

Records

[Title Page\(s\)](#) [Key Passage\(s\)](#) [JLL Article\(s\)](#) [Context](#)

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Bacon F (1645). Franc Baconis de Verulamio / Summi Angliæ Cancellarii / Novum organum scientiarum. [Francis Bacon of St. Albans Lord Chancellor of England. A 'New Instrument' for the sciences] Lugd. Bat: apud Adrianum Wiingaerde, et Franciscum Moiardum. Aphorism XLVI (pages 45-46).

Title pages



Key passages

plena imparitatis, tamen affingit Parallela, & Correspondentia, & Relativa quæ, non sunt. Hinc Commenta illa, *In caelestibus omnia moveri per circulos perfectos*, lineis spiritalibus & draconibus (nisi nomine tenus) prorsus reiectis. Hinc elementum Ignis cum Orbe suo introductum est ad constituendum quaternionem cum reliquis tribus, quæ subijciuntur sensui. Etiam Elementis (quæ vocant) imponitur ad placitum decupla proportio excessus, in raritate ad invicem. & huiusmodi somnia. Neque vanitas ista tantum valet in dogmatibus, verum etiam in Notionibus simplicibus.

XLVI.

INtellectus humanus in iis quæ semel placuerunt, (aut quia recepta sunt & credita, aut quia delectant,) alia etiam omnia trahit ad suffragationem, & consensum cum illis; Et licet maior sit instantiarum vis & copia, quæ occurrunt in contrarium; tamen eas aut non observat, aut contemnit, aut distinguendo summovet & reiicit, non sine magno & pernicioso præiudicio, quo prioribus illis Syllepsibus authoritas maneat inviolata. Itaque recte respondit ille, qui, cum suspensa tabula in templo monstraretur eorum; qui vota solverant, quod

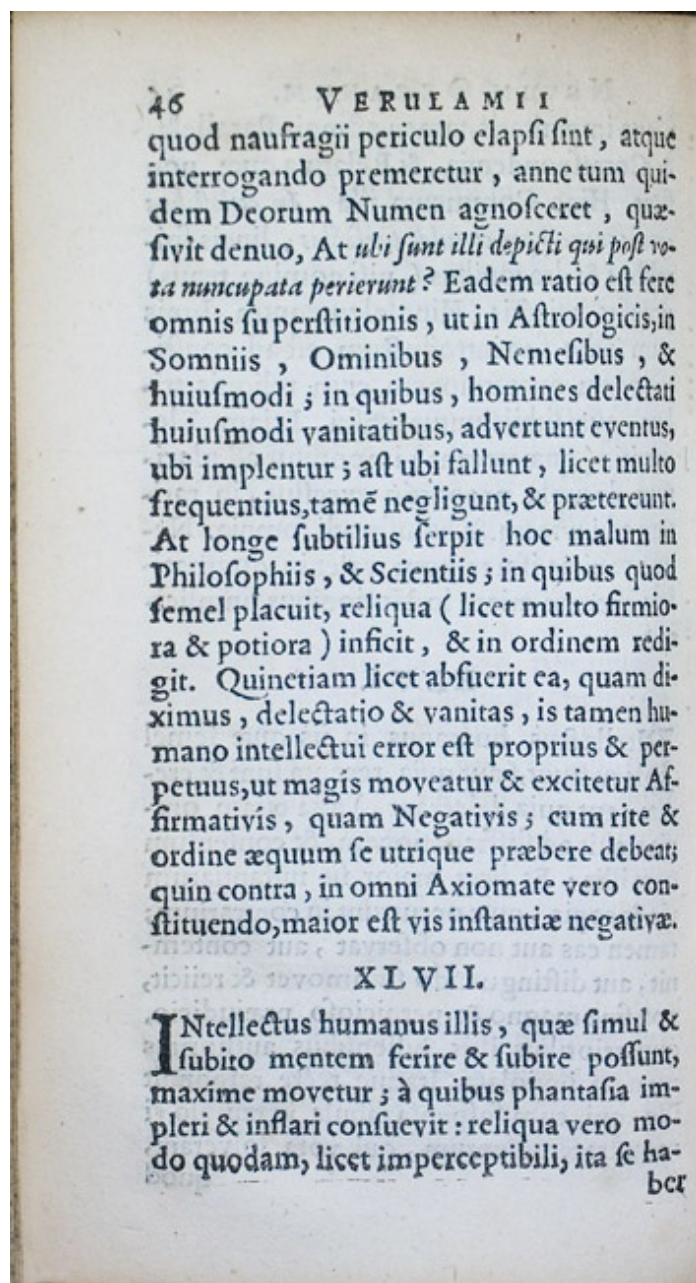
Translation

The human understanding draws everything else to be in harmony with, and to support, those things which once please it, either because they are [generally] received and believed, or because they delight it. And, though it must be admitted that the force and the number of instances that occur to the contrary is greater, it [the understanding] either does not heed them or it disdains them; or, if it does take notice of them, it distances itself from them and dismisses them - and that not without great and pernicious prejudice - so that the authority of those previous beliefs remains inviolate.

In this respect, he [1] rightly replied, who, when he was shown, on tablets hung up in a temple, those who had given votive offerings so that they might be saved from the perils of shipwreck, and was pressed for an answer whether he nevertheless denied the power of the Gods, asked in his turn 'And where are those shown who died after they had called on the Gods?' This is more or less the reason for all superstitions, such as [belief] in astrology, in dreams, in the fates and suchlike, in which men delight; they pay heed to those that come to pass but, on the contrary, when they are false - which happens much the more often - they neglect them and pass them over. And this evil creeps, persistently and most subtly, into the philosophies and the sciences, in which that [opinion] which is once accepted infects all the rest (even though these are much better established and more powerful) and reduces them to agree with it. Moreover, as we have said, [even in cases] where delight and vanity were absent, an error ever present in, and peculiar to, human understanding is that it is more moved and excited by an affirmative than a negative; whereas, by all that is proper, each of these should have equal weight. But, on the contrary, in determining the truth of any axiom, the force of the negative has the greater influence.

1 Diagoras the atheist. Cicero tells the story (De Natura Deorum, III, 37); Cicero speaks of 'tabulis pictis', that is, pictures or portraits of those saved from shipwreck and Diagoras says simply 'And where are those portrayed who

were shipwrecked and perished at sea?'. Bacon is more specific; adding the: ' after they had called on the Gods ' which is, presumably, to be understood in Cicero's tale.



Translation

The Humane Understanding attracts all other things to give its suffrage and consent unto those things which once please it, either because they are received and believed, or because they delight. And though a greater strength and number of contrary instances occur, yet it doth either not observe, or contemn them, or remove, or reject them by a distinction not without great and dangerous prejudice, by which an inviolable authority remains in those former conceptions. Therefore he gave a right answer, who, when a list of the Names of such as had paid there their vows for escaping the danger of Shipwrack, was shewn to him hung up in a Temple, and when he was questioned whether he did not acknowledge the Deity of the gods? He in answer demanded what was become of their pictures who had perished after that they had paid their Vows? There is almost the same reason for all Superstition, as in Astrological dreams, presages, &c. Men delight in such vanities, they mind the events when they come to pass, but when they fail, which is very often, they neglect and pass them by. But this evil more subtilly invades Philosophy and Sciences, wherein that which once takes, infects and corrupts the rest, though more firm and better. But in case this delight and vanity were wanting, yet it is a proper and perpetual error in Humane Understanding, to be rather moved and stirred up by affirmatives than by negatives, although in truth it ought to be indifferent to both: Yet on the other hand the strength of a negative Instance is greater in constituting every Axiom.