

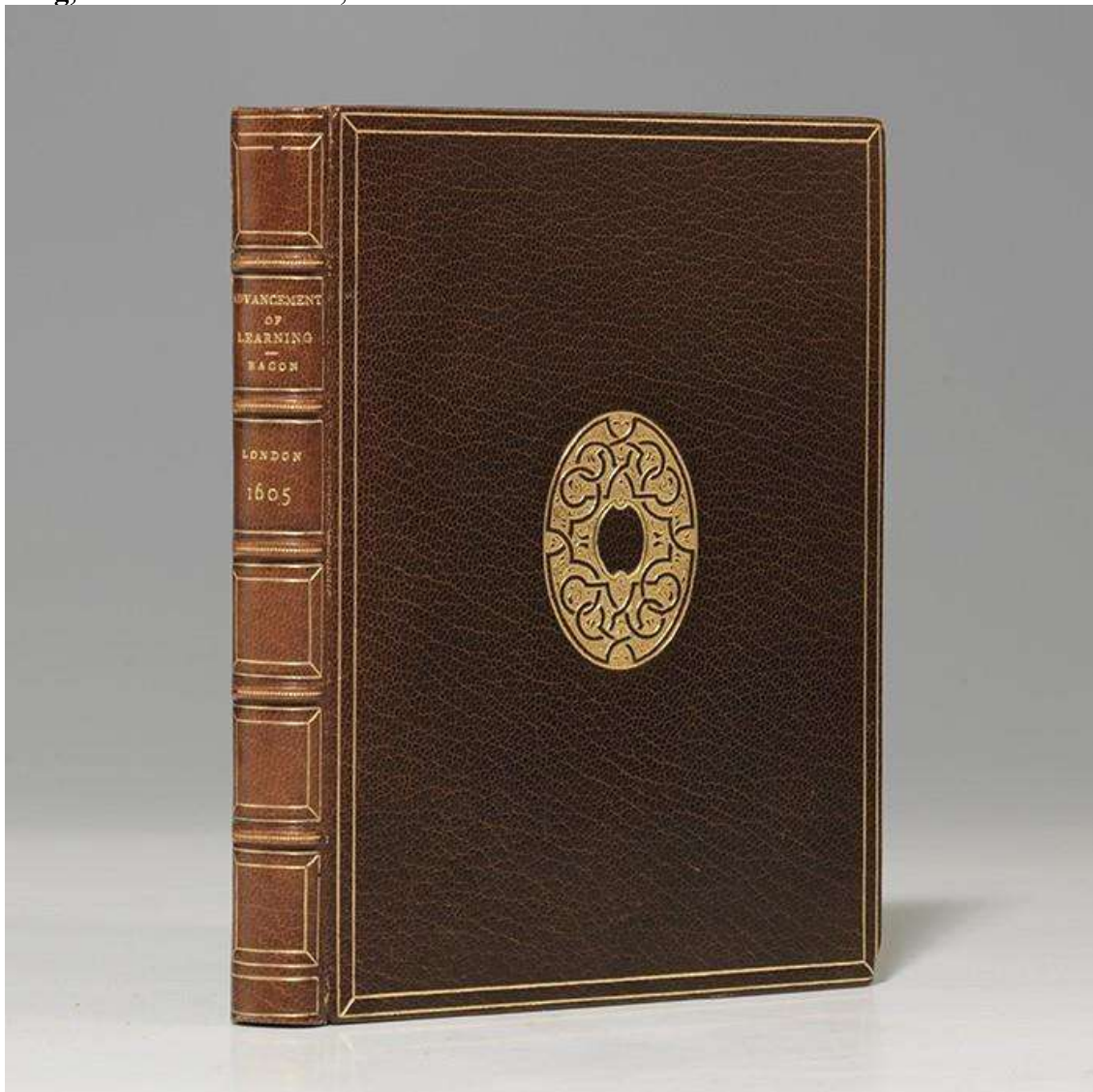
# "Of the Proficiency and Advancement of Learning, Divine and Human" (1605) by Francis Bacon

Curated by Stephen A Batman

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## Summary of this Particular Rare First Edition

Francis Bacon, The Two Books of Francis Bacon. Of the proficiency and advancement of Learning, divine and humane, 1605



THE  
Tvvoo Bookes of  
FRANCIS BACON.

