



Francis Bacon and the Rhetoric of Nature

John C. Briggs

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Francis Bacon and the Rhetoric of Nature offers a synthesis of Bacon's views about language and nature. John Briggs clarifies the close relation between Bacon's famous reform of scientific method and his less well-known conceptions of rhetoric, nature, and religion. He examines traditional views of nature and persuasion that were influential in the intellectual and practical life of early-seventeenth-century England, and shows how Bacon replaces the "old nature" – with its gradual unfolding of organic potential – with a "new nature" of violence, secrecy, and instantaneous revelation rewarding the self-abnegating, assiduous sons of science.

Briggs explores Bacon's paradoxes and puzzles in the context of the older Aristotelian and cosmological perspective, paying particular attention to the views of persuasion. He points out a remarkable and complex consistency in Bacon's use of Solomon, Moses, Paul, and the Greeks, and reveals the depth of Bacon's conviction that nature is God's code, which scientists decipher and exploit. He uncovers, throughout in Bacon's work, a darker, more Machiavellian and ingenious Bacon than the twentieth-century admirers of his rationalist façade have identified.

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