

JOABIN'S SILENCE:
PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LIFE
IN FRANCIS BACON'S NEW ATLANTIS (1626)*

by

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For a successful Jewish merchant, Joabin of Francis Bacon's New Atlantis is less talkative than we might wish. He seems to have found a way to accommodate himself quietly and comfortably to his political surroundings, where Marlowe's Barabas and Shakespeare's Shylock generally speaking fail. Bacon draws Joabin to our attention for his being, along with his fellow Jews, a loyal and respected citizen of a prosperous and well-governed South Sea island kingdom called Bensalem, hitherto uncharted on European maps. Joabin even acts as a semi-official spokesman on behalf of Bensalem's peaceful and luxurious way of life. In private conversation with a thoughtful European visitor who is the book's narrator, Joabin is asked to explain a state-funded household ceremony called the "Feast of the Family," which the visitor has recently heard described and which celebrates the rewards of fatherhood in Bensalem. Joabin himself owes much to the regime under which he lives. Bensalem's citizens, cosmopolitan in their ethnic origins, include Jews, Persians, and Indians among others, as well as native islanders.¹ Although the island is said to have been converted to Christianity since the mid-first century A.D., its civil religion emphasizes charitable works rather than dogma, and its rituals both public and private remain highly syncretistic. In any case, the modified Judaism which Joabin openly professes is no barrier to his active participation in Bensalem's public life. Indeed, Joabin's terse but informative conversation with the narrator is interrupted by a messenger's announcement of a political emergency to which

Joabin is commanded to attend in haste. The mysteriously unspecified political circumstances which limit his conversation make us wonder, however, whether the peace and prosperity which Bacon's Bensalem displays to its visitor are the whole story.

From a strictly literary viewpoint, the New Atlantis resembles a narrated Platonic dialogue, though without any disconcerting Socratic cross-examinations. Except for Bacon's nameless, placid narrator, who tends to smooth over the story's potentially worrisome rough-spots, its plot reads like a science-fiction adventure, concerning sudden peril at the hands of an unpredictable and overpowering nature, followed by gradual redemption in the hands of efficient yet compassionate strangers. Bacon's narrator presents himself as a senior officer of a European explorer-ship which almost founders during a storm en route to China from Peru around 1612,² but which soon receives unexpected hospitality, if at first cautiously, from the newly sighted island. Bensalemites' wealth and leisure are seen to owe much to an elaborate government-sponsored research institution, whose high technology facilitates the island's covert worldwide intelligence-gathering, and vice versa whose worldwide intelligence-gathering facilitates its technology-intensive production of military, industrial, and consumer goods. It is difficult to know whether, in the end, the fruits of Bensalem's scientific enlightenment are for the sake of her domestic and global politics, or the other way around. The narrator does not

say. As we shall see, a correspondingly ambiguous silence pervades the situation of Bacon's Jew as well.

Be that as it may, within a scant week or so following their near shipwreck, Bacon's European sailors recuperate from their ordeal (with the aid of Bensalem's advanced medical and nutritional technology), acclimatize to Bensalem's customs, and even incline toward immigration. Bacon's reader is allowed to follow the narrator's hurried introduction to life in Bensalem through a series of spokesmen, who appear perhaps hierarchically arranged: (1) a coast-guard officer, who prevents the crippled ship from landing but promises emergency relief and supplies; (2) a customs and immigration officer, a "person of place" as he is called, who together with his attendants stipulates the conditions under which the sailors will be permitted to land after all; (3) the governor or administrator of Strangers' House, Bensalem's official visitor's hostel, who recounts to some ten interested sailors the circumstances of the island's conversion to Christianity and its longstanding foreign policy of deliberate isolation; (4) Joabin, a private citizen whom we might consider Bensalem's equivalent of a combined Bernard Baruch and Henry Kissinger, and who alone among the spokesmen appears to be freely sought out or chanced upon by the narrator personally; and finally (5) one of the so-called Fathers or scientist-priests of Salomon's House, Bensalem's remarkable research institution, also called The College of the Six Days Works. Although Joabin serves to answer the narrator's questions about marital life which have

