Every Wednesday next ensuing the last of February, the stratriots… elect the second essay” (Oceana, 336). And so on through March, the rest of the year being left to the work of legislation or military activity for which the elections occurred. The cyclical year, with its repetitive renewals, is the obvious form for the structure of the model, which is meant to be a sort of political perpetual motional machine. The commonwealth of Oceana is, as Harrington notes, a circle, a concept he understands in a structural, as well as a political, sense, for he concludes the model by “turning the end into the beginning,” (Oceana, 339) that is, the beginning of the newly-ratified commonwealth.

In the interstices of this structure, however, Harrington’s model presents a different, and more intimate depiction of time; it is on this level, the level of the simulation, that Harrington actually illustrates, rather than merely indicating, the passage of time in its contingent details. He does so by means of fictions, the speeches of the Lord Archon, his characters, his description of the people’s response to the new constitutional arrangements, and, in particular, the odd events in the final section of Oceana entitled “The Corollary.” In this section, Harrington describes the progress of the commonwealth up to fifty years after its foundation, in the course of which Oceana makes new laws, erects new institutions, engages in some rather casual imperialism. Because these events are not necessary, but merely contingent, they can only be depicted as fictional, not as normative rules like the laws contained within the model. But this is not to say that they are arbitrarily fictional: there is a delimited range of possibilities within which they could fall.
In one of his final speeches, the Lord Archon provides an apt analogy for thinking about this kind of model: “It grieves me” he says, speaking for Harrington, “that the foregoing orders are not capable of any greater clearness in discourse or writing: but if a man should make a book, describing every trick and passage, it would fare no otherwise with a game at cards.” The problems a political architect encounters are like those someone would face who listed the rules—and the ways of cheating—for a game of cards, which would prove inadequate as a demonstration of how the game actually was played. What Harrington has done, to amend this lack, is provided a sample game, with normative rules supplemented by an illustration of one possible sequence of play. The analogy bears comparison with Henry Neville’s *Shuffling, Cutting, and Dealing in a Game at Pickquet, Being Acted from the Year, 1653 to 1658*, a political satire comparing the Commonwealth to a card game; evidently, Harrington was not the only political thinker who perceived the similarity between the political experiments of the interregnum and the curious mixture of chance, skill, and (in some cases) depravity that characterizes a game of cards.¹⁵³ This, then, is Harrington’s primary innovation on the political model: he has found a way to at once represent his commonwealth as immortal, in defiance of the majority of early modern political treatises, and yet as partaking, within limits, of the haphazard sequences of history.

Viewing *Oceana* in this way helps to clarify Harrington’s aim in writing it. No doubt he would have been very pleased by the wholesale adoption of his thirty orders by Cromwell, or Parliament—after all, his friend Henry Neville did submit a motion to adopt many of Harrington’s laws, presumably with his support, to Parliament in 1659.

¹⁵³ Henry Neville, *Shuffling, Cutting, and Dealing in a Game at Pickquet, Being Acted from the Year, 1653 to 1658* (London, 1659).
But the model could be, in its own terms, accounted a success independently of the adoption of any of its particulars, because Harrington takes it to prove his basic principles: that empire follows the balance of property, that rotation of office is necessary to the continued life of government, that those who propose laws must not also vote on them, for “the whole mystery of a commonwealth… lies only in dividing and choosing.”

The extent to which these are, indeed, proven, rests on whether, given a model with a structure based on such principles, it is possible to arrive at a simulation with a substantially different outcome than the one Harrington devises. It is a test that requires the use of fictions and rests on persuasion, while nevertheless being more combinatorial than rhetorical in ambition.

Harrington’s principles are demonstrated by the interaction of the orders and the fictional material surrounding them. Though vastly more elaborate, this is not unlike the way in which his historical models operate, in which our knowledge of history—with Harrington’s occasional hints—is meant to tacitly confirm his statements about the flaws and strengths in their constitutional structure. The second model from Brief Directions quoted above, like the model of Oceana, asks readers to make use of imagination, that faculty understood to link the concrete particulars of sense to the elevated conclusions of reason, as well as memory. The interaction between orders and their effects can be far more precise in Oceana, however, than in the second model, for Harrington has himself undertaken the necessary labors of the imagination. And it is also considerably more pointed than the models of Athens or Sparta, for the Lord Archon, unlike Solon or Lycurgus, understands and articulates the full intention of his laws with respect to Harrington’s theory.
Harrington’s first readers misunderstood this aspect of Oceana. These readers divided, by and large, into two camps: sympathizers and followers, who took his theories and discarded his fictions as an unhelpful shell; and critics and enemies, who used his fictions as a way to attack the objectionable theoretical matter encased within them, charging him with willful utopianism. William Prynne, for instance, could sneer that Marchamont Nedham, John Rogers, and Harrington’s “Utopian Republike like the Chymists Philosophers-stone,” was “never yet in esse, but in fieri, or fancy at the most, and a meer NEW NOTHING,” and even the more sympathetic Nedham wrote a series of satirical letters from Utopia and Oceana, the two states firmly associated in equal impossibility.\footnote{William Prynne, \textit{A Brief and Necessary Vindication}, (London, 1659), p. 59, and Marchamont Nedham, \textit{Mercurius Politicus}, 5-12 March 1657, #352-56.} Harrington resisted the label of utopianism, but he would have done better, in some respects, to adopt it—for in stressing the importance of his fiction, he might, paradoxically, have made his political principles seem more practicable. As it is, \textit{Oceana} has continued to be regarded, even by its acutest critics, as an integument of fiction awkwardly enclosing an independent philosophy. There is, as I have attempted to demonstrate, another reading possible. As Timaeus remarks, “the accounts we give of things have the same character as the subjects they set forth” (Plato, 29b). Or as Harrington himself puts it, “the necessary action or life of each thing is from the nature of the form” (\textit{Aphorisms Political}, 763).

“The utopian pattern of correctness,” Karl Mannheim argues in \textit{Ideology and Utopia}, “arises out of the concrete modes of obtaining knowledge prevailing at a given
time.”¹⁵⁵ That is to say, the structure of utopian thought—and utopian writing—is always predicated on the epistemological stance of the culture within which it is produced. One has, by this account, every reason for taking Harrington’s writing as an important indication of ideas about truth and knowledge in the early modern period. But this is, in fact, too weak a claim. In treating utopian texts as passively ‘arising’ out of culture, Mannheim ignored the extent to which such texts could actively reorient attitudes toward knowledge. Harrington’s *Oceana* was not merely a product of a culture briefly obsessed with making models, but provided a new conception of their use, and more broadly, a concept of the relation between truth and fiction that bears comparison with Swift’s satire in *Gulliver’s Travels*, and Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. If this latter text presents itself, in Steven Zwicker’s neat formulation, as “a kind of perfection of myth in history,” one might, I suggest, think of *Oceana*’s strange ontology in parallel, as a kind of perfection of truth in fiction.¹⁵⁶

III. Margaret Cavendish

In a list of the aphorisms of William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, his wife and biographer Margaret Cavendish records his remark, “That Foraign Commerce causes frequent Voyages; and frequent Voyages make skilful and experienced Sea-men, and Skilful Seamen are a Brazen Wall to an Island.” Cavendish’s conceit rests on a paradox: the sea surrounding the British Isles is both a conduit and a barrier, and it is in fact the latter by virtue of being the former. It is a door that the right key can either open or lock fast. William and Margaret Cavendish would have had every reason to perceive the English Channel’s duality: as exiles, it was a barrier that they had had to cross, and eventually, to recross—a bright line that, for sixteen years, both divided them from and connected them to their native country.

Margaret first crossed the Channel in 1644, at the age of twenty-one. The daughter of a wealthy family from Colchester, she had become a Maid of Honour to Queen Henrietta Maria in 1640, just months after the beginning of the Civil War. Then Margaret Lucas, she accompanied Henrietta Maria in her flight to France. After Margaret met and married William Cavendish, Marquess of Newcastle—the retired general of the Royalist army, and a recent exile—she lived in Paris and Rotterdam, before taking lodgings in Antwerp. In 1651, she traversed the Channel again. Living lavishly in Antwerp on the most limited of incomes, Cavendish and her husband had gone deeply into debt: “necessity inforced me,” she wrote, “to return into England.” Like the wives of many Royalists, she petitioned Parliament for her portion of her husband’s property, and while awaiting the outcome of her petition, wrote the first of her books, Poems, and
Fancies. The petition did not meet with success, but her book was published in 1653, launching her career as a poet and philosopher. Again she crossed the sea, returning to Antwerp.

In 1660, Margaret and William Cavendish crossed the Channel a final time. On the eighth of May, Parliament issued a declaration proclaiming Charles—now Charles II—the legitimate monarch, and on the twenty-fifth of that month, he arrived in England, followed by Cavendish and her husband. Thus their exile ended; during their remaining decades, they remained securely in England, ensconced in a London townhouse and the Newcastle family estate, Welbeck Abbey, where Margaret wrote epistolary works, drama, orations, and natural philosophical treatises of astonishing scope and originality.

Given that Cavendish’s life was demarcated by crossings of the Channel, it is not hard to see why she should have compared herself to a ‘barque’ in an early, biographical poem entitled “Similizing a young Lady to a Ship.” The analogy extends further than she herself realized, to her style of thought as well as her biography: the core principle of Cavendish’s philosophy is her belief in the ultimate contingency of divisions. No one was more adept at traversing the most apparently fixed distinctions, including those that divided physics and metaphysics, form and matter, sense and reason, and even national and international political thought. In a first chapter, I demonstrate how Cavendish rejects not only the idea that the Restoration, by returning England to stability, canceled the decades of turbulence that preceded it, but also the very intellectual strategies that, by conceiving of politics as static and bounded, permitted such conclusions to be drawn. In a second chapter, I discuss Cavendish’s wider rejection of any method or model that claims to achieve domestic political order without regard to the contingency of international
relations. For Cavendish, the Channel, the very real line that separated domestic English politics from international relations, could only be made to resemble a ‘brazen wall’ by those who knew how to cross it.
Chapter 6: The Representation and Reality of Change

In the volume *Letters and poems in honour of the incomparable princess, Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle* (1676) an anonymous poet suggests, “Had Spencer liv’d your Works t’have seen/You must have been his Fairy-Queen.” The encomium is superficially apt, for Margaret Cavendish’s first work *Poems, and Fancies* (1653), likely influenced by Spenser, contains an extended verse treatment of fairies and their kingdom. But it is also apt in a deeper sense than the anonymous poet likely knew. Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* ends with the unfinished “Mutabilitie Cantos,” and the problem of change haunts his verse, in which dizzying metamorphoses constantly call the stability of the allegory into question. Like Spenser, Cavendish is preoccupied with the problem of change and its inverse, the problem of identity over time. This preoccupation owes much to the political environment of Cavendish’s age. If Spenser’s Fairyland frequently resembles Elizabethan England and Ireland, Cavendish’s Britain, in the course of the transformations effected by the Civil War and Restoration, had a disconcerting way of resembling Fairyland. For many, as Steven Zwicker and Derek Hirst note, “The fact that political change so obviously and dramatically did occur in the seventeenth century paradoxically induced a strengthened denial of the idea of change.” In writing about

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157 Portions of this chapter were presented at the annual meeting of the Renaissance Society of America in Washington, D.C. in 2012, and at the annual meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association in Providence, R.I. in 2012. *Letters and poems in honour of the incomparable princess, Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle* (The Savoy, 1676). The volume was presented to William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, after Margaret Cavendish’s death.

the complex dynamics of change, then, Cavendish was both reacting to her era, and against the conservative fictions of stability with which many of her contemporaries responded to it.