Of the proficiencie and aduance-  
ment of Learning, diuine and  
humane.

*To the King.*

AT LONDON,  
Printed for *Henrie Tomes*, and  
are to be sould at his shop at Graies Inne  
*Gate in Holborne. 1605.*

I

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THE FIRST BOOKE  
of FRANCIS BACON; of the  
*proficiency and advancement of*  
*Learning diuine, and humane.*

*To the King.*



Here were vnder the Lawe  
(excellent King) both dayly  
Sacrifices, and free will Of-  
ferings ; The one procee-  
ding vpon ordinarie obser-  
uance ; The other vppon a  
deuout cheerefulnesse : In  
like manner there belon-  
geth to Kings from their Seruants, both Tribute of  
dutie, and presents of affection : In the former of  
these, I hope I shal not liue to be wanting, according  
to my most humble dutie, and the good pleasure of  
your Maiesties employments: for the later, I thought  
it more respectiue to make choyce of some oblati-  
on, which might rather referre to the proprietie  
and excellencie of your indiuiduall person, than to  
the businesse of your Crowne and State.

Wherefore representing your Maiestie many  
times vnto my mind, and beholding you not with

A 2

the

**"A TOTAL RECONSTRUCTION OF SCIENCES, ARTS AND ALL HUMAN KNOWLEDGE": FIRST EDITION OF FRANCIS BACON'S *ADVANCEMENT OF LEARNING*, 1605, A BEAUTIFUL COPY IN FULL MOROCCO BY RIVIERE & SON**

"Francis Bacon conceived a massive plan for the reorganization of scientific method and gave purposeful thought to the relation of science to public and social life. His pronouncement 'I have taken all knowledge to be my province' is the motto of his work...

[Bacon's] ambitious proposal was: 'a total reconstruction of sciences, arts and all human knowledge... to extend the power and dominion of the human race... over the universe' The plan for this was to be set out in six parts," only two of which were ever completed (PMM 119).

*The Advancement of Learning*, in which Bacon conducts a comprehensive survey of human knowledge and learning, represents the first part. It was followed 15 years later by *Instauratio Magna* [*Novum Organum*], in which he details his new scientific method. *The Advancement of Learning* is the only work Bacon ever published in English. "Intrinsically an important book" (Pforzheimer 36).

An expanded and latinized version [*De augmentis scientiarum*] appeared in 1623. Without final blank and two added leaves of errata (present in "very few copies" only). Occasional mispagination as issued without loss of text. ESTC S100507. Norman 97. Horblit 8a. STC 1164. Rosenbach 27:30. Very faint occasional early marginalia.

A fine copy of this landmark work.

BACON, Francis. *The Two Books of Francis Bacon. Of the proficience and advancement of Learning, divine and humane*. London: Henrie Tomes, 1605. Small quarto, late 19th-century full brown crushed Morocco gilt, raised bands, all edges gilt. Housed in a custom clamshell box.

## Introduction

"Of the Proficience and Advancement of Learning, Divine and Human" (commonly known as "The Advancement of Learning") is a seminal work published in 1605 by Francis Bacon, one of the most influential figures of the English Renaissance. The book represents Bacon's ambitious attempt to reform the state of knowledge and learning during a period of significant intellectual transition. Written during the early years of King James I's reign, the work is addressed to the monarch as a plea for royal patronage of scientific research and educational reform.