been raised by the report he has heard from two of his shipmates concerning Bensalem's fatherhood celebration, he does not quite answer them fully. His less than complete account of courtship and marriage is framed on the one hand by the narrator's description of him as a Jew, and on the other hand by the political message which removes him from further conversation with the narrator--except for his brief return next morning to announce the rare arrival in town one week hence of the Father of Salomon's House, his then unobtrusively accompanying the narrator to view the civic parade welcoming the Father, and his informing the narrator three days later that the Father has granted a group audience to the sailors and an exclusive interview to one sailor chosen by his fellows, who turns out to be the narrator himself. In order to understand the prominent yet ambivalent place of Bacon's exemplary Jew, then, it is necessary to consider not only what he says but also what he does in terms of the narrative as a whole.

But is Bacon's narrative whole? It appears to be a literary fragment. The book ends, somewhat abruptly, with the Father's recruiting the narrator to publish the extensive description of Salomon's House to which he has just listened. Bacon's literary executor advises the reader that the author originally intended to add a lengthy "frame of Laws, or of the best state or mould of a commonwealth," but preferred to conclude his life's work by compiling a "natural history" instead.³ Still, inferences about the book's evident incompleteness depend on some assessment of

its content, and here Bacon gives us warrant to second-guess his executor. A lengthy paragraph or more of the speech by the governor of Strangers' House, the book's central spokesman, is devoted to correcting an account of ancient Atlantis found in Plato's Critias, of which Bacon's readers are reminded and which resembles the New Atlantis in its formal incompleteness.⁴ If Bacon took from Plato the theme which gave his own book its title, then perhaps he took much else too, including his de facto literary format. In any case, the book's appearance of incompleteness may also be seen to suit the dramatic incompleteness of its several speakers, and of Joabin in particular.

II

The narrator's introductory description of Joabin suggests the benign or salutary effect of Bensalem's official policy of toleration toward Jews. That policy depends in part on what differentiates Jews in Bensalem, of whom there are some few ancestral lines, from Jews elsewhere. Jews elsewhere are said to "hate the name of Christ, and have a secret inbred rancour against the people amongst whom they live."⁵ Bensalemite Jews, on the other hand, combine extreme patriotism with high praise of Christianity's founder. Joabin himself "ever acknowledges" that Christ is Virgin-born, superhuman, and ruler over the "Seraphims" or six-winged angels guarding the divine throne. He and his fellow Jews go so far as to call Christ by such laudatory terms as the "Milken Way" and the "Elijah of the Messiah," terms which

indicate among themselves and their Christian neighbors that Christ is a way to heaven and a herald of the biblically promised redemption to come. At the same time, Joabin consciously assimilates his country's ancient lineage and divine mission to those of his religion. Bensalem's founding father is said to be Nahor, Abraham's younger brother;⁶ Bensalem's laws "which they now use" are derived from a "secret cabala" or unwritten teaching of Moses himself; and when the Messiah eventually comes and sits on his throne of judgement in Jerusalem, "the King of Bensalem should sit at his feet, whereas other kings should keep their distance." Joabin's articulate if eclectic merging of patriotism and religion seems not accidentally connected with the narrator's further description of him as wise, learned, statesmanlike, and thoroughly familiar with Bensalem's laws and customs. We are therefore led to wonder in what way Joabin's wisdom undergirds or interweaves his rapprochement between Bensalem and Judaism. Does he speak simply as a private citizen whose scholarly appreciation for his ethnic roots, or what the narrator calls "these Jewish dreams," is strictly antiquarian? Or does he speak rather as a statesman, mediating between ongoing Bensalemite and Jewish interests--and if so, which if either does he favor? To answer such questions, or merely to clarify them, we must pursue the further tracings of Bensalem's religious and political origins in the dialogue.