No one familiar with the academic study of Margaret Cavendish will be surprised to see an essay on her work begin by situating it in opposition to the dominant tendencies of her milieu. If Cavendish is, in 2011, safely within the widening perimeter of scholarly debate, it is precisely because of such opposition: the prescience and coherence of her critique of myths of Enlightenment at the point of their inception have ensured her relevance to early modern scholarship. In particular, critics including Lisa Sarasohn, John Rogers, and Eve Keller have revealed the sophistication of Cavendish’s feminist critique of the natural philosophy associated with the Royal Society and the politics implicit in its experimental program. 159 This critique, clearly stated in her *Philosophical Letters* (1664) and *Observations on Experimental Philosophy* (1666), is to an extent a rhetorical and stylistic one: debarred, for the most part, from examining philosophers’ practice, Cavendish’s *Observations* observes their textual record. Cavendish’s own style, which ranges across poetry, drama, oration, dialogue, utopian fiction, and epistles as well as natural philosophy, is more than a neutral vehicle for her critique. It is through the form and style of her work that she is able to present natural philosophy with a model of discourse in which the “rational perception” of imagination supplements the operation of

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reason and substitutes for the operation of sense.\(^{160}\) Because in this respect, as in others, Cavendish’s prose is responsive to that of her contemporaries, new insights into their writing make new insights into hers possible: as recent work, including the research of Peter Dear and Victoria Kahn, reveals the intricate ways in which early modern philosophers used literary form, it becomes possible to discern a correspondingly greater degree of nuance in Cavendish’s rejoinder.\(^{161}\)

Cavendish’s opposition to her contemporaries’ “denial of the idea of change,” then, is alert to their use of a rhetoric and style that bolsters it. By way of contrast, Cavendish’s own ontology and style are calculated to accommodate mutability. The fluidity of Cavendish’s prose is clearest in her early works—in The Worlds Olio (1655), for instance, whose maxims and essays form chains linked by analogy and association.\(^{162}\) But it is also apparent, albeit more subtly, in the controlled prose of her later writing. This essay focuses on the appendix to Cavendish’s The Grounds of Natural Philosophy (1668), her last work. To the reader first opening the pages of the book, The Grounds of

\(^{160}\) Margaret Cavendish, Philosophical Letters (London, 1664), p. 26. Cavendish objects to Hobbes’ characterization of imagination as “decaying sense.” Cavendish writes, “he conceives Sense and Imagination to be all one… whereas in my opinion they are different, not onely their matter, but their motions also being distinct and different; for Imagination is a rational perception, and sense a sensitive perception,” p. 26.


Natural Philosophy will seem like an unlikely text in which to examine the stylistic expression of mutability. The book was nominally a reworking of her earlier Philosophical and Physical Opinions, but as she notes in the dedication, she had made “many Alterations and Additions, (which forc’d me to give it another Name).” These “many Alterations and Additions” have the effect of lending Cavendish’s exposition of her philosophy, from her theories of matter, perception, and causation to animal reproduction and human disease a degree of clarity unmatched elsewhere in her oeuvre, attributable to the fixity of terminology, the clear divisions between sections, the systematic organization of the work as a whole—characteristics far removed from the articulation of mutability. It is as if the pressure of the form has at last managed to freeze the drift and flow characteristic of her Interregnum writings into the crystalline structure of the philosophical treatise.

The appendix to The Grounds of Natural Philosophy, however, departs dramatically from the clear and methodical progression of the text proper. It presents the reader with a series of discussions pertaining to the resurrection and afterlife, a speculative theology that becomes, by its conclusion, an obscure political fantasy. It has yet to receive a satisfactory interpretation; given that many of Cavendish’s earlier writings were equally fantastic without being allegorical, it may not seem to require one. Yet it is, I will suggest, both a more deliberate and a more topical work than it appears to be. Viewed in the context of the conservative myths of Restoration political

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163 Ryan John Stark, for instance, considers that in one of the key passages of the appendix, “the expectation of arrival at a core image, or core equation in Galileo’s sense of nature’s book, is frustrated by an image of, and a stylistic enactment of, the irreducible” in “Margaret Cavendish and Composition Style,” Rhetoric Review, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Spring, 1999), pp. 264-281, p. 272.
thought, it is evident that Cavendish is offering a damning assessment of the value of such fictions, even as she presents a rival fable delineating the nature of political change.

Speculative Theology

Religion and politics were both subjects Cavendish claimed to avoid. In the dedication to her first book, *Poems, and Fancies*, she remarks that she has spent her time innocently, writing poetry and natural philosophy, rather than “busie my selfe out of the Sphear of our Sex, as in Politicks of State, or to Preach false Doctrine in a Tub.”¹⁶⁴ She had not, apparently, changed her position in 1664, when she published her *Philosophical Letters*, for she claims to avoid addressing Hobbes’ politics because, “a Woman is not imployed in State Affairs, unless an absolute Queen.” Besides, she continued, “it is but a deceiving Profession, and requires more Craft than Wisdom” (*Philosophical Letters*, 47). Yet in the interval between the publication of the former text and the latter, she had written three books explicitly preoccupied with political questions.¹⁶⁵

It would be wrong to call the treatment of politics in Cavendish’s appendix to *The Grounds of Natural Philosophy* explicit—it is, after all, presented as a discussion of natural theology, concerned with questions relating to the resurrection and afterlife. But it would be equally wrong to call its political bent merely implicit; rather, it is hidden in plain sight, easy to overlook so long as its terms are not understood, astonishingly bold once they are. Before the appendix begins, in the final sentence of the treatise proper,

¹⁶⁵ Orations of Divers Sorts Accommodated to Divers Places stages imaginary dialogues on a number of political issues (1662), while *CCXI Sociable Letters* (1664) and *The life of William Cavendishe* (1667) both contain intermittent political observations.
Cavendish hints at the subject of the discussion to follow. The final chapter of the *Grounds of Natural Philosophy* is entitled “Of Different WORLDS.” It offers, like many of Cavendish’s works, a paean to variety and multiplicity. But in its concluding sentence Cavendish breaks the mood of philosophical Irenicism and leaves the reader on a note of caution. Fearful of misinterpretation, she warns that when she writes that nature has “Self-moving Parts, which is the cause there is self-joyning, uniting, and composing; self dividing, or dissolving,” readers should not think that “Matter dissolves; but, that their particular Societies dissolve.”¹⁶⁶ *Their particular Societies dissolve.* These words, the concluding phrase of the treatise, would have an unsettling resonance for British readers in 1668, still recovering from the trauma of the Civil War and what was for some the equal and opposite trauma of the subsequent restoration of the monarchy eight years earlier. Though Cavendish had stipulated previously in her text that “society” should refer to “the Frame and Form of [creatures’] Society, or Composition,” (26) the literal meaning of the sentence cannot be ignored.

There is, indeed, little sense in supposing her diction to be devoid of political meaning. Cavendish’s usage was by no means conventional; on the contrary, it would sound nearly as alien to seventeenth-century ears as it does to our own, and even a reader who recollected her redefinition of ‘society,’ would be unlikely to forget its ordinary sense. Cavendish had not used the word as a term of art in her previous treatises, but four years prior, in her *Philosophical Letters*, she had written,

> the natural motions in an Animal Creature, although they are altered in the dissolution of the animal figure, yet they may be repeated again by piecemeals in

other Creatures; like as a Commonwealth, or united body in society, if it should be dissolved and dispersed, the particulars which did constitute this Commonwealth or society, may joyn to the making of another society, 459.

The repetition of the word “society” at the close of this passage clearly presages her later adoption of the term with reference to bodies, suggesting that her use of the word is not a mere caprice of diction, but lies in a sense of the deep parallel between the effects of change and conditions of identity in social groups and in the bodies of creatures. In addition, the connotation of the word ‘dissolve’ reinforces a political reading of the word ‘society’. It was, after in all, in the aftermath of Charles’ decision to dissolve Parliament in 1640 that Cavendish’s own ‘particular society’ had dissolved.167

This, then, is the note on which *The Grounds of Natural Philosophy* concludes. Its appendix picks up from that conclusion in order to address a problem still more pertinent to Cavendish’s own historical moment: the reunification of the dissolved society. The subject of the appendix is, accordingly, neither death nor dissolution, but the resurrection of bodies and their afterlife in a materialist heaven and hell. In tandem with the change of subject, Cavendish alters her prose style. Rather than continuing to use the relatively straightforward expository prose she adopted in the body of the text, Cavendish presents a dialogue between the ‘major’ and ‘minor’ parts of her mind, each representing different opinions on a given subject. Beginning in Part I, Chapter V of the appendix, they debate “whether a Creature being Dissolved, and could Vnite again, would be the same” over the

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167 Christopher Ricks notes the convergence of the senses of the word ‘dissolution’ in Clarendon’s prose: “Clarendon gives salience to the word ‘dissolution’ in the conviction that it was the ill-judged dissolutions of Parliament that led to the dissolution of the kingdom” in “The Wit and Weight of Clarendon,” *Essays in Appreciation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 51-66, p. 54.
course of three short chapters. Among other considerations, the minor and major parts discuss whether all of the matter accumulated over the course of the individual’s life should be preserved, creating a monstrous (or at least immense) figure, or whether some matter ought to be omitted. The major part argues that if a society “should only rise with some of their Parts, as (for example) when they were in the strength of their Age, then all those Parts that had been either before, or after that time, would be unjustly dealt with” (260). How, the debate asks, may the claims of particular bits of matter be reconciled with the needs of the whole?

Viewed in context, it is apparent that Cavendish’s appendix is not a vague political gesture, but an incisive intervention in a live debate. In 1668, the use of the word “resurrection” with respect to societies retained much of the resonance it had accrued immediately following the Restoration. After returning to England, Charles II found himself the recipient of a vast number of celebratory poems, pamphlets, and sermons, many hewing close to set patterns of metaphor and diction. One of the more popular tropes involved a comparison of the restored monarchy with the resurrected body. The Oxford poetry collection *Britannia Rediviva* (1660), a volume that includes poems by both the young John Locke and the still-younger John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, suggests resurrection in its very title. Within its pages, one N.C. writes, “Advance, yee Crowns; attend your Sov’raign’s Head./Here’s now a Resurrection from the dead,” while T. Topping asks “Could nought but wounds to us recovery give,/And must the Nation dye that it might live?” Similarly, in his “Ode upon the Restoration” Abraham Cowley compares the inevitability of the Restoration with “the Resuscitation of the

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168 *Britannia Rediviva* (Oxford, 1661), unnumbered page.
Day, or *Resurrection of the Spring,*” adroitly merging two tropes of renewal in each line. Cavendish herself had linked the two terms earlier: in her play *Youths Glory, and Deaths Banquet,* the Lady Sanspareille’s mother worries that her “ruines will have no restoration, or resurrection.”

As a metaphor for the Restoration, resurrection suggested not only the revival of an older, better era, but also the divine inevitability of that revival. Many regarded the downfall of the monarchy and its eventual reinstatement as providential events, best explained with reference to God’s higher purposes, however dimly glimpsed. And the epithet ‘rebellion’ adopted by a number of Royalists, including its best-known historian, Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, likewise suggests an exceptional event, with history, at the Restoration, looping back to a starting point eighteen years prior. Indeed, by declaring all legislation enacted without the king void—all legislation since 1641—the Cavalier Parliament effectively obliterated nineteen years of aberrant political history. The tendency, then, was to see the era as interrupted by an unfortunate detour, then resumed at the point of departure, rather than as a continuous historical process encompassing a series of shifts and changes. It was after all in the interest of social order, to say nothing of the administration of Charles II, to regard it in such a manner.