Bacon's primary motivation for writing this treatise was his deep dissatisfaction with the prevailing methods of acquiring knowledge, which he found outdated and ineffective. He sought to introduce and popularize a new scientific method based on observation, skepticism, and testability, challenging the dominant Aristotelian approach that had prevailed in European universities for centuries<sup>1</sup>. The cultural climate surrounding the book's publication was marked by the expansion of scientific and social knowledge, as well as significant religious and political turmoil in England<sup>1</sup>. The Protestant Reformation had reshaped religious life, while the Renaissance had sparked renewed interest in classical learning, albeit in ways that Bacon found problematic.



Economically and politically, England was transitioning from the Elizabethan era to the Jacobean period, with King James I (to whom the book is dedicated) representing the first Catholic monarch of England in this new phase<sup>1</sup>. Bacon, who was actively pursuing political advancement at court, strategically used this work to showcase his intellectual prowess while advocating for royal support of his vision for the advancement of learning. The book is structured in two parts: the first defends the dignity and value of learning against its critics, while the second provides a comprehensive survey of the state of knowledge and outlines areas needing further development<sup>4</sup>.

## The Author

Francis Bacon was born in London on January 22, 1561, to Sir Nicolas Bacon, who served as Lord Keeper of the Seal, and Lady Anne Cooke Bacon, daughter of Sir Anthony Cooke, a humanist who had tutored King Edward VI<sup>3</sup>. This privileged background provided Bacon with connections to the royal court from an early age, as his mother was also the sister-in-law of Lord Burghley, a powerful figure in Elizabethan politics.

Bacon's education began at Trinity College, Cambridge, which he attended from April 1573 (at the age of 12) until December 1575<sup>3</sup>. Finding the traditional Aristotelian curriculum stale and outdated, he developed an early preference for Renaissance humanism over scholasticism. After Cambridge, he enrolled at Gray's Inn to study law, but soon left to work under Sir Amyas Paulet, the British ambassador to France<sup>3</sup>. When his father died unexpectedly, Bacon returned to England with limited financial resources and began seeking government positions.

His political career spanned nearly four decades, during which he was extremely active in Parliament, law, and the royal court. In 1584, he became a member for Cornwall in the House of Commons, and his political rise continued steadily thereafter<sup>3</sup>. In 1603, he was knighted upon James I's ascension to the throne, and subsequently held positions including Solicitor General (1607), Attorney General (1613), and eventually Lord Chancellor (1618), one of the highest political offices in England<sup>3</sup>.

However, Bacon's political career ended in disgrace in 1621 when he was accused of accepting bribes, impeached by Parliament, and briefly imprisoned in the Tower of London<sup>3</sup>. Though some sources suggest he may have been set up by political enemies, the scandal effectively ended his public service. After his fall from grace, Bacon retired to St. Alban's, where he focused on his philosophical and scientific writings until his death in 1626<sup>3</sup>.

Throughout his life, Bacon maintained a passionate commitment to reforming the methods of acquiring knowledge. He strove to create a new outline for the sciences focused on empirical methods and experimentation rather than relying on ancient authorities. His approach emphasized gathering data, analyzing it prudently, and performing experiments to observe nature's truths in an organized way<sup>3</sup>. Bacon believed that when approached this way, science could become a tool for the betterment of humankind, a vision that would profoundly influence the development of modern scientific thought.

## Why this is a Canonical Book

"The Advancement of Learning" must be included in the canon of books containing major ideas that reflect elements of America's politics, governance, economics, and culture for several compelling reasons. First and foremost, Bacon's emphasis on empirical observation and experimentation as the foundation of knowledge directly influenced the scientific method that would become central to American intellectual and educational traditions. This commitment to evidence-based inquiry rather than reliance on authority or tradition aligns perfectly with America's emphasis on pragmatism and innovation.

Second, Bacon's vision of knowledge as a tool for improving the human condition—what he called "the relief of man's estate"[6](#)—resonates deeply with the American ideal of progress. His belief that scientific advancement should serve practical human needs rather than merely satisfying intellectual curiosity helped shape America's characteristically utilitarian approach to education and research. The American emphasis on applied science and technology can be traced in part to Bacon's influence.