On the second day after their three days' quarantine in Strangers' House, ten interested sailors forgo sightseeing to

converse with the governor and hear his answer to their question of how Bensalem became Christianized despite its remoteness from the rest of Christendom.⁷ The sailors' question is evidently prompted by the Christian regalia and formalities of their rescuers, including the customs and immigration officer's preliminary wish to be assured of the sailors' Christian peaceableness, as well as by the governor's statement that he is also by vocation a Christian priest. The governor informs the sailors that the coming of Christianity was prepared, in effect, by a scientifically certified miracle. Twenty years after Christ's ascension, citizens of Bensalem's east-coast port of Renfusa (whose name is Greek for "sheep-natured") saw offshore one calm and cloudy night a pillar of light rising toward heaven and topped by a bright cross of light. Viewers on shore sent out boats, which were mysteriously prevented from approaching more closely than sixty yards from the pillar but stood around it as in a theater. Aboard one boat was one of the "wise men" from Salomon's House. With appropriate prayerful gestures, he suddenly proclaimed before God--and on the basis of his God-given ability to distinguish divine miracles from works of nature, works of art, and "impostures and illusions of all sorts"--that the pillar was a "true Miracle," whose meaning he therefore prayed to God to reveal. As the scientist's boat alone was then allowed to approach the pillar more closely, the pillar dissolved spectacularly, leaving a small ark containing the entire Old and New Testaments in a single volume, including certain as yet

unpublished New Testament apocryphal books, and also a letter from the missionary St. Bartholemew assuring "salvation and peace and goodwill" for the people to whom God would ordain the ark. The book and letter were read and accepted by each Bensalemite in his own language (Hebrew, Persian, Indian, etc.).

In retrospect, it may well be that the narrator finds that such an appeal to the authority of a natural scientist to validate a supernatural sign is incongruous. Yet none of the sailors interrupts with pointed questions. Nor is the governor allowed to expand his remarks in order to suggest pertinent answers, for after a brief pause he is called away by a messenger. But then again, the governor unlike Joabin or the ancient scientist is never characterized as "wise." Among the questions left unraised and unanswered by the governor's remarks, then, is whether a "wise" account by either Joabin or the scientist would differ significantly from his own, merely pious account. The issue here is not primarily epistemological--how to tell miracles from natural or artificial works or from "impostures and illusions"? It is theological and political. Assuming that Bensalem's "wise" scientists are technically competent, the question remains whether their official competence extends to the point of being able to decide knowledgeably, i.e. scientifically, concerning the theological and political merits of Christianity itself. The issue may even have a sinister side, since the reader later learns that among the astounding facilities of Salomon's House are laboratories for deliberately

implementing what are called "deceits of the senses": these include not only "all manner of feats of juggling" and "false apparitions" but also, recalling the governor's own words in connection with the miracle, "impostures, and illusions."⁸ At any rate, given that Salomon's House pre-dates Christianity in Bensalem, was its endorsement simply for the sake of scientific enlightenment--whether in the innocent sense that the miracle may after all be "true" at face value, or in the underhanded sense that, especially if the miracle in question turns out to be among the "impostures and illusions" reproducible at will by Salomon's House, Bensalem's scientifically-approved Christianity was chosen chiefly on the grounds of its compatibility or congeniality with Bensalem's science? Or do both science and Christianity necessarily subserve some further public interest--in common, say, with men like Joabin?

However that may be, on the third day after their quarantine in Strangers' House, the conversation resumes by turning to matters of statesmanship.⁹ The sailors hear the governor's answer to their question of how Bensalem, though unknown to the rest of the world, is yet so knowledgeable about the world. The governor describes a time three thousand years earlier, antedating the historical records of present-day Europe, when Bensalem was a great sea-trading power alongside Phoenecia (including Tyre and Carthage), Egypt, Palestine, China, and especially Atlantis (which the governor identifies with America, both North and South). Bensalem's subsequent isolation followed

the legendary attempt by Atlantis to conquer the rest of the world, a legend which modern Europe has learned chiefly through Plato, yet which Bacon's governor corrects in several ways, presumably on the basis of Bensalem's own historical records. First, as the governor indicates, Atlantis was not a single island but comprised all of America, including Mexico (then called Tyrambel) and Peru (then called Coya). Second, to Plato's merely "poetical and fabulous" account of how the Atlantian forces attacked Europe and Asia through the Mediterranean and were utterly destroyed by the Athenians, the governor adds that only Tyrambel attacked the Mediterranean, while Coya attacked Bensalem but surrendered before firing a shot, because of Bensalem's superior strength and the military and naval maneuvering of her "wise" king Altabin, who afterwards allowed the Atlantians to return home peaceably in an extraordinary act of clemency. Third, however, "Divine Revenge" soon destroyed the civilization of Atlantis anyway, not by an earthquake as Plato claims, but only by a localized flood, which left survivors whose descendants populate an uncultivated America to this day (1612). Henceforth the loss of America as a trading power and the general decline of navigation elsewhere left Bensalem isolated. In the wake of these circumstances, Bensalem's greatest lawgiver, King Solamona, around 288 B.C. redirected Bensalem's long-term foreign policy toward the goal of self-sufficiency, and to that end set laws prohibiting contact with foreigners, except for (1) relief for travelers in distress, (2) wooing of prospective immigrants