Yet such an attitude was bound to aggravate certain royalists, particularly those who, like Cavendish and her husband, having sustained heavy personal and financial losses over the course of the war, expected a larger share of the benefits of the Restoration than they in the end received. They found instead that their rewards were

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170 Margaret Cavendish, *Playes written by the thrice noble, illustrious and excellent princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle* (London, 1662), p. 128.
paltry, their revenge, practically non-existent: the policy of oblivion worked steadily against the interests of the exiles. As John Miller notes, “If the Restoration settlement left a legacy of bitterness, this was not because Parliamentarians thought it had been too severe but because Royalists thought it had not been severe enough.”¹⁷¹ When Cavendish returned to England after sixteen years of exile, her mother Elizabeth Lucas, brother Charles Lucas, and brother-in-law Charles Cavendish were all dead, while her husband’s estates were considerably diminished and, in some cases, had to be repurchased. For someone in her circumstance, there was no point in pretending it was possible to return to a golden past; recognition of the changes effected by civil war was pressed upon her. Cavendish’s critique of the policy of oblivion was in part psychological: “I have observed,” she complains, “that it is more easie… to forget then to remember” (LWN, 197). But it was also practical; as she remarks, “the Act of Oblivion proved a great hinderance and obstruction to [William’s] designs, as it did no less to all the Royal Party” (LWN, 92). By the time the final act of the Clarendon Code had been instated in 1665, dissatisfaction was more general. The various misfortunes of 1666, Dryden’s annus mirabilis, the year of the Fire of London and the English defeat in the Second Dutch War, helped to congeal dissent.¹⁷² It is not surprising, then, that Cavendish’s examination of the Restoration in 1668 should prove decidedly skeptical.

By subjecting the idea of resurrection to a materialist analysis, Cavendish attempts to undermine the myth that the society that had dissolved in 1642 was

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¹⁷² Steven Pincus notes, “While English radicals had always warned of the threats from Popery and arbitrary government, by the autumn of 1666 many moderates—Presbyterian Royalists and supporters of limited monarchy—were enunciating the same concerns” in Protestantism and Patriotism: Ideologies and the Making of English Foreign Policy, 1650-1668 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 369.
effortlessly revived in 1660. For the Royalists, resurrection was a powerful image; Cavendish works and worries the metaphor with a facility reminiscent of Donne—one of the few English poets she quotes in her work—examining its implications and possibilities. Unlike her contemporaries, her discussion focuses on the difficulties associated with the process of resurrection, and its potentially imperfect character. In so doing, she proposes a view of history that avoids conservative fictions of constancy in favor of careful examinations of change. Indeed, Cavendish’s work had always focused on change and mutability, but such a focus was much further outside Royalist orthodoxy in 1668 than it had been in the 1650s. If the dazzling variety of Cavendish’s early work expressed a worldview grounded in flux, it did no more than provide a metaphysical foundation for the Royalist party line, in which the possibility of fantastic and inexplicable change was embodied by the Interregnum regime. To persist in the expression of such a metaphysics and its connected politics after the Restoration, however, was a political act of an entirely different complexion, for it suggested that to Cavendish’s eyes, at least, the Restoration underlined rather than canceled the Civil War’s revelation of the volatility of all political society.

By subjecting the resurrection to a materialist analysis, Cavendish simultaneously entered another forum of debate: that of natural philosophy. The characteristic problems with which Cavendish’s philosophy—and indeed much of early modern philosophy considered broadly—is absorbed, problems of identity, change, and the nature of matter and motion, are all problems that had been associated with discussions of the resurrection. Though Cavendish’s triangulation of politics, natural philosophy and

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173 See, for example, Poems, and Fancies, p. 39.
theology is distinctive, there is a venerable tradition of employing thought experiments concerning resurrection to discuss problems of identity and persistence through change. Her choice of subject, then, obliged—or allowed—her to engage in contemporary controversies on two distinct fronts simultaneously.

In demonstrating the importance of medieval debates about the resurrection to beliefs about personal identity, Caroline Walker Bynum has illuminated the ways in which theology and natural philosophy could intersect within them. “It is,” she writes, “in the examples more clearly than in the articulated positions that we see the essential similarity of medieval and modern discussion.”174 In both the medieval and early modern periods, debates about the nature of the resurrected body often hinged on whether it needed to be composed of the same matter as in its lifetime in order to maintain its identity. For what, if not reviving the precise bits and pieces of which it had consisted, could ensure the body that rose at the general resurrection was the same body that, years prior, had belonged to the living man or woman? There were of course difficulties—over the centuries, who could tell in what, or in whom, a corpse’s matter might end up?—but, it was maintained, God was capable of working around such impediments. This position was not, however, the only available option: in defining the soul as the form of the body, Thomas Aquinas offered an influential alternative.175 If the soul, like a sort of divine

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Social Security Number, were to serve as the body’s guarantee of identity, matter could be exchanged while preserving continuity. After all, matter was always being exchanged during the life of the individual in any case.

Debate about the resurrection in seventeenth-century England was no doubt less likely to linger on the technicalities of the revival of fetuses and fingernails, or the inevitable problems posed by cannibalism, than medieval ones. “We are what we all abhor, *anthropophagi* and cannibals, devourers not only of men, but of ourselves,” Thomas Browne wrote rather breezily in *Religio Medici*. For Browne, the popular medieval conundrum asking how both cannibals and their victims could be resurrected posed no special problem, for all human bodies inevitably decay and cycle through the food chain: we are all cannibals. Yet despite considerable stylistic differences, early modern philosophers’ and theologians’ basic positions clustered around the same poles that had structured medieval debate: the identity of a person must either be a result of the continuity of matter or identity must receive some extra-material guarantee. In response to Browne’s treatment of the question the philosopher and diplomat Kenelm Digby, an acquaintance of Cavendish’s, argued, “it is but a grosse conception to thinke that every *Atome* of the present individuall matter of a body… should at the sounding of the last *Trumpet* be raked together againe from all the corners of the earth.” On the contrary Digby believed, with Aquinas, “that which giveth the numerical individuation to a *Body*, is the substantiall forme. As long as that remaineth the same, though the matter be in a continuall fluxe and motion, yet the thing is still the same” (83).

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Hobbes and Descartes, acquaintances of Cavendish’s through her husband and his brother, the mathematician Charles Cavendish, and two of her most important antagonists in her *Philosophical Letters*, shared related perspectives on the identity of the human body through time. Descartes had argued that all material change was the result of change in place; as he wrote in his *Principles of Philosophy*, “any variation in matter or diversity in its many forms depends on motion.”¹⁷⁸ The human body, however, is not simply extended matter, but rather is joined to the soul, which acts as a principle of individuation, just as it had for Aquinas.¹⁷⁹ Though Hobbes is a thoroughgoing materialist who denies the existence of a soul independent of the body, his solution proves to be surprisingly similar. In *De corpore* II.XI, “Of Identity and Difference,” Hobbes suggests that a child and adult are “the same man.” What, in the absence of an immaterial soul, makes him the same man? Hobbes’ answer is simple: “that Man will always be the same, whose Actions and Thoughts proceed all from the same beginning of Motion, namely, that which was in his generation” (101). Hobbes suggests in *Leviathan* and elsewhere that the soul is another word for life, and life is simply a special kind of motion.¹⁸⁰ By tracing Hobbes’ series of redefinitions backward, then, one arrives again at the old Thomist solution, now given a materialist gloss that would have appalled Aquinas. Hobbes continues, concluding his sentence with a remark that, in 1655, must

have struck some of his readers as eminently topical. In parallel to the criterion of identity for humans, it is “the same City, [civitas]” he writes, “whose Acts proceed continually from the same Institution, whether the Men be the same or no” (101). Like Cavendish, the author of *Leviathan*, characteristically enough, connects the composition of the human body with the predicament of Interregnum England.

It is in Hobbes’ offhand comment that the underlying equivalence of Cavendish’s philosophical and political critique becomes clear: for philosophers, in Cavendish’s view, also have their conservative fictions. In asserting continuity, they elide change, or characterize it as inessential. In Cavendish’s philosophy, by way of contrast, change matters because *matter* matters. Whether you are discussing the revival of a body or a state, you cannot simply assert the continuity of soul or sovereign—the “Artificiall Soul” of the state—and forget the discontinuity of matter, whether that which composes the body, or the variegated human matter that makes a society.¹⁸¹ For Cavendish, the act of balancing what is ‘just’ to the matter of a body or society with what is necessary to the preservation of its form or structure is at best a difficult and at worst an impossible task. Indeed, the very fact that Cavendish proposes that the claims of matter and structure must be balanced, perhaps imperfectly, undercuts any account of political change in which the interests of the people and the state are taken as automatically and effortlessly identical. In so doing, she registers an objection to the neat narrative of temporary chaos and the resumption of order by means of which the interval of the Civil War was in effect elided.

Cavendish’s matter theory was always capable of being pressed into political service—as John Rogers and Lisa Sarasohn, among others, have demonstrated—but it

was only in the appendix to *The Grounds of Natural Philosophy* that she found a means of discussing physical and social bodies simultaneously.\(^{182}\) A year before she published *The Grounds of Natural Philosophy*, Thomas Sprat had written his *History of the Royal Society*, in which he condemned “this vicious abundance of Phrase, this trick of *Metaphors*, this volubility of *Tongue*, which makes so great a noise in the World.”\(^{183}\) He was far from alone in making such a critique; on the contrary, his predecessors included both Bacon and Hobbes. Perhaps taking such dictates to heart, as Cavendish began to focus on natural philosophy in the 1660s, moving away from poetry and fiction, she also began to write in a plainer style, making less use of figurative language and ornament. Such a style, combined with a Baconian emphasis on underlying structure as a means of explaining natural phenomena, allowed her language to have a broad extension. By framing her discussion in terms of ‘societies,’ that is, natural aggregations of matter, and composite parts rather than in terms of any given organization or society, she could position her writing at the nexus of politics, religion, and natural philosophy, constructing implicit analogies while avoiding figurative speech. The descriptive and figurative elements of a more heavily rhetorical style would, on the contrary, have been more likely to anchor her writing to particular objects, narrowing its frame of reference. This, then, is one way in which her style, responding to her contemporaries, underpins her philosophical contributions. But the appendix to *The Grounds of Natural Philosophy* does

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\(^{182}\) John Rogers has argued that Cavendish’s animist theory of matter is intended “to supply the metaphysical foundations for a social agenda for which she had almost no contemporary support—the liberation of women from the constraints of patriarchy,” in *The Matter of Revolution*, p. 181, while Lisa Sarasohn understands the politics of Cavendish’s animism in rather broader terms, as suggesting how, in analogy to material nature, “every member of a well-ordered polity naturally unified to create a strong state” in *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish*, p. 102.

not remain in the relatively well-charted terrain of debates about the resurrection. Instead, she introduces a far more exotic subject, supported by an unconventional use of the dialogue form. It is to this subject, the final one covered in the appendix, that I now turn.

