



# Francis Bacon: The Double-Edged Life of the Philosopher and Statesman

*Robert P. Ellis*

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Around the time Shakespeare inaugurated the golden age of English drama, the young Francis Bacon proposed to take "all knowledge to be my province." He soon realized the difficulty of that but in the process he posed two related questions, which he understood better than any other man of his time: Can human beings respect and obey nature, and Can they also command nature? He asked many other questions considered useless and impractical in his time but vital in ours.

After a busy career as an English parliamentarian, judge and advisor of King James I, Bacon published in his final years *The Advancement of Learning*, which included his *New Atlantis*, with its prescient vision of human accomplishments, many achieved only in the past century. The first important book of English essays, it is an investigation of civil and moral problems that continue to engage and perplex us.

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