from among such travelers by offering favorable jobs and generous subsidies, and (3) covert intelligence-gathering expeditions abroad by a team of scientists from Salomon's House--an institution which Solamona also established.

It is not clear from the governor's revision of the Atlantis myth how much he has read of Plato's Critias firsthand.¹⁰ That is, to what extent has he considered the fuller theological and political implications of that myth as Plato lets us glimpse them? The governor may know of Plato only in the way that he knows of Bensalem's conversion to Christianity, namely second-hand at best, through Bensalem's authorized historical records or textbooks. At any rate, he simply assumes that a knowledge of history, albeit of Bensalemite history, is superior to the knowledge which might be gained by studying Plato's "poetical and fabulous" account in its own terms. He thus elevates (Bensalemite) history over (Platonic) poetry. Yet he does not exactly say why. One cannot maintain in the governor's defense that history itself refutes the Platonic account. Leaving aside the epistemological difficulty of establishing with certainty the particulars of the remote past, we note that if Plato's account is indeed a poetic fable, i.e. a deliberately invented myth, then strictly speaking it cannot be refuted by a simple appeal to recorded history, by whose standards it is not necessarily bound. It can only be replaced by that history.¹¹ We are therefore left to examine in somewhat fuller detail the governor's replacement of Plato's myth with the particulars supplied by Bensalem's

authorized records, in the hopes of elaborating the one clue we have learned from the governor so far concerning the distinctiveness of Bensalem's public policy as it affects Jews like Joabin. It is the support and deference which Bensalem pays to the scientific technology of Salomon's House.

The Platonic discussion, in contrast, is guided by a thoroughgoing critique of science or art (technē) in matters of public policy. Briefly, the conversation about Atlantis in Plato's Critias continues a previous day's conversation in Plato's Timaeus, which in turn follows a conversation the day before as found in Plato's Republic.¹² In the Republic, Socrates narrates a conversation he once had with Plato's two brothers and others about the perfectly just city. The perfectly just city, Socrates had argued, is politically realizable only if justice is an art which supervises all the other arts in the city, including the art of war, such that each citizen practices only the one art best suited to him or her.¹³ The ruling artisan must therefore be a philosopher, who understands the scope and limits of all the other arts and so, paradoxically, minds everyone else's business while minding his own. Establishing such an art politically, however, cannot as such be a matter of art. It is a matter of chance or good fortune.¹⁴ The coming into supreme political power of a philosopher, though theoretically possible, is as unlikely for all practical purposes as is the converting of an actual ruler to the way of life of the philosopher, for the philosopher's first priority is wisdom rather than political

honor or even bodily pleasure, which are more comprehensible and credible to non-philosophers.¹⁵ Nor is it clear how other artisans would withstand the meddlings of the philosopher's art, since its interference with the proven arts would undoubtedly seem counterproductive to them. And even if per improbabile an actual philosopher were to rule, his ruling art could not guarantee that his successors would be philosophers either.¹⁶ Chances are thus that the perfectly just regime either would never see the light of day, or else would collapse within a generation or two. Politically speaking, then, Socrates' argument is a failure. Nevertheless it shows the necessary limits of any attempt to superimpose justice on the city and its everyday arts. For anyone who like Socrates ~~nevertheless~~ seeks as much justice as is humanly possible for the city, the argument indicates that there is a corresponding need to be moderate in his or her practical expectations, or that political life must somehow include moderation over and above art.¹⁷ For Plato, the putative art of justice is hardly the solution to the ongoing problems of political life, but indicates the permanently problematic character of political life, and hence the need for political moderation.