Political Fantasy

The final section of the appendix, itself divided into fifteen chapters, is devoted to the contemplation of an object Cavendish terms “restoring beds.” Proffering fantasy in the guise of speculation, Cavendish suggests that there may well be certain ‘beds’ or ‘wombs’ that will restore the flesh of a decayed corpse to life and health. This is resurrection once again, but it is resurrection without the assistance of divinity, effected by the operation of nature alone. Cavendish’s speculation receives its impetus from the sadness the parts of her mind feel in thinking that “their kind Society should dissolve, and that their Parts should be dispersed” (292-3), leading ‘the major part’ to hypothesize that if there were “Beds of Production” there must also be “Beds, or Wombs, of Restoration,” for, she continues with rather questionable logic, “if Nature's actions be poised, there must be one, as well as the other” (293). The minor part of Cavendish’s mind disagrees, but the major part is nevertheless allowed to proceed, asking “Whether it might not probably be, that the Bones or Carcase of a Human Creature, were the Root of Human Life? and if so, then if all the Parts were dissolved, and none were left undissolved, but the bare Carcase; they might be restored to life” (299). Bodies, according to this account, might be revived gradually, from their bones alone—just as the “dry and withered Root of some Vegetable” (294) might be made to produce new leaves.
As in Cavendish’s prior discussion of resurrection, such speculation proves to have political stakes. But in contrast to the previous discussion, their significance does not need to be uncovered through an examination of context. No longer does Cavendish refer to the Restoration obliquely by way of resurrection; on the contrary, she now invokes the Restoration through the idea of ‘restoration’ itself. In the very center of the discussion of restoring beds, the eighth chapter of fifteen, she poses a fundamental question: *Whether Restoration was done by a General Act, or by Degrees?* (302).

“General Act” is too precise to be chance; it suggests that Cavendish was thinking of the general Act of Oblivion (1660). Her question is central to Restoration politics: how, and by whom, was the Restoration actually accomplished? Underlying this question is another one concerning historical process: are the divisions and compositions of political bodies accomplished by the decisions of the sovereign, or are they, rather, always the subject of gradual and organic change?

Cavendish’s description of the restoration of the body as the regeneration of the flesh from the ‘carcase’ or skeleton suggests an answer. Flesh can be restored, however laboriously, provided the rudiments remain; in the beds of restoration, Cavendish elaborates, “from the bones, and the sap or juyce of the bones, did all the Parts belonging to a Human Creature, spring forth, and grow up to Maturity” (301). If the mere skeleton of the state remains intact following political upheaval, it may, Cavendish’s fanciful depiction suggests, be possible to return to a healthy and flourishing body politic. But if social change involves the organic growth, death, and restoration of an organism, there can be no guarantee of its ultimate success, and one certainly cannot assume a simple or linear process. Nor can restoration of any kind occur by mere fiat, or even, Cavendish
implies, by human artifice, however ingenious. There is no point in “cruelly torturing the
Productions of Nature,” for “if there be any such things in Nature, as Restoring-Beds…
those Beds cannot possibly be Artificial, but must be Natural Beds” (295-6). To the
question of Whether Restoration was done by a General Act, or by Degrees? (302), then,
Cavendish’s answer is emphatically “by Degrees”—by degrees, that is, if at all.

Aside from such language, in which the political implications of Cavendish’s
thought are unconcealed, there are other hints dispersed throughout the passage that
Cavendish is thinking of England even as she speaks of the body. In asking where such
“restoring beds” might be found, for instance, Cavendish proposes that they must be in
the center of the world. But world’s center is not where we might expect it to be—and
where Cavendish indeed placed it in prior writing—deep underground.184 It is, rather, in
the sea, “for, the Sea is inclosed with the Airy, Fiery, and Earthy Parts of the Universe,
and therefore must be the Center” (308). Then the sea itself must have a center: and this
center proves to be an island. In Cavendish’s writing, as in that of her contemporaries, the
introduction of an island is typically a topographical shorthand for Britain.185 By situating
“restoration” on an island, then, Cavendish gestures to its national context.

In the appendix’s humorous conclusion, a dissatisfied minority of Cavendish’s
mind ascends into her glandula, “which is a kind of a Kernel, which they made use of,
instead of a Pulpit,” (310), in order to denounce the preceding discussion.186 After they

184 In Natures Pictures, the story “The Travelling Spirits” features a man who is taken to
the center of the earth, which “was but a Point in a Circle” by a witch, p. 253.
185 See, for example, “Of an Island” in Poems, and Fancies, p. 176.
186 Their situation in the glandula is a parody of Descartes’ assertion that there is a part of
the body in which the soul “exercises her functions more peculiarly than all the rest…
which is a certain very small kernell,” that is, the pineal gland, in Rene Descartes, The
Passions of the Soul (London, 1650), p. 26—the edition Cavendish would have read.
give a brief speech, the appendix concludes abruptly: “Upon which Discourse, the rest of my Thoughts were very angry, and pull'd them out of their Pulpit, the Glandula; and not only so, but put them out of their Society, believing they were a Factious Party, which, in time, might cause the Society's Dissolution” (312). This is the final sentence of Cavendish’s published corpus, and very possibly the last sentence she wrote for publication. It is a very clear evocation of the events leading up to Civil War, at least as they were afterwards understood by Hobbes and other Royalists, with belligerent radical preachers playing the key role.187 In this final sentence, then, “the Society’s Dissolution,” is linked unambiguously to English history. But it is also linked to speech, and to dialogue as a means of both effecting and representing social change. In her CCXI Sociable Letters, Cavendish praises “Natural Orators, that can speak on a Sudden upon any Subject,” for their eloquence has tremendous power: it can even, she writes, “Compose or Dissolve Commonwealths.”188

Here, again, style underwrites content. While the body of the Grounds of Natural philosophy assumes a conventional form for a work of early modern natural philosophy, that of expository prose, the appendix, in contrast, is mostly conducted in dialogue. Beginning with I.IX, “Of Several Religions”—a starting point that can hardly be coincidental in this context—Cavendish uses dialogue to present a variety of opinions, avoiding the artificial stability of her contemporaries’ work both in form and in theory.

187 Thomas Hobbes, Behemoth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Hobbes writes, “B. But how came the people to be so corrupted? And what kind of people were they that could so seduce them? A. The seducers were of divers sorts. One sort were ministers; ministers, as they called themselves, of Christ; and sometimes, in their sermons to the people, God’s ambassadors; pretending to have a right from God to govern every one his parish and their assembly the whole nation…”

Dialogue was not an unconventional form for a scientific treatise; Galileo had, after all, presented his major works in that form, and Robert Boyle had published his dialogue *The Sceptical Chymist* only seven years prior, in 1661. Cavendish, however, departs considerably from such precedents in designating her speakers as the major and minor parts of her own mind. Whether, like Christopher St. Germain and Hobbes, Cavendish had used the anonymous characters of a law student and theologian or philosopher, or like Plato and Diderot had borrowed the names of her contemporaries, she could, of course, be said to be conducting a debate between her own mental figments. That she refers to her speakers as such, however, underscores the character of the appendix as a literary dialogue by reducing it to its purest elements. In putting the appendix in the form of a dialogue within her own mind, Cavendish plays with the relationship between literary form and oral discourse, invoking a mental debate that is at once neither and both. Cavendish’s distinction of the durable skeleton of the commonwealth from its malleable and fluctuating flesh maps on to a division between literary texts and oral discourse. But it is not a simple correspondence, for Cavendish registers her awareness of the line dividing speech and writing primarily through her persistent attempts to blur it. Oral discourse, or its simulacrum, has much to offer political theory in Cavendish’s view—even political theory presented in texts. Speech is unstable, and must continually be regenerated; far from being a liability this makes speech—or its textual representation as dialogue—a suitable vehicle for representing flux.

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Scholars have noted Cavendish’s partly self-conscious situation of her writing within an oral context. Stephen Clucas writes, “Discourse’ itself, in fact, in the sense of speech, or conversation, is a neglected, but vitally important key to understanding Cavendish’s work.”

In an essay on Cavendish’s drama, James Fitzmaurice has done much to illuminate its role in private performance. “The extent and sophistication of Cavendish’s criticism of reading aloud” he writes, “suggests a household where such reading and critiques of it were commonplace.”

Cavendish very likely intended many of her works, including her plays and political orations, to be read aloud. A consideration of the role speech played in Cavendish’s work bears on the transition to dialogue in the appendix of the *Grounds of Natural Philosophy*. Both Walter Ong’s theories of the difference between oral and literate cultures and, more recently, the work of the anthropologist Jack Goody are well known.

Both scholars conclude that writing spatializes characteristics that are realized temporally in speech. In *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society*, Goody contrasts the “fixity” of writing with the process of “homeostatic adjustment” possible with a series of oral communications, which rely on the memory for preservation. In writing, “there is a consequent loss of flexibility which creates problems in a changing situation,” he writes; “on the other hand fixity is advantageous for contractual relations of many kinds” (Goody, 174). The consequence of Goody’s view is that oral and literate cultures permit different kinds of political

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relationships and communities, with the former characterized by a condition of constant and fluid change while the latter is characterized by a stasis punctuated by events.

While Goody and Ong are writing about oral as compared to literate societies, the linguist M.A.K. Halliday’s research suggests that such findings are also relevant on a local level with respect to the differences between speech patterns and texts within a literate society. Halliday characterizes the differences in grammar and vocabulary between written and spoken language as follows: “written language represents phenomena as if they were products. Spoken language represents phenomena as if they were processes… In other words: speaking and writing—each one makes the world look like itself.”

By the time Cavendish composed her *Grounds of Natural Philosophy*, she had come to an intuitive grasp of this distinction. Cavendish’s writing had always had an unusually close relationship to speech. Much of the oddness of her early writing, much of its stumbling, and its confused, contradictory character can be attributed to her use of speech as a paradigm for writing. Her earliest books, from *Poems, and Fancies* to *The Worlds Olio* to *Natures Pictures* all move unmethodically, digressing and revising earlier material, shifting terminology mid-course, or following the impulse of an idea to an unexpected conclusion. One of these works, *Natures Pictures*, simulates an oral context, for it is framed as a series of stories told in verse by an assembled company of men and women. Of course, such a device has an eminently literary pedigree, gesturing toward Chaucer and Boccaccio. Yet in Cavendish’s case, the frame is likely more than a generic convention: the frontispiece of the volume depicts an elegant company of storytellers, presided over by Margaret and William Cavendish, and from her *Sociable Letters*, we

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know that similar assemblies did in fact occur. “For Method,” she writes in the preface to *Natures Pictures*, “I do neither understand perfectly what it is; nor, if I should, have I the patience to be ty'd to its exact Rules.”

Cavendish’s works are in Halliday’s terms as much process as product. According to her own testimony, in her first few works Cavendish scarcely made use of the tool, unique to writing, of revision (the very word is a corroboration of Ong’s and Goody’s arguments about the visual and spatial emphasis of literacy). By the time she wrote *The Grounds of Natural Philosophy*, her style of composition placed a greater emphasis on fixed terminology and methodical organization. Though she reiterates her claim to spontaneous and disorganized prose in its dedication, declaring herself “too impatient to labour much for Method,” the text itself is, after all, a much revised—and methodized—version of her *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*. Yet Cavendish was also capable of mimicking the fluidity of speech in dialogue to her own ends, as the appendix discloses. It is possible the act of composing drama and orations, likely with private performance in mind in the late 1650s and first half of the 1660s had helped her to sift the unique properties of dialogue and treatise.

In the appendix’s dialogue, Cavendish makes use of some of the characteristics of speech in a playful way, confounding distinctions between speech and writing. By vacillating between modes, she maintains a degree of ambiguity. Putting an opinion in the mouth of the major, rather than minor, part of her mind enhances its authority, as does making it the last speech on a topic, which is conventionally presumed to carry the day. The one principle is a spatial one; the other is temporal. But by giving the minor part the last speech, as Cavendish does in II.IV, “Whether the Parts of one and the same Society,
could, after their Dissolution, meet and unite” and in III.VI, “Whether the Creatures in the Blessed World, do Feed, and Evacuate,” she plays the two tendencies against each other. Conclusions, in passages like these, are not simply given, but emerge in the course of a discussion—often only to dissipate again at the discussion’s close. Yet for all the ambiguity such tactics introduce into her subsidiary claims, they illustrate and reinforce her central theme. The slow, organic shifts Cavendish depicts in society are mirrored in the language in which it is discussed. The small society of Cavendish’s brain, in its divisions and compositions, its shifts and gradual embrace of new opinions, undergoes the same process as society writ large. In the appendix to *The Grounds of Natural Philosophy*, then, society, like the language in which it is discussed, is shown to be a process rather than a product.

