New Atlantis – Francis Bacon Essay, Research Paper

Francis Bacon was the founder of the modern scientific method. Thefocus on the new scientific method is on orderly experimentation. For Bacon,experiments that produce results are important. Bacon pointed out the needfor clear and accurate thinking, showing that any mastery of the world inwhich man lives was dependent upon careful understanding. This understanding is based solely onthe facts of this world and not as the ancients held it in ancient philosophy. This new modernscience provides the foundation for modern political science. Bacon’s political science completely separated religion and philosophy. For Bacon, nothing exists in the universe exceptindividual bodies. Although he did not offer a complete theory of the natureof the universe, he pointed the way that science, as a new civil religion,might take in developing such a theory.Bacon divided theology into the natural and the revealed. Naturaltheology is the knowledge of God which we can get from the study of nature andthe creatures of God. Convincing proof is given of the existence of God butnothing more. Anything else must come from revealed theology. Science andphilosophy have felt the need to justify themselves to laymen. The beliefthat nature is something to be vexed and tortured to the compliance of manwill not satisfy man nor laymen. Natural science finds its proper method whenthe ’scientist’ puts Nature to the question, tortures her by experiment andwrings from her answers to his questions. The House of Solomon is directlyrelated to these thoughts. “It is dedicated to the study of Works and theCreatures of God” (Bacon, 436). Wonder at religious questions was natural,but, permitted free reign, would destroy science by absorbing the minds andconcerns of men. The singular advantage of Christianity is its irrationality.The divine soul was a matter for religion to handle. The irrational soul wasopen to study and understanding by man using the methods of science.The society of the NEW ATLANTIS is a scientific society. It isdominated by scientists and guided by science. Science conquers chance anddetermines change thus creating a regime permanently pleasant. Bensalem,meaning “perfect son” in Hebrew, has shunned the misfortunes of time, vice anddecay. Bensalem seems to combine the blessedness of Jerusalem and thepleasures and conveniences of Babylon. In Bacon’s NEW ATLANTIS, the need forman to be driven does not exist. Scarcity is eliminated thereby eliminatingthe need for money. “But thus, you see, we maintain a trade, not for gold,silver or jewels… nor for any other commodity of matter, but only for God’sfirst creature which was light” (Bacon, 437). This shows a devotion to truthrather than victory and it emphasizes the Christian piety to which thescientist is disposed by virtue of his science. As man observes and bringsthe fruits of his observations together, he discover likeness’ anddifferences among events and objects in the universe. In this way he willestablish laws among happenings upon which he can base all subsequent action.Bacon realized that sometimes religious ideas and the discoveries of natureand careful observations were contradictory but he argued that society mustbelieve both.The NEW ATLANTIS begins with the description of a ship lost at sea.The crew “lift up their hearts and voices to God above, who showeth hiswonders in the deep, beseeching him of his mercy” (Bacon, 419). Upon spottingland and discerning natives the sailors praise God. When a boarding partycomes to their ship to deliver messages, none of the natives speak. Rather,the messages are delivered written on scrolls of parchment. The parchment is”signed with a stamp of cherubins’ wings… and by them a cross” (Bacon, 420).To the sailors, the cross was “a great rejoicing, and as it were a certainpresage of good” (Bacon, 420). After the natives leave and return to theship, they stop and ask “Are ye Christians?” (Bacon, 421). When the sailorsconfirm that they are, they are taken to the island of Bensalem. On Bensalem,the sailors are ‘confined’ to their resting place and are attended toaccording to their needs. The sailors reply, “God surely is manifested inthis land” (Bacon, 424). Upon talking to the governor the next day, he

exclaims “Ye knit my heart to you by asking this question, [the hope thatthey might meet heaven], in the first place, for it showeth that you firstseek the kingdom of heaven” (Bacon, 427). This is not true. The sailors havealready sought food, shelter and care of the sick. In other words, they hadsought self preservation. As Bacon put it, “they had already prepared fordeath” (Bacon, 419).After the Feast of the Family, the father of Salomon’s House has aconference with the travelers. The father says, “I will give the greatestjewel that I have. For I will impart to thee… a relation of the true stateof Salomon’s House” (Bacon, 447). The greatest ‘jewel’ is not one of monetaryvalue but of knowledge. The father continues, “The End of our Foundation isthe Knowledge of Causes and secret motion of things, and the enlarging of thebounds of Human Empire, to the affecting of all things possible” (bacon, 447).This is the turning point from religion to science and science becoming thenew civil religion. From this comes the ability of human rule over Nature.It was stated before that they were interested in “God’s first creature whichwas light” (Bacon, 437). This contradicts an earlier statement that “It isdedicated to the study of Works and Creatures of God” (Bacon, 436). Theformer obviously an indication to science as the latter is to religion.Bacon stresses the importance of ‘light’ as the precursor of ‘fruit’to suggest that they are following the divine instrument. There are twoimages used by Bacon to refer to knowledge, torture and light. The torturerefers to the violent twisting of nature’s secrets. Nature must be conqueredbut is not adverse to the conquest. The forces of Nature are against us, butin a rather passive manner. Light, on the other hand, is the meaning fornatural philosophy. From Salomon’s house there go forth ‘merchants of light’and ‘lamps’. Light is identified with truth. Supposing that light issymbolic of natural philosophy, then it dismisses the case of light beingdivine philosophy. The light in Bacon is primarily the light of Nature. Theobvious contrast here is one between “gold and silver and light” (Bacon, 437).Light, here is noble where gold and silver are base. The ‘noble light’ is forthe beneficence of all man. Bcaon took the modern spirit and weaved themtogether so as to suggest a method by which man could master the universe. Hedid this to the end that he might exhibit therein a model or description of acollege instituted for the interpreting of nature and the producing of greatworks for the benefit of man.The island community of Bensalem also has “two long and fairgalleries” (Bacon, 456). In one gallery the native place all manner ofpatterns and samples of rare and excellent inventions. In the other galleryare placed statues of inventors. It is interesting to note here that whilethe island and its natives act in “so civil a fashion” (Bacon, 423) inprofessing to be Christian and religious that they place science so high ontheir list. Science is placed so high that instead of having statues of Godand his works, they erect statues of inventors of the western world therebyshowing their commonness and baseness to human preservation. They do,however, have “certain hymns and services, which (we) say daily, of laud andpraise to God for his marvelous works” (Bacon, 457). But, even this is done”for the illumination of (their) labors and the turning of them into good andholy uses” (Bacon, 457). The statues are erected to the memory of what thenatives consider most important for in Bacon, the scientists are a consecratedpriesthood.In Bacon’s NEW ATLANTIS, religion plays an important role. However,it is a role of cover-up. It covers up the true idea that Bacon is trying toget across – science as the new civil religion. Although he relegatedreligion into a realm of its own outside of and different from philosophy, heheld that there were religious laws that man must obey whether or not theyappeared reasonable. By freeing theology and philosophy, Bacon was able toshape philosophy so that it might undertake an unbiased study of the universe.This left man subject to the will of God and thereby shorn of his freedom. Itis obvious that this creation could not long satisfy the thinking mind as itwas far too contradictory. The laymen have a genuine thirst for knowledge yetThey cannot know what is uncovered either by religion or by science.