Still, in Plato's terms, one need not despair entirely of the possible realization of the perfectly just city if it could be shown that such a city was at one time actual. According to Critias in the Timaeus, the Athens which had defeated Atlantis some 9000 years earlier (he says) was just such a city.¹⁸ Critias

recalls having heard when young a festive recitation about Athens' great and virtuous victory over Atlantis from his grandfather, who had relied on Critias' great-grandfather's account of a report which the "wise" Solon had heard from an Egyptian priest. Critias' own account of Atlantis thus depends not so much on written records as on oral tradition. It is therefore only as reliable as that tradition. But, to say nothing of other things, Plato indicates by way of the dramatic action of the dialogue that Critias' memory is defective, if only to the point of Critias' having had to spend full time including a sleepless night since the previous day's conversation in order to recollect each detail sufficiently.¹⁹ In any case, Critias' account is also emphatically harmonistic.²⁰ Critias wishes to harmonize the perfectly just city of the Republic, which according to Socrates he considers a mere "myth,"²¹ with his own ancestral Athens. He even asks the natural philosopher Timaeus to introduce the account of Athens and Atlantis with an account of the genesis of the universe up to the point of the founding of those two cities, which Timaeus does at length. But Timaeus ignores ^{Critias'} ~~Socrates'~~ insistence that the account of ancestral Athens and Atlantis be true, for Timaeus' cosmogony is admittedly only a likely story.²² And Critias himself forgets the built-in tension which the Republic had shown between the requirement that the just city be governed by a single art which rules over all the others and the requirement that the just city be moderate. Critias suppresses the problem of the place of the arts in the

just city, and with it the problem of moderation. No wonder, in the Critias, he is incapable of accounting for the decline of ancestral Athens from the peak of its virtue following its victory over Atlantis, except by an appeal to the judgment of the gods.²³

Bacon's governor reports the details of Plato's Atlantis myth accurately enough as far as he goes. Even so, his report imitates that of Plato's Critias in seeking to harmonize two potentially incompatible elements.²⁴ As Critias seeks to harmonize the "myth" of the perfectly just city with his own Athens, so the governor seeks to harmonize the corrected "history" of Atlantis with his own Bensalem. The resulting "history" includes not only Altabin's magnanimous victory over Atlantis and the subsequent flood which destroyed Atlantian together with European and Asian civilization, but also Solamona's longstanding policy of self-sufficiency as necessitated or made possible by the flood, as well as Bensalem's eventual conversion to Christianity under the auspices of the scientific technology first patronized by Solamona. Bacon's governor thus follows Plato's Critias in smoothing over the tension noted by Plato between history or political life and the arts. To be sure, unlike Critias the governor thinks of the arts, so far as we can tell, in terms of the scientific technology of Salomon's House. Does he then divine some alternative to Plato, based on the replacement or improvement of the arts by means of a scientific technology which would master

nature as a whole?²⁵ Given the governor's silence on this issue, we can only infer from the narrative structure of the New Atlantis itself. Consider that, unlike Plato's Critias, Bacon's New Atlantis is not preceded by the Republic and Timaeus, which would supply the standards for recognizing the tension between politics and the arts; rather, if Bacon's literary executor be trusted here, the New Atlantis is succeeded by the unfinished natural history. The Critias ends suddenly with Zeus about to announce to an assembly of the gods his plan to destroy not only the defeated Atlantis but also the victorious European and Asian allies, for their "unjust acquisitiveness and power";²⁶ the New Atlantis, on the contrary, ends with the speech by the Father of Salomon's House, which mentions neither divine justice nor human beings' "unjust acquisitiveness and power" but instead promises human beings a kind of salvation from destruction, albeit a salvation based on replacement of the gods in favor of scientific mastery of nature. We are left to infer that, as Plato's Atlantis together with all the civilized world was once said to be subject to the destructive power of the gods, so Bacon's Atlantis (America) together with all the civilized world, for whom global navigation has recently resumed, is now said to be subject to the salvific power of Bensalem's scientific technology. It follows that Bensalem's "history" leaves her in a position, if not already poised, to restore her long-lost global commerce, without however abandoning her Solamonic goal of self-sufficiency. It is not yet clear, however, to what extent such a

modification of policy will nevertheless require or compel Bensalem to imitate the "unjust acquisitiveness and power" of ancient Atlantis and its quondam contemporaries.