“*TIME is not a Thing by it self,*” Cavendish wrote in the nineteenth chapter of her treatise, for it is “only the variations of Corporeal Motions” (*Grounds*, 17), or as she put it in *Natures Pictures*, “the Variation and Alteration of Nature” (550). Change, then, subtends time itself, and history, insofar as it records time’s passage, is the chronicle of the ceaseless variations of the world. Cavendish’s view of history is mirrored in her prose, which from her first books had emphasized wit, “the free gift of nature” and like nature, the subject of “a perpetual motion, with continual changes and varieties” (*Olio*, 11). By way of contrast, in her opinion the adherence of formally trained philosophers and historians to methods of analysis and composition severed their work from the flux that animated nature and history alike. When Cavendish disclaims method in the introduction to *The Grounds of Natural Philosophy*, then, it is as much a profession of pride as of modesty. She is, she claims, “too illiterate to afford” the “Beautiful
Symmetry” characteristic of more methodical writers. But symmetry, however beautiful, suggests petrifaction; it is a quality of objects arranged in space, not in time. In this respect, Cavendish had altered her views very little across her work—but with the Restoration, her world had altered around her. Cavendish’s appendix to *The Grounds of Natural Philosophy* is her response to this alteration, an alteration that, ironically, manifested its discrepancies with the past most clearly precisely in its insistence on continuity.
Chapter 7: Two Models too Many:

Why There Are Three Worlds in *The Blazing World*

When the political economist, physician, surveyor and inventor William Petty launched his newly designed double-bottomed boat in 1664, a vessel aptly named *The Experiment*, Charles II was among the onlookers who gathered to watch.¹⁹⁴ The ship, a kind of catamaran, was the third iteration of an ambitious design intended to sail more swiftly than any of the king’s existing fleet. Among the many aspects of the ship that aroused the interest of Petty’s contemporaries, it was its ostentatiously experimental character that attracted most comment. Petty had designed the ship from a model based on his research, and it was itself a kind of model—a fact that seemed noteworthy to his contemporaries. One anonymous author referred to *The Experiment*’s predecessor, *The Invention II*, as “this famous Model / Sprung from a mathematick Nodelle”.¹⁹⁵ John Aubrey, meanwhile, found room between the many incidents in his account of Petty’s extraordinarily eventful life to mention that he “gave a modell [of the double-bottomed boat] to the Royall Societie made with his owne hands,” perhaps following his own suggestion that the ideal academy should contain “Modells of all great and noble Engines.”¹⁹⁶ But like other extraordinary vessels before and after, *The Experiment* proved unlucky: in 1665, it was sunk by a storm in the Bay of Biscay.

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¹⁹⁵ qtd. in McCormick, 152.
Petty’s experiment was not reproduced; in the wake of his shipwreck, neither the
court nor the Royal Society were willing to pay for a fourth vessel. No doubt the
skepticism of his peers contributed to their reluctance: from the earliest stages of *The
Experiment*’s development, many of his contemporaries had doubted the possibility of
making a ship using mathematical calculations and forms derived from models. While
much of their mistrust was very likely the product of a reflexive intellectual
conservatism, it nevertheless contains a central insight about the limitations of modeling.
Models have no environments: insofar as an interaction with an environment is
represented, that environment itself becomes part of the model. In order to preserve their
simplicity and focus, models must be walled off from reality with its contingency and its
infinite quantities of mostly irrelevant information. The storm in the Bay of Biscay, an
eample of the environment at its most brutal and vigorous, showed the terrible
contingency of reality, a contingency it was neither possible nor desirable for the model
to take into account.

In 1666, a year after *The Experiment* sunk off the coast of France, Margaret
Cavendish published *The Blazing World*. Cavendish’s book begins, like so many other
utopian works, with a tempest at sea. Behind this merely fortuitous connection, there is a
deeper and stranger link between *The Blazing World* and Petty’s nautical disaster: one
purpose of Cavendish’s text, I will argue, lies in the exploration of the paradoxical
relationship between models and their elided environments—which may, themselves,
contain further models. To some of Cavendish’s contemporaries, at least one of these
worlds, that is, The Blazing World itself, was a kind model. In a volume of

William Petty, *The advice of W.P. to Mr. Samuel Hartlib for the advancement of some
particular parts of learning* (London, 1647), p. 25.
commemoratory poems published after Cavendish’s death, Knightly Chetwood asked, “did you take this flight to Heav’n to see / How it with Thy fair Model did agree?”

Were the entirety of Cavendish’s volume devoted to the description of The Blazing World, Chetwood’s description of her text as a paradisiacal model would be persuasive. But *The Blazing World*—as opposed to *The Blazing World*—does not contain one model or one world, but rather three. The purpose of this chapter will be to suggest an answer to the question posed by this problem: that is, why are there three worlds in *The Blazing World*?

In the preceding chapter, I suggested that Cavendish was skeptical about the continuity of the British state through the Civil War. Though in the last analysis she accedes that the state to which she returned in 1660 is, in fact, the same one she had left, she insists that it has preserved its identity only narrowly. In this chapter, I will show how an analysis of political change *tout court* underlies Cavendish’s assessment of the British case. *The Blazing World* is a logical place to begin, in part because no work has played so large a role in the recent revival of Cavendish’s reputation. Its ingenious blend of disparate genres and discourses, including romance, natural philosophy, and political thought, has made it an inviting object of study. Such work has contributed to our understanding of Cavendish’s view of imagination, science, and gender, among other subjects. But though critics commonly refer to *The Blazing World* as a utopian text, its relationship to its own genre and its generic predecessors has not been explored in a sustained way. In part, this is due to the fact that Cavendish’s political philosophy as a whole has received comparatively little attention, except in the context of her treatment

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197 *Letters and poems in honour of Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle*, p. 170.
other subjects such as gender, natural philosophy, and exile.\textsuperscript{198} Because of this omission, the political bent of \textit{The Blazing World} is not well understood, and critical discussion has reached no consensus on even its basic stances. As I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter, it is treated by turns as rigidly authoritarian or remarkably egalitarian, reflexively conservative or deeply progressive.

Such paradoxical reactions are, as is often the case, derived from paradoxes intrinsic to Cavendish’s writing. Cavendish did not, however, wander blindly into paradox in \textit{The Blazing World}: on the contrary, paradox is an intellectual stance she carefully cultivates to expose the limits of the utopian tradition. Such limits lie precisely at the borders of the imaginary state. Unlike most early modern utopian writers, she is deeply interested in the relation of states to foreign powers. Utopianism, by way of contrast, does not tend to lead to a sophisticated analysis of international relations. This is because most utopian writers imagine the state as constrained first of all and only by its own immutable institutions. Even empire, that notoriously sprawling and porous political form, is something of which utopian authors frequently dream but can never quite apply. Neither adaptation to the exigencies of imperialism, nor reliance on an empire as a source of material support is allowed within its framework. The latter in particular is debarred, for to imagine a nation made powerful by an influx of gold or goods, as Spain’s power was increased by the profitable colonization of the New World, would be tantamount to rigging the game. Insofar as utopianism invokes imperialism at all, it is only as a sort of

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{198} Deborah Boyle’s article “Fame, Virtue and Government: Margaret Cavendish on Ethics and Politics” in \textit{Journal of the History of Ideas}, vol. 67, no. 2 (2006), pp. 251-90, forms an important exception. Boyle argues very plausibly that posthumous fame is the overarching political motivation in Cavendish’s view. Boyle’s argument focuses on how Cavendish thinks politics ought to function, but in so doing, it omits her critique, which forms at least as extensive a portion of her thought.}
side effect of the very self-sufficiency of native institutions, for the excellent social arrangements of the utopia lead to a prosperity that, in turn, results in a high birth rate. Colonialism is one way of siphoning off a growing population—war, infant exposure, and restrictive marriage laws are all alternative solutions found within the philosophical tradition—effectively placing a state’s human excess outside the text’s imaginative margin. James Harrington’s *Oceana* is an excellent example of this tendency, for within that text, imperialism remains a mere outlet for utopianism, which is essentially a closed system. If Harrington suspects that acquiring an empire will de- or re-form the structure of his polity in any serious way, he never shares his suspicion with his readers.

Utopian writers’ failure to consider external politics in any serious way is bound up with the literary form they used—that is, models. Models presuppose the existence of firm boundaries between the model and the world at large; as a kind of social modeling, then, utopianism tends to imagine bounded states, whose success or failure is a product of purely internal conditions. In the instances in which utopian states represent other countries, those too become subsumed within the model, usually as a kind of liminal zone in which the residual problems of the utopia can be quietly solved, or as a mere device for demonstrating the superiority of the utopian state to its neighbors. To suggest that other states become part of the model insofar as they are represented within it is of course a tautology, and may therefore seem entirely unproblematic. After all, the reader might object, people can and do make models of international relations all the time—there are, in fact, large swathes of the modern university devoted to precisely that enterprise. But in the early models of society developed by the authors of Renaissance utopias, the convenience of making the borders of the model coincide with the borders of the state
exerted an immense and undeniable pressure. Both in utopian texts and outside of them, social models were conceived in spatial terms, a fact to which the maps frequently appended to utopian texts bears witness.

The use of fictions allows utopian writers to bracket the areas they wish to consider even more thoroughly than other kinds of models are able to do; while a model ship may, perhaps, encounter real water, the use of fiction draws an impermeable tissue around the model commonwealth. There are, of course, considerable advantages to this approach: in the seventeenth century, it allowed writers to imagine the unity of society, including the relationships between politics, law, learning, trade and labor without relying on organic hierarchies. Through utopian models, it became possible to imagine a functionally rather than hierarchically organized society that is nevertheless fully integrated. The trade off for this kind of unity is insularity—utopias, as has often been observed, tend to be islands, or in the case of Campanella’s *Civitas Solis* and Gott’s *Nova Solyma*, walled cities. In virtue of their very form, then, they tend to lack sophisticated accounts of the relationship between societies. While Machiavelli, Hugo Grotius, and neo-Taciteans including Justus Lipsius were developing rich theories of international policy that allowed for chaotic, contingent and as often as not, aggressive relations between states, utopian thinkers, though in many cases keen followers of such thought, could not incorporate it into their social models.

By way of contrast, *The Blazing World* represents an attempt to do just that: to marry utopian form and international politics. The two are not, however, happily yoked; the resulting fiction turns in on itself to offer a critique of modeling through a critique of the idea that either politics or the attempt to imagine the political can be fully self-
contained. The reader finds an account of difference, variety, and change embedded within *The Blazing World*—in Cavendish’s philosophy, variety in time. In the appendix to *The Grounds of Natural Philosophy*, Cavendish makes an unequivocal statement in favor of the necessity of acknowledging political change; *The Blazing World* presents a similar conclusion, but begins to delineate some of the forces animating such change. And in both texts, literary form plays a significant role in making such a case—of necessity, for as Cavendish is well aware, in models form and content are never truly discrete.

Like the subject of the last chapter, *The Blazing World* is an appendix of a sort. It appeared attached to Cavendish’s *Observations on Experimental Philosophy* (1666), a work of fancy designed to “recreate the mind” and “to delight the reader with variety” (6) after the difficult labor of the preceding treatise. In this respect, it follows the lead of Bacon, who had published his *New Atlantis* as an appendix to his natural historical treatise, *Sylva sylvarum*. This appropriation of a Baconian device has pointed polemical stakes: *Observations on Experimental Philosophy* is dedicated to critiquing the Royal Society’s experimental method, for which they claimed a Baconian lineage. By appending a scientific utopia to a work of natural philosophy, Cavendish implies that the Baconian mantle may be broader than her opponents are willing to concede.