Third, Bacon's critique of the "idols" or false notions that hinder the progress of knowledge[6](#) parallels America's foundational skepticism toward received wisdom and established authority. His insistence on questioning prevailing assumptions and testing ideas against experience rather than accepting them on faith aligns with the critical thinking that underpins American democratic discourse and scientific advancement.

Fourth, Bacon's plea for royal patronage of scientific research foreshadows the American tradition of public support for education and research. From the land-grant colleges established by the Morrill Act to modern federal funding of scientific research, America has embraced Bacon's vision of knowledge advancement as a public good worthy of institutional support.

Finally, Bacon's organization of knowledge into a systematic framework, with clear distinctions between different fields of study, influenced the structure of American higher education and research institutions. His comprehensive survey of learning and identification of areas needing development provided a model for the organized pursuit of knowledge that characterizes American universities and research establishments.

In these ways, "The Advancement of Learning" contains ideas that have profoundly shaped American intellectual traditions, educational institutions, and approaches to knowledge and progress, making it an essential text in understanding the philosophical foundations of American culture and governance.

## Five Timeless Quotes

1. "Knowledge is power." (Ipsa Scientia Potestas Est)[5](#)

This iconic phrase, attributed to Bacon, encapsulates his revolutionary understanding of the relationship between knowledge and human capability. While the exact wording does not appear

in "The Advancement of Learning," it perfectly summarizes Bacon's core belief that empirical knowledge gives humans the ability to control and manipulate nature for their benefit. In our current information age, this quote has taken on new dimensions as data and expertise translate directly into economic, political, and social advantage. The phrase reminds us that in contemporary society, access to education and information remains a crucial determinant of individual opportunity and national prosperity, making Bacon's insight as relevant today as it was four centuries ago.

2. "Learning is the beginning of wealth. Learning is the beginning of health. Learning is the beginning of spirituality. Searching and learning is where the miracle process all begins."[5](#)

This quote reflects Bacon's holistic view of learning as the foundation for all aspects of human flourishing. In our current context, where lifelong learning has become essential for career adaptation in a rapidly changing economy, Bacon's words remind us that education is not merely vocational but transformative across all dimensions of life. The quote speaks to contemporary concerns about the purpose of education, suggesting that learning should be valued not just for its economic utility but for its capacity to enhance our physical well-being, spiritual depth, and overall quality of life.

3. "Learning without thought is labor lost; thought without learning is perilous."[5](#)

This quote, which Bacon draws from Confucian wisdom, highlights the essential relationship between acquiring information and critically reflecting upon it. In our current era of information overload and "fake news," this insight is particularly valuable. It reminds us that mere accumulation of facts without critical analysis leads nowhere, while theorizing without empirical grounding can lead to dangerous misconceptions. This balanced approach to knowledge—combining empirical observation with thoughtful analysis—remains the cornerstone of effective education and sound decision-making in both personal and public spheres.

4. "The first distemper of learning is when men study words and not matter."[7](#)

Bacon's critique of "delicate learning" that focuses solely on words and style over substance speaks directly to contemporary concerns about superficial discourse in public life. In an age of sound bites, tweets, and rhetorical polarization, Bacon's warning against privileging eloquence over evidence remains profoundly relevant. This quote challenges us to look beyond persuasive packaging to evaluate the substantive content of arguments, a critical skill for civic participation in a democratic society increasingly influenced by sophisticated media messaging.

5. "Learning is the eye of the mind."[5](#)

This elegant metaphor captures Bacon's understanding of how education transforms our perception and comprehension of the world. Just as our eyes allow us to navigate physical reality, learning enables us to perceive patterns, meanings, and possibilities that would otherwise remain invisible. In our visually-oriented digital culture, this quote reminds us that true seeing requires more than passive reception of images—it demands the active engagement and

interpretive frameworks that education provides. The metaphor speaks to education's role in developing not just what we know but how we see, a process that remains fundamental to informed citizenship and personal growth.