From what the governor has said or implied so far, however, it is clear enough that if the name "New Atlantis" in Bacon's title refers to Bensalem as heir to the old Atlantis, then perhaps Bensalem does not differ from Atlantis at all in its political aim, namely world domination, but only in its means, namely peaceable commercial and technological development so far as possible rather than violent military conquest. At this point, Bensalem's need for cosmopolitan and sophisticated men like Joabin--say, as diplomats or international entrepreneurs--becomes more apparent. But what do men like Joabin derive from Bensalem in turn?

III

The material prosperity of men like Joabin is evident in the celebration to which the two shipmates are invited toward the end of the first week in Bensalem.²⁷ The so-called "Feast of the Family" marks a father's becoming a Tirsan, or patriarch with thirty living descendants over the age of three. (The term, of Persian derivation, suggests "fearful,"²⁸ but whether it means "Godfearing" or just plain "wary" is not immediately clear.) Two days before the feast, all family members are assembled, together with three friends of the Tirsan's choosing and the local governor or civil administrator. With the latter's help, the Tirsan resolves any family discords, relieves any pressing

financial needs, reproves any wayward offspring, advises concerning marriages or careers or the like, and designates his chief heir. During the feast, the Tirsan sits on a dais under a home-made canopy which is fashioned of Bensalem's all-season ivy (a winter-resilient species presumably developed by Salomon's House)²⁹ and bound or braided by silver and by multi-colored silks. The ivy's leaves and sprigs afterwards serve as souvenirs for the guests. Strangely, the family matriarch, if there is one, sits aloft behind an elaborate partition and concealed from others' view. Equally strange perhaps is the Tirsan's intermittently absenting himself for private devotions. Publicly, the Tirsan receives a royal scroll and title, and a royal gift of a cluster of grapes wrought of gold and delicately enamelled with sun or moon signs on each grape according to the preponderance of male or female descendants, the number of grapes being equal to the total number of descendants. After a formal dinner which concludes with a hymn praising Adam and Noah as progenitors of mankind and Abraham as "Father of the Faithful," and with a prayer giving thanks for the birth of "our Saviour,"³⁰ the Tirsan blesses each descendant individually. The feast thus celebrates abundance, both material and familial. It is Bensalem's attempt to reconcile the requirements of family life with the conditions of general wealth made possible by Salomon's House. Indeed, wealth and family seem both its preconditions and its reward. But are these conditions simply compatible?

Something like this question must have been bothering the narrator for some time prior to his conversation with Joabin. Like his fellow sailors, the narrator has been pondering immigration to Bensalem at least since hearing about its favorable jobs and generous subsidies for newcomers.³¹ Perhaps for that reason, he now confesses to Joabin that he was "much affected" by his shipmates' report of the Tirsan celebration. He adds that he had never heard of a solemnity so guided or directed by nature. By "nature," as his further remarks suggest, the narrator means sexual desire and the propagation of children, matters to which the Bensalemites seem to him to be giving the greatest priority. He asks Joabin three connected questions: what are Bensalem's marriage laws and customs? are Bensalemite marriages happy? are they lifelong? The narrator thus wonders about the practical rewards and restrictions of married life as such. Possibly he has noticed that the Tirsan celebration would appear to reward the proliferation of offspring even apart from marriage. For example, in saying as they do that "the king is debtor to no man, but for propagation of his subjects," Bensalemites suggest that their king may be indifferent to whether marriages are long or happy or even lawful so long as they produce children. More fundamental than marriage and family, it seems, are sexual desire and the need to procreate, as suggested respectively by the ivy, classically associated with Dionysus the god of desire, and by the grape, a biblical symbol of fecundity as well.³² Above all, there is the visible absence

of the mother of the family--if there be one, the shipmates had said (perhaps there are more than one, in which case none need even be invited!)--whereas there is little sexual discrimination otherwise. Could the celebration's deference to "nature" here mean, so far as the narrator is concerned, that Bensalemites do not consider the family natural, and do not therefore give it highest priority, but like the narrator himself identify the natural simply with the sexual, or at any rate with erotic desire? In the narrator's last analysis, then, is the legitimacy accorded to "nature" only ^{as} a means for reaping whatever political benefits may accrue from Bensalem's potentially rampant sexual promiscuity, namely a proliferation of children to solve the king's admitted underpopulation problem, while at the same time fending off the threat which promiscuity poses to family life and the political order by offering longterm financial incentives for boosting population?