Like Bacon’s *New Atlantis*, *The Blazing World* begins with a sea voyage: its opening pages describe a course of events touched off by a merchant who kidnaps the young lady he loves, carrying her onto his ship. When a terrible storm forces the ship off course towards the North Pole, he and his men freeze to death, but the young lady is
preserved “by the light of her beauty.” The ship sails over the North Pole and onto another world, “for it is impossible to round this world’s globe from Pole to Pole… because the Poles of the other world, joining to the Poles of this, do not allow any further passage” (8). This new world proves to be the Blazing World of the volume’s title, whose emperor the young lady marries and is accordingly given administrative carte blanche. She uses her power to organize the Blazing World’s inhabitants, who are for the most part talking animals, into a scientific academy. The academy proves to be a failure—much fun is had at the expense of the Royal Society in the process—and the Empress decides, with the help of spirits, to write a Cabbala. They offer her the use of a scribe, and suggest the services of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, who is fetched in spiritual form from her own world. It is only at this point that the reader learns that the world from which the young lady began is not meant to be an approximation of our own, and that the young lady, though herself an avatar of Cavendish, is to be introduced to her author. After much philosophical speculation, the souls of the two women leave the Blazing World for Cavendish’s own, where they arrive at her estate at Welbeck and are entertained by William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle. In due course the Empress pleads Newcastle’s cause to a personification of Fortune—to no effect—before returning to her own world, concluding the first book of The Blazing World.

200 Cavendish’s depiction of herself as scribe to her heroine may be an allusion to Christine de Pizan’s use of the same conceit in Christine’s Vision. On the possibility of Cavendish’s exposure to the works of Pizan, see Cristina Malcolmson, “Christine de Pizan’s City of Ladies in Early Modern England” in Debating Gender in Early Modern England, 1500-1700, ed. Cristina Malcolmson and Mihoko Suzuki (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 15-36.
Even within this book, it is clear that unity and its failures provide a central theme of *The Blazing World*. Beginning with its very premise, *The Blazing World* introduces the problem of multiplicity, for its plot is predicated on the partitioning of Cavendish’s one world into an infinitely extended chain of worlds, strung together at their poles. The relationship between unity and multiplicity, often expressed in terms of the relationship between the whole and its parts, finds its way into the descriptive language of *The Blazing World*. The inhabitants’ customs and technology, their language and even their landscape, have a way of resolving into simple wholes. When the young lady arrives, she is taken by ship to Paradise, the seat of the Emperor. Approaching by sea,

the Lady at first could perceive nothing but high rocks, which seemed to touch the skies; and although they appeared not of an equal height, yet they seemed to be all of one piece, without partitions; but at last drawing near, she perceived a cleft, which was a part of those rocks, out of which she spied coming forth a great number of boats, which afar off showed like a company of ants, marching one after another; the boats appeared like the holes or partitions in a honey-comb and when joined together, stood as close, 12-13.

Imagery emphasizing unity is everywhere in this passage: the first glimpse of Paradise shows a mass of rock whose height makes it seem “to touch the skies,” suggesting, aptly enough, that the island of Paradise is a bridge between heaven and earth. The rock appears to be “of one piece, without partitions,” a pleonasm that serves to emphasize the island’s extraordinarily cohesive construction. The initial impression Cavendish gives the reader of the tight cohesion characteristic of Paradise is underlined by her description of the inhabitants’ boats. These are designed to link together—a formation that, as the
reader has already learnt, the inhabitants use in storms or in battle, “and being thus united, no wind nor waves were able to separate them” (12).

As soon as Cavendish begins to discuss the inhabitants’ governance and mores, however, physical unity starts to seem like a mere proxy or reflection of the world’s overarching political and linguistic unity:

there was but one language in all that world, nor no more than one Emperor, to whom they all submitted with the greatest duty and obedience, which made them live in a continued peace and happiness, not acquainted with other foreign wars or home-bred insurrections, 13.

In addition, the Blazing World has religious homogeneity, for as its inhabitants inform the empress, “there was no more than one religion in all that world, nor no diversity of opinions in that same religion” (19). Such unity is not merely elegant, but predictably enough has real political ends. Cavendish attributes the “peace and happiness” of the inhabitants to the Blazing World’s obedience to a single government, which their religious and linguistic accord bolsters.

There is, of course, nothing surprising about Cavendish’s heavy stress on unity as a political value; indeed, it would be easy to characterize such a stance as the product of Royalism fortified by the terrifying experience of multiplicity that was the English Civil War. In this respect, Cavendish may seem merely to follow in a tradition beginning with Jean Bodin, who held that sovereignty is indivisible, an idea that proved central to the writings of Thomas Hobbes and Robert Filmer, among others. 201 The Blazing World

has been read as a political fiction of precisely this kind: in Frédérique Aït-Touati’s lucid and thoughtful account, “Cavendish’s project is to reestablish a world founded on harmony and equilibrium and constructed around a single, central and luminous figure of absolute authority.” Yet it is possible to read this text, as John Rogers has done influentially, in precisely the opposite way. In Rogers’ view, *The Blazing World* is, rather, “structured as an unabashedly liberal system, a system of disseminated sovereignty devised quite specifically to counter the authoritarian organization of the leading theories of her day” (Rogers, 197). Does *The Blazing World* depict a political landscape in which sovereignty is impressively concentrated or strikingly diffuse? Is it a deeply and conventionally conservative work, or a radically progressive one? The answer, of course, is both: Cavendish’s particular brand of disappointed conservatism is equally committed to disclosing the desirability and impossibility of a truly conservative ideal. At times this attitude makes her writing seem suffused with despair, as in her biography of her husband, when she records how “Fortune hath ever been such an inveterate enemy to him” (*Life of William Cavendish*, 117); at others, though, her attitude seems to be one of cheerful, even delighted, resignation, as in *The Blazing World* itself.

This attitude is on display from the first pages of the book. Look again at the passage above, describing the heroine’s entry into Paradise. At first glance, it appears to be a paean to unity, embodied both on land and sea in the architecture of the landscape and its strange vessels. Yet on the apparently monotonous surface of the rock, fissures

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203 Cavendish’s displeasure at her age seems keenest when discussing her and her husband’s loss of estate: “Nor is it possible for him to repair all the ruines of the Estate that is left him, in so short a time, they being so great, and his losses so considerable, that I cannot without grief and trouble remember them,” p. 93.
soon appear—“at last drawing near, she perceived a cleft”—while the boats, temporarily linked, are always capable of separating again, a theme that will become more heavily stressed as the narrative proceeds. The joints of Cavendish’s imaginary kingdom may be impeccably sutured, but that does not lead it to blur into an undifferentiated unity: the seams always show.

And the seams are meant to show—for the very universe Cavendish depicts is structured by such conjoined and conjoining borders, the places where worlds are linked to one another. *The Blazing World* offers readers a view of three worlds, with infinite others in distant prospect. Why did Cavendish choose to present her utopia in the form of so distinctive a cosmology? One answer lies in her eagerness to make use of a new and exciting set of imaginative possibilities. In 1666, Leibniz had not yet formulated his theory of possible worlds, but others, inspired by classical authors, were developing related ideas. Henry More, Cavendish’s acquaintance, is one likely influence on her text. In his *Democritus Platonissans, or, An Essay Upon the Infinity of Worlds out of Platonick Principles* (1646), More used Spenserian stanzas to describe infinite worlds, “for matter infinite needs infinite worlds must give.”204 His worlds are not only the product of infinite matter—or infinite space—however, but also of infinite time:

…long ago there Earths have been

Peopled with men and beasts before this Earth,

And after this shall others be again

And other beasts and other humane birth… 76.1-4

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The same logic that implies there are infinite worlds existing concurrently also implies that there are infinite worlds existing successively; in each case, the argument is grounded in the omnipotence of the divine creative faculty. Variety in time and space are linked in More’s *Democritus Platonissans*, then, by their common cause.

Similarly, in *The Blazing World* multiplicity—variety in space—is tied to change—variety in time. In describing the government of the Blazing World, Cavendish connects its stability with its social, religious and political monoculture. Political and religious variation, in Cavendish’s account, seems to spur change, which quickly takes on its own momentum. This theme is apparent not only in Cavendish’s description of the Blazing World’s extraordinary homogeneity, but is depicted inversely in the larger narrative. It is in this respect that the distinct but connected worlds of the text’s universe become thematically crucial. As residents of each world make their way to the others, they bring change in their wake: the Empress reorganizes the Blazing World, instituting a new academy and building new temples, before using the resources of the Blazing World to reorder her own world. The Duchess of Newcastle, fetched from our world, provides advice on the management of both others. Cavendish’s narrative does not suggest an endpoint to such changes; on the contrary, it implies that so long as distinct worlds are governed by their own social and political systems, and so long as it is possible for inhabitants of one world to visit another, there can be no assurance of perfect stability.

II. International Relations

Book II of *The Blazing World*, in which the Empress intervenes in the political system of her native planet, is about precisely such interactions. The second book is considerably shorter than the first. Whereas the first book finds space for dialogues on
natural philosophy, metaphysics, religion, government and fortune, the second book focuses on a strange interplanetary military campaign. Though it has received far less attention than the first book of *The Blazing World*, it is in this book that we find the most stringent test of the possibility of establishing unified and unchanging governments. At the beginning of this book, the Empress receives news that “the world she came from, was embroiled in a great war, and that most parts or nations thereof made war against that kingdom, which was her native country” (90). Cavendish’s Empress determines, with her husband’s encouragement and the Duchess of Newcastle’s advice, to martial the resources of the Blazing World to save her native country. Cavendish’s political thought is often—and correctly—read through its engagement with the idea of civil war. But the opening of Book II makes it clear that civil war is not the problem in which she is interested here; it is, rather, the vicissitudes of international relations that inform this book’s relation to politics.

Cavendish would have had a sense of the contours of contemporary thought on international relations through her husband and their circle of acquaintances both at home and abroad. William Cavendish was a dedicated amateur political theorist; though his plays frequently address political questions, his chief work in this vein was a treatise offering advice in the reason of state tradition addressed to Charles II.\(^{205}\) Margaret Cavendish was familiar with this work, having appended excerpts from it, in some cases suitably modified, to her *Life of William Newcastle* as samples of his political wisdom. Despite her protestations to the contrary, it is likely that this casual, conversational

knowledge was supplemented by her own reading; her *Orations of Divers Sorts* contains evidence of an informed engagement with some of the key motifs in contemporary political philosophy and international theory.\(^{206}\)

The Renaissance discussions of international relations in which both Cavendish and her husband participated form an important background to the second book of *The Blazing World*. It is a rich and intensely varied background, from which Cavendish draws in a manner that is at once nuanced and *ad hoc*. Her object, here as elsewhere in her work, is to reveal the inadequacy of fixed formulae or models to establish immutable rules for any given field of inquiry, but her complex means of doing so typically involves pitting discourses against one another. If in *The Blazing World*, she uses theories of international relations to thwart the more isolationist models of government characteristic of English political theory, she also refuses to adhere to any single method of analyzing international relations. The result is an effortlessly composite and fanciful narrative.