## Five Major Ideas

### 1. The Scientific Method

At the heart of "The Advancement of Learning" is Bacon's revolutionary approach to acquiring knowledge through systematic observation and experimentation. Rejecting the prevailing Aristotelian method of deducing truth from first principles, Bacon advocates for an inductive approach that begins with empirical observation of particular instances and builds toward general principles<sup>1</sup>. This empirical method emphasizes "gathering data, prudently analyzing it and performing experiments to observe nature's truths in an organized way"<sup>3</sup>. Bacon believed this approach would provide "completely new and different insights" rather than merely recycling existing knowledge<sup>2</sup>. His vision of science as a collaborative, cumulative enterprise aimed at practical human benefit rather than abstract speculation laid the groundwork for modern scientific research methodologies and institutions.

### 2. The Classification of Knowledge

Bacon presents a comprehensive reorganization of human learning into three main divisions based on the faculties of memory, imagination, and reason, corresponding to history, poetry, and philosophy<sup>8</sup>. This systematic classification represents one of the first modern attempts to map the entire landscape of human knowledge and identify gaps requiring further exploration. Bacon's organizational framework influenced subsequent encyclopedic projects and the structure of academic disciplines. His approach reflects a belief that progress in knowledge requires not just new discoveries but a coherent understanding of how different fields relate to each other. This systematic organization of knowledge remains influential in academic institutions and research methodologies today.

### 3. The Critique of Intellectual Errors

Bacon identifies various "distempers" or errors that hinder the advancement of learning, including what he calls "fantastical learning," "contentious learning," and "delicate learning"<sup>7</sup>. These represent pseudoscience, scholastic quibbling, and excessive focus on style over substance, respectively. More profoundly, in his later work *Novum Organum*, he develops this into the doctrine of the "Idols" or false notions that distort human understanding: Idols of the Tribe (inherent human cognitive limitations), Idols of the Cave (individual biases), Idols of the Marketplace (confusions arising from language), and Idols of the Theatre (received systems of thought)<sup>6</sup>. This systematic analysis of cognitive biases and methodological errors represents an early contribution to critical thinking and the psychology of reasoning that remains relevant to contemporary discussions of cognitive science and epistemology.



#### **4. The Practical Purpose of Knowledge**

Throughout "The Advancement of Learning," Bacon emphasizes that the ultimate goal of knowledge is not abstract contemplation but practical utility—"the glory of the Creator and the relief of man's estate"<sup>6</sup>. This utilitarian vision of learning contrasts with both the scholastic focus on theological questions and the humanist emphasis on eloquence and moral wisdom. Bacon envisions science as providing power over nature that can be harnessed to improve human conditions through technological innovation. This pragmatic orientation toward knowledge as a tool for material progress rather than merely spiritual or intellectual enrichment represents a pivotal shift in Western intellectual history that continues to influence educational priorities and research funding decisions.

#### **5. The Relationship Between Divine and Human Knowledge**

As indicated in the full title of the work, Bacon carefully navigates the relationship between religious faith and scientific inquiry. He distinguishes between "pure knowledge arising from the study of nature that leads to growth and Grace" and "proud knowledge" of worldly values that leads to atheism<sup>1</sup>. This distinction allows him to advocate for scientific advancement while avoiding charges of impiety. Bacon argues that the proper study of nature actually reinforces religious faith, as "the further he studies Nature the nearer he comes to God"<sup>4</sup>. This reconciliation of scientific inquiry with religious devotion provided an important framework for the development of modern science in a Christian cultural context and continues to inform discussions about the relationship between science and faith.