With the narrator's questions in mind, Joabin launches into a lengthy and spirited praise of Bensalem's chastity, as against the promiscuity he finds prevalent in Europe.³³ Bensalem, by contrast, is "the virgin of the world." Joabin resolutely defends Bensalem's virtue by attacking, to begin with, Europe's worldly tolerance of prostitution. Europeans, he charges, excuse prostitution as a necessary evil to protect the institution of marriage. They say it³⁴ prevents adultery with married women, preserves virginity among eligible maidens, and pre-empts "unnatural lusts," etc. But Bensalemites find such excuses

sophistical. Europe's "preposterous wisdom" here, they contemptuously call "Lot's offer, who to save his guests from abusing, offered his daughters."³⁵ Joabin's biblical allusion, however, suggests that his main target is not prostitution, or in general heterosexual promiscuity, but homosexuality, its Lot-inspired trade-off, for he immediately protests in so many words that to condone harlotry in place of Sodomy does not eliminate but intensifies the passions which give rise to the latter, whereas Bensalem on the contrary has succeeded in abolishing all touches of "masculine love" in favor of the world's most faithful and inviolate masculine friendships, and Bensalemites even repeat pious mottos equating chastity among men with reverence for oneself. Here Joabin's pause provokes the narrator's own biblical allusion, in lieu of his embarrassed silence. He recalls what the widow of Sarepta said to the prophet Elijah, that he had come "to bring memory to our sins," although the narrator then suppresses the remainder of the biblical citation, which continues with the frightened or frightening thought that the sins in question, those of the widow's son, deserve punishment by death.³⁶ Has Joabin's polemic--wise, learned, statesmanlike, and informed, as the narrator would have it--been deliberately designed to elicit from the narrator a tacit admission of the population-stifling evils of homosexuality and to warn him and his shipmates away from those evils as the price of Bensalemite citizenship, or indeed of their ever leaving Bensalem alive? In any case, Joabin's severe attack on European

sexual mores serves in effect to focus the narrator's subsequent attention on how well Bensalem's marriage laws and customs facilitate its own modification of "Lot's offer," namely its restraining non-productive homosexuality by liberalizing or emancipating child-producing heterosexuality.

Do Bensalem's marriage laws and customs thereby harness raw sexual appetites in the direction of long and happy marriages, as the narrator had wondered? Only very loosely, despite Joabin's gloss. In any event, it is a question which Joabin avoids answering directly. The laws, he reports, prohibit polygamy, stipulate acquaintanceship of at least one month before marriage, and restrict inheritance rights for children of couples who marry without parental consent. Surely the narrator easily surmises that the first law nevertheless permits serial remarriages, the second allows too short a time-span for couples to reckon the likelihood of a lifetime of happiness together, and the third imposes too long a one. Together, the three provisions seem paltry--too trivial, too little, and too late--unless they are somehow supplemented by the guidance of wise customs. Are they? Here Joabin's all-too-brief comments are most revealing, but also most guarded, concerning Bensalem's giving loose rein to sexual promiscuity. Joabin, who has read Thomas More's Utopia (and perhaps Plato's Laws), revises More's recommendation that prospective betrothed be allowed to see each other naked (in the company of suitably approved chaperons) to warn of bodily defects.³⁷ Bensalemite couples, says Joabin, would "think it a

scorn to give a refusal after so familiar knowledge." Joabin rather approves of Bensalem's "more civil" way of conducting premarital body inspections. Near each town are a pair of pools, called Adam and Eve's pools, where a friend of either fiancé is allowed to see his or her intended bathe naked. Bensalemites accordingly replace married or respectable chaperons, the proxies of family authority, with unattached voyeurs, whose loyalty belongs primarily to the adolescents themselves