*The Blazing World*, then, is at once an imaginative work—a work of fancy, as Cavendish describes it—that participates in romance conventions and a thought experiment designed to play provocatively with some of the more pressing problems posed by Renaissance warfare and imperialism. In Cavendish’s work in particular, there is no conflict between the two modes. In her view, imagination’s role in the composition of texts is scarcely confined to those genres that we tend to think of as literary; on the contrary, it works closely with reason to guide and shape most texts, from metaphysics to natural philosophy. Just as Cavendish is an acute theorist of the role of imagination in her

\(^{206}\) For example, see “An Oration persuading to the Breach of Peace with their Neighbour-Nation,” pp. 133-4; “An Oration concerning Shipping,” pp. 137-8; “An Oration from a Besieged City” p. 142, in *Orations of Divers Sorts* in *Political Writings*. 
own work, she is an equally perceptive observer of its role in the work of others: her polemical writing is littered with observations about the way in which an author’s perspective and formal choices dictate conclusions. Cavendish’s persistent interest in the way that the imaginative or actual position of observers influences their observations provides a warrant for examining *The Blazing World*’s politics as, in part, a consequence of its strange imaginative perspective. The Empress is in an unusual position for a conquering power: although she chooses to identify her interests with that of her native country, she is fundamentally an outsider, arriving from an independent world. Imagining the problems of international relations from this perspective, one that combines interest in the welfare of an individual nation with a more abstract and distanced set of goals, allows Cavendish to draw on competing traditions of political thought.

Two of the major schools of international thought in the Renaissance differ in terms of political perspective—a term I take here in an entirely literal sense. The reason of state tradition, encompassing figures as diverse as Machiavelli, Justus Lipsius, Henri, duc de Rohan, and Giovanni Botero on the continent and Francis Bacon and Marchamont Nedham in England, among others, had a number of varied, and in some cases even sharply opposed strands. But its practitioners’ emphasis on prudence typically entailed focusing on the view from within a given state, with its set of interests and strengths. The vantage point could, of course, shift rapidly; understanding the means toward political action entails understanding the frequently incompatible ends of distinct political actors. In order to understand a rival’s or enemy’s actions, one had to make an imaginative leap.

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placing oneself in his situation. Cultivating such a skill was at the heart of reason of state theory; Machiavelli, for example, reserves special praise for the captain who can “foretell the policies of the enemy,” with the strong implication that his book will offer readers a tutorial in the practice.\textsuperscript{208}

By way of contrast, the natural law tradition took a different approach to the problems of international relations. For thinkers like Francisco Suárez, Francisco de Vitoria, Alberico Gentili and Hugo Grotius, among others, a given range of permissible actions held for all political actors. Viewing international relations from the perspective of a single state might occasionally prove necessary, but it would not bring a writer any nearer to a political truth. In their abstract and universalizing analysis of political interactions, they took—or purported to take—a view from above, using either \textit{a priori} reasoning to discern the absolute dictates of natural law, or \textit{a posteriori} reasoning from the actions of the majority of states over the course of history. For Grotius, the law of nature transcends all other codes and authorities. No positive law can abridge it; indeed, it “is so unalterable, that God himself cannot change it.”\textsuperscript{209} The imaginative and empirical resources natural law discourse drew upon were, therefore, very different from those of the reason of state tradition, with its emphasis on the role of prudence in a highly contingent world.

The perspective Cavendish adopts in \textit{The Blazing World} is, like reason of state philosophy, focused on the prospects of a single nation. Yet because Cavendish’s heroine is removed from the political sphere in which she intervenes by the distance of a world,

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\textsuperscript{209} Hugo Grotius, \textit{The Rights of War and Peace}, Chapter 1, section 10.
\end{flushright}
the vantage point from which she observes political action also resembles the abstract and
distanced view of natural law philosophy. The importance of the Empress’ remove from
the warfare in which she intervenes is emphasized from the beginning of the episode. The
first impediment she faces is the practical problem of crossing the divide between
worlds—a difficult task even without an army in tow. The Blazing World proves to be no
easier to leave than it was to enter: “as their Blazing World had but one Emperor, one
government, one religion, and one language, so there was but one passage into that
world” (91), and a narrow one, at that. Cavendish describes the astonishing parallelism
between the social and physical structure of the Blazing World as if it follows simply—as
indeed it does. If the universe of the text depicts a series of conjoined models, there is no
reason to draw a distinction between the representation of physical and intellectual
structure within the worlds. The comparative invulnerability of the Blazing World’s
social monoculture, as compared to the complex plurality of the Empress’ native world,
severely limits the extent to which it is subject to change from outside, and such a limit is
naturally reflected in the physical construction of the world. But it limits such
possibilities without, as the narrative suggests, foreclosing them.

After some deliberation, the Empress manages to reenter her world with
submarines. Though she embarked in order to save her native country from attack, the
social and political reorganization she directs amounts to a much more radical program
than the reader could have anticipated. Cavendish’s Empress uses the marvelous
resources of the Blazing World, including ‘fire stones’ and obedient bird- and fish-men,
in order to awe and intimidate the countries of her world into becoming tributaries of her
native kingdom. This process proves, perhaps unsurprisingly, to rely on casual brutality:
the Empress “force[s] all the rest of that world to submit to that same nation” (98) chiefly by burning their boats and cities: “she resolved to send her bird- and worm-men thither, with order to begin first their smaller towns, and set them on fire (for she was loath to make more spoil than she was forced to do) and if they remained still obstinate in their resolutions, to destroy also their greater cities” (99). “Thus,” Cavendish informs the reader, “the Empress did not only save her native country, but made it the absolute monarchy of the world” (100). The reader, here, might seek to mitigate the moral dubiousness of the narrative’s violence by reflecting that the Empress’ establishment of a universal monarchy, though achieved by questionable means, qualifies as a benefit within the terms set by Cavendish’s politics. The route to utopia, as William Morris would reflect in the nineteenth century, may well lead through battlefields.

Yet Cavendish herself bars so ethically convenient an interpretation: the reorganization of the world is plainly not utopian. This becomes apparent in a scene that playfully reenacts Bacon’s description of the reception of the Gospels in Bensalem, in which the Empress appears to the subjects of her native kingdom on the water.²¹⁰ At the time of this address, the rest of the world has been subdued: the king of her native land, EFSI—shorthand for England, France, Scotland and Ireland—is the world’s undisputed leader. For all that, the Empress’s speech reveals that she is by no means confident that the new geopolitical order is sustainable. In addressing the monarchs of the world, she

²¹⁰ As in Bacon’s New Atlantis, a number of ships observe a radiant spectacle by night on the water. The Empress, Cavendish writes, “desired that they should be pleased to come into the open seas with their ships, and then her own ships should meet them… the Empress appeared upon the face of the water in her imperial robes; in some part of her hair she had placed some of the star-stone, near her face, which added such a lustre and glory to it, that it cased a great admiration in all that were present” The Blazing World, p. 100.
informs them that EFSI’s king “is now become the head-monarch of the world; which power, though you may envy, yet you can no ways hinder him; for all those that endeavor to resist his power, shall only get loss for their labour, and no victory for their profit” (102). Speaking privately to the king, the Empress has already assured him “of the readiness of her assistance whenever he required it” (101). Such comments suggest that the new world order is startlingly unstable, propped up by the Empress’ willingness to intervene whenever necessary with extravagant and theatrical displays of force. Victory has not created a political equilibrium, but merely a temporary cessation of hostilities.

The shadows that gather around the edges of this otherwise bright—even dazzling—presentation of empire follow, perhaps, from Cavendish’s historical situation. Across the sixteenth and the better part of the seventeenth centuries in England, imperial aggression was more likely to be felt as a threat from without than as a national prospect. By making her avatar an empress rather than a queen, Cavendish adds a hint of dangerous glamour to her central character, as well as a sliver of ironic distance. The course of the Empress’ adventures may, perhaps, even seem like a bizarre enactment of one of the early modern world’s most famous slogans of imperial aspiration. Philip II’s motto, non sufficit orbis, the world is not enough, a slogan that became notorious in England for its “immeasurable ambition” toward the end of the sixteenth century, and continued to serve as an epitome of Spanish pride well into the seventeenth.211 For Cavendish’s empress too, bearing sway in one world is not enough.

211 George Puttenham writes of the Spanish motto, “Non sufficit orbis, meaning, as it is to be conceaued, that one whole world could not content him. This immeasurable ambition of the Spaniards, if her Maiestie by Gods prouidence, had not with her forces, prouidently stayed and retranched, no man knoweth what inconuenience might in time haue insued to
Needless to say, the Empress is on the whole a far more benign imperial presence than English readers tended to associate with Spain. England had its own imperial traditions—so, for that matter, did most of Europe, in one of its many patrimonies from Rome. Even leaving aside the brief but intense blaze of imperial enthusiasm during the Interregnum, the English could look back to the sort of Protestant, liberationist empire sixteen century British writers, including Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, and George Buchanan, conceived as a possible response to the threat of encroaching Catholic power. Yet despite fleeting resemblances, this is not the imperial traditional in which Cavendish is writing either. Protestantism, to begin with, scarcely seems to be the point—the religion the Empress establishes is, rather, a sort of high-church deism. Nor, as we have seen, does she ever create a stable world order of the sort that theorists of Protestant empire like Sidney and his associates envisioned. The most pressing problems of empire are raised without being resolved. But this is no flaw: Cavendish is not interested in resolving the ambiguities of her narrative, for to do so would be tantamount to proposing solutions to the problem of change or delineating fixed trajectories of change. To do so would be to abandon the very premise of *The Blazing World*, which is that such problems are insolvable by their very nature. It is an etiology, a description of the ineradicable causes of change in an infinitely mutable world. The Empress’ solution to the problem of

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all the Princes and common wealthes in Christendome” in *The arte of English poesie* (London, 1589), 87. The phrase *non sufficit orbis* is from Juvenal.


213 Cavendish bolsters a theologically minimalist conception of God, emphasizing his unity and omnipotence, with a splendid, artfully-designed cathedral adorned with luminous gemstones.
international politics is, as we have seen, no solution at all; the point, rather, is the complex way in which it fails.

III. International and Internal Politics

The second book of *The Blazing World* provides a testament to the failures of even the most radical international policies. But the problems posed by international relations are not merely those that come from without, that is, from the multiplicity of enemies nations must expect in a diverse world. They are also problems that come from within: in Cavendish’s account, the internal structure of a society is molded by the possibility of conquest. The Blazing World, which does not have to maintain an army, is largely invulnerable to such threats. But Cavendish’s *Orations of Divers Sorts* shows that she is well aware of the role they play in the ordinary course of politics. Her repeated emphasis on taxation, for example, suggests one way in which the expense of international relations could lead to warfare. In an oration exhorting citizens to pay taxes, an anonymous speaker notes, “much money must be employed to have intelligence from foreign parts and nations, for fear of surprisals, and perchaunce great sums of money are required to corrupt enemies to betray the rest, and so to prevent danger, if not ruin” (264).

International politics is an expensive matter, requiring steep taxation. Elsewhere one of Cavendish’s orators remarks that taxation “will so much discontent your subjects in general as will cause them to murmur and make them apt to rebel” (190). The implication is clear enough: the exigencies of international relations often shape internal politics. Nor is taxation the only avenue by which this may occur. Cavendish also dwells on that stock theme, the danger of a standing army. “Disband most of the soldiers,” one oration advises, “since we perceive no visible enemy; for we have more reason to fear our own
soldiers than any other power, by reason they are become so proud and insolent with their victories” (273).