### **Three Major Controversies**

#### **1. The Challenge to Aristotelian Authority**

Bacon's critique of Aristotle and scholasticism represented a radical break with established intellectual traditions. He criticized the "contentious learning" of scholastics who engaged in "detailed studies and unenlightening quibbling about Aristotelian philosophy and theology"<sup>7</sup>. While Bacon acknowledged Aristotle's contributions in providing specific axioms for scientific disciplines, he found "lacking in the Greek philosopher's work... a master principle or general theory of science"<sup>9</sup>. This challenge to Aristotelian authority was controversial in university settings where Aristotle's works formed the foundation of the curriculum. Critics saw Bacon's empirical approach as undermining the coherent philosophical framework that had organized Western thought for centuries. The controversy reflected deeper tensions between traditional authority and emerging empiricism that would characterize intellectual debates throughout the scientific revolution.

#### **2. The Political Implications of Learning**

Bacon had to defend learning against charges that it undermined political stability and military virtue. As he notes, some politicians objected "that Learning softens mens natures, and makes men unfit for the exercise of Armes. That it perverts mens dispositions for Matter of Government"<sup>8</sup>. These criticisms reflected concerns that intellectual pursuits might produce

citizens more inclined to question authority than to serve the state obediently. Bacon counters these objections by arguing that "Learning makes not men unapt for Armes" and "Learning enables men for Civil affaires"[8](#). This controversy about the political implications of education continues to resonate in debates about the proper aims of public education in a democratic society—whether it should primarily produce compliant citizens and workers or critical thinkers capable of challenging existing institutions.

### **3. The Moral Ambiguity of Scientific Power**

While Bacon enthusiastically promoted the practical benefits of scientific knowledge, his vision raised troubling questions about the potential misuse of such power. His famous statement that "knowledge is power" contains an ambiguity that critics have seized upon—power can be used for good or ill. As one commentator notes, "Bacon saw no reason to view the quasi-magical powers of experimental scientists with any anxiety," believing that "the outcome of increasing our ability to manipulate and control our environment will be to improve the lot of everyone"[6](#). However, this optimistic view has been challenged by subsequent developments, as "the Baconian project of controlling the environment runs the risk of rendering it uninhabitable"[6](#). This controversy about the moral implications of scientific and technological power has only intensified in the nuclear age and the era of climate change, making Bacon's confident embrace of knowledge-as-power a continuing subject of critical reassessment.

## **In Closing**

Civic-minded Americans should read "The Advancement of Learning" because it provides crucial insights into the intellectual foundations of modern democratic society and scientific progress. Bacon's emphasis on empirical observation and experimentation rather than deference to authority resonates deeply with America's democratic ethos, which values evidence-based reasoning over appeals to tradition or hierarchy. His vision of knowledge as a tool for improving the human condition aligns with America's pragmatic approach to education and research as means of solving practical problems and enhancing quality of life.

Furthermore, Bacon's systematic identification of cognitive biases and methodological errors that impede clear thinking offers valuable tools for citizens navigating today's complex information environment. His warnings against "fantastical learning" (pseudoscience), "contentious learning" (unproductive argumentation), and "delicate learning" (style over substance)[7](#) remain remarkably relevant in an era of misinformation and polarized discourse. These analytical frameworks can help citizens evaluate claims more critically and participate more effectively in democratic deliberation.

Bacon's organization of knowledge into a comprehensive system also provides a model for understanding how different fields of inquiry relate to each other, countering the fragmentation and specialization that often characterizes contemporary discourse. This holistic vision of learning can help citizens integrate insights from various disciplines when addressing complex social and political challenges.

Perhaps most importantly, Bacon's optimistic belief in human capacity for progress through collective, cumulative inquiry offers an inspiring alternative to both cynical pessimism and uncritical acceptance of the status quo. His vision of knowledge advancement as a collaborative enterprise for public benefit rather than private advantage speaks to America's highest aspirations as a society committed to the common good.

By engaging with "The Advancement of Learning," civic-minded Americans can gain not only historical perspective on the development of scientific and educational institutions but also conceptual tools for addressing contemporary challenges. Bacon's work reminds us that the advancement of learning is not merely an academic concern but a civic imperative—essential to the flourishing of both individuals and the democratic society they collectively constitute.

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