The mere existence of international politics—which, in Cavendish’s philosophy, as in most of her contemporaries’, is largely tantamount to warfare—leads to a world characterized by internal, as well as external conflict. This insight is characteristic of a basic problem that reverberates through her writing: difference breeds dissent. It is a problem basic to all social life; hence Cavendish remarks in her Sociable Letters, in my Opinion, Societies should be apart by themselves, like several Commonwealths, Courtiers should only Converse with Courtiers, or Courtly Persons, and Country Gentlemen with Country Gentlemen, Citizens with Citizens, Farmers with Farmers, and I think they do so, at least, are most pleased with the Conversation of their own likeness: Also Statesmen should only Converse with Statesmen, Learned men with Learned men, Wits with Wits... indeed, Societies should be Chosen, and not Mix’d, and every Society should Move in its own Sphere… 153

The statement is radical in the extremity of its recommendation, as well as in the connection it draws between society writ little and Society writ large. But the solution it offers to social conflict is an illusory one. As Cavendish realizes, the world’s “several Commonwealths” may be geographically distinct, but they hardly remain “apart by themselves.” War, as Walter Raleigh noted, is “the ordinary theme and argument of
history”—history, then, is in large part the story of societies failing to remain separate, violently mingling and merging as they expand and contract.  

What hope is there, then, for a truly stable social order? In a world characterized by political distinctions between nations, the answer is none at all. Difference reproduces itself at every level; even apparently innocuous divisions between countries lead to unstable societies, which are themselves characterized by conflict and dissent—and just as the process can work downward, so it can work upward. The smallest distinctions ramify endlessly, creating a world in which, as Eve Keller writes, “the notion of coherence itself, the idea of consistency and regularity, seems for Cavendish to be a construct.” Cavendish’s relentless focus in Book I of The Blazing World on parts and wholes, on the fierce opposition between variety and unity, reemerges as the central theme of Book II. In fact, this emphasis is discernible from the first sentence of Cavendish’s account of the war: “the world she came from, was embroiled in a great war, and that most parts or nations thereof made war against that kingdom, which was her native country” (90). The language of ‘parts’ serves essentially the same function here as it did in the first book: a world composed of parts, a divided and diverse world, is an essentially unstable one. Long before the Empress ever returns to her native world, the source of its predicament is apparent in its very partitions.

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215 On the socially creative potential of distinctions, see Niklas Luhmann, who writes, “a system is a difference” and “a system only needs one single operation, one single type of operation, to reproduce the difference between system and environment” in “System as Difference,” in *Organization*, vol. 13, no. 1 (2006), pp. 37-57, p. 48. Eve Keller, “Producing Petty Gods: Margaret Cavendish's Critique of Experimental Science.”
The continuity Cavendish sees between the social chaos of human interaction and the large-scale chaos of international interaction may well be a widely-shared, if infrequently articulated view in the period. Richard Tuck has argued that the reason of state and natural law traditions are surprisingly similar with respect to how little accord they attributed toward natural human behavior. “What we have to understand from the beginning is that human society, for these humanist and post-humanist writers, was a much thinner idea than it was for the Aristotelians: it completely lacked the dimensions of friendship and self-sacrifice which a true political community possessed.”\textsuperscript{216} Tuck argues that this thin version of human sociability is ultimately derived from Renaissance theories of international relations, which tended to set the threshold for justifiable warfare low, including preemptive warfare. Anything could happen in the wilderness that surrounded states—and anything often did.

Such an account of human behavior in the absence of a sovereign authority could put particular pressure on the distinction between being inside a state and being outside of it. For Hobbes and Grotius, there is a bright line between internal and external politics, dividing natural interaction from social relations within the safer confines of a state. Cavendish, on the contrary, tended to see the difference between the world that existed before or around states and the one existing within them as a matter of shading: what the chaos that could break out at any moment within states so different from the chaos surrounding them? She could, furthermore, easily imagine herself outside of a state; she had, like the other residents of England, lived without one during the early years of the

\textsuperscript{216} Tuck, \textit{The Rights of War and Peace}. 
English Civil War, before emigrating abroad. Even after the Restoration, she occasionally doubted whether, as a woman, she could be said to be in a state at all:

we are not tied, nor bound to State or Crown; we are free, not Sworn to Allegiance, nor do we take the Oath of Supremacy; we are not made Citizens of the Commonwealth, we hold no Offices, nor bear we any Authority therein; we are accounted neither Useful in Peace, nor Serviceable in War; and if we be not Citizens in the Commonwealth, I know no reason we should be Subjects to the Commonwealth: and the truth is, we are no Subjects, unless it be to our Husbands, and not alwayes to them…

It seemed so often to be merely a matter of perspective.

In erasing the sharp divisions between internal and external, Cavendish’s philosophy is more closely akin to the reason of state theory of Machiavelli—or for, that matter, of her husband William. But if Cavendish agrees with Machiavelli’s belief that politics is the ceaseless competition of power both within a state and outside it, she differs sharply from them in her attitude toward this conviction. She is unequivocal in her claim that the political ideal is the tranquil and unified monarchy, in which both obedience and prosperity are universal: “Government is for Safety, Peace, and Profit,” she writes in The Worlds Olio, while in Natures Pictures, the desiderata are “Plenty, Conveniency, Peace, and Tranquillity.” Cavendish’s ideal form of the government is connected to its effects: in her view monarchy, as Deborah Boyle notes, “is the form which best promotes stability” (Boyle, 282). Yet the governments she knew, whether monarchies or republics, could hardly have been said to attain these goals.

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217 Cavendish, Sociable Letters, p. 25.
218 The Worlds Olio, p. 133; Nature’s Pictures, p. 287.
Is not only is not identical to *ought* in Cavendish’s philosophy, then, but the two are in fact unbridgeably distant. This distance provides one key to the question of why Cavendish turned to the utopian form. Utopianism notoriously flirts with impossibility. Its actual embrace of fiction, as I have argued, is typically far more complex than that with which it is credited: aside from a few satirical works—Joseph Hall’s *Mundus alter et idem*, for example, or Richard Brome’s *Antipodes*—virtually no seventeenth-century utopian writings were quite so blithely fantastical as their critics liked to pretend. Yet by invoking the form’s accepted reputation of impossibility, she could imply that other social models were equally unfeasible. Like utopias, the relatively insular political theory of philosophers such as Hobbes or the Civil War thinker Philip Hunton, exclusively preoccupied with questions of internal politics, bracketed a single, model state.

Cavendish made the discovery, nearly fifty years in advance of Swift and several centuries before the modern era’s embrace of dystopian literature, that the best way to oppose the momentum of visions of social organization was by writing a utopia. Dystopian literature is rarely simply the opposite or antagonist of utopianism; its proper target tends, rather, to be all highly-planned forms of social organization. In attacking planned social organization by way of the apparently narrower target of utopian thought, dystopian authors reveal that utopianism is, in their view, merely at the apex of the various forms of social modeling and engineering. And if utopian works are at the top of the pyramid, for many authors that pyramid is remarkably level—the only difference between a self-declared utopia and a social plan, for such writers, is the extent to which its intentions are declared. *The Blazing World* is not a dystopian work, but like dystopias, it aims at satirizing and undermining contemporary models of social organization.
In Cavendish’s view, one of the chief defects of such models is their naive belief that it is possible to treat states in isolation, their evasion, that is, of the problems posed by international relations. Cavendish’s anti-utopian utopia corrects this omission with intentionally troubling consequences. Its interlinked worlds are intended to defy any method that treats states as solitary entities, discrete and self-contained, including the utopian method. Worlds—states—touch, and in so doing, both change others and are themselves changed. The Blazing World, then, has two intertwined purposes. Insofar as it is a representation of international relations, it presents a view of European politics that encompasses both external and civil warfare, focusing on England’s view of both. But insofar as Cavendish is critiquing rival theories of political and social life, The Blazing World presents a meta-theory of political methodology. Cavendish’s interlinked models are designed to reveal the limitation of theories of government that treat single states in isolation, and by way of that revelation, the limitation of modeling as a method of political analysis.

Modeling, as I noted above, does not require the analysis of single states. But because models do not and cannot have environments, early models of political society tended to make the borders of a state and the borders of the model at least approximately coincident. By making the limits of her models worlds rather than mere islands, Cavendish emphasizes this aspect of modeling—worlds, after all, are not ordinarily thought of as possessing environments. But what happens, Cavendish asks, when worlds come into contact; that is, when apparently discrete models meet? The Blazing World demonstrates that change inevitably results as the models interact, coercing and contaminating one another. Those who, like James Harrington, claimed to have found the
pattern for an immortal commonwealth did so, in Cavendish’s view, by relying on impossibly naïve preconditions, for the very form of their writing barred them from considering what happens when one Oceana encounters another. They denied the contingency that comes from the interaction of distinct and autonomous entities. Harrington, it is true, left a little room for contingency within the machinery of his model, which reiterates the ideal machinery of the spheres in miniature. Just as the spheres permit the occasional comet without ever allowing it interrupt their course, so Oceana permits the occasional exceptional act, so long as it occurs within or between the state’s fixed trajectories.

For Cavendish, such weak contingency is simply not good enough. It does an injustice to the dynamism of history, driven madly onward by the difference engine of international relations. Had Cavendish merely represented such dynamism as a kind of unstructured fluidity, as she very nearly does in her early work, her writing would be of considerably less interest. But because her mature work critiques fixed models of politics, as well as of science, nature, and psychology, she tends to adopt her contemporaries’ forms provisionally, only to discard them ultimately. Her habitual mode or writing fluctuates between savage censure and high parody, as the single volume containing the *Observations on Experimental Philosophy* and *The Blazing World* amply illustrates.

Cavendish’s peculiar brand of critique accords badly with the Enlightenment view of knowledge many of her contemporaries were already beginning to embrace. The future of political theory would belong, by and large, to men like William Petty, with whom I began this chapter. Petty’s most influential models were not, after all, the models of his double-bottomed boats: they were rather the models associated with “political
arithmetic,” the precursor to economic theory that he developed over the course of his philosophical career.\(^{219}\) The ambitious venture that first brought Petty fame, his survey of Ireland, foreshadows his latter uses of population statistics; like such studies, it counts and calculates, mapping out a population in the service of making a new kind of model of a political territory. In November of 1674, less than a year after Margaret Cavendish’s death, William Petty discussed his solutions to problems of scale and proportion associated with model ships, among other things, before the Royal Society. A month later, he printed a version of this speech. In his dedication of the volume, he connected his mathematical formulae and models to politics, writing “There is Political Arithmetric, and a Geometrical Justice to be yet further cultivated in the World.”\(^{220}\) Ironically enough, this dedication, which expressed precisely the kind of intellectual confidence Cavendish deplored, was addressed to her husband, the recently widowed William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle.

It is perhaps no coincidence that the revival of Margaret Cavendish’s reputation has coincided with a post-Enlightenment critique of models such as Petty’s. It is, to be sure, also the product of a surge of interest in the writing of Early Modern women. But as scholarly interest in her work continues to grow, it becomes more apparent that her ironic and at times bitter resistance to the frames and formulae of her contemporaries makes her

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\(^{219}\) See also William Petty, *Political Arithmetick* (London, 1682); *A Treatise of Taxes and Contributions* (London, 1662). In this text, Petty discusses, among other things, the “false opinion… that the greatness and glory of a Prince lyeth rather in the extent of his Territory, then in the number, art, and industry of his people, well united and governed” (5-6). Petty’s focus on population rather than land leads him to emphasize the importance of the internal structure and management of states as opposed to international relations or imperial expansion.

writing unusually attractive to contemporary readers. Long before twentieth-century counter-Enlightenment thinkers or their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century predecessors declared that “when men… once begin to talk of power, happiness, misery, pain, pleasure, motives, objects of desire, as they talk of lines and numbers, there is no end to the contradictions and absurdities into which they fall,” Margaret Cavendish offered a prescient satire on the limitations of her contemporaries’ efforts to make politics into a science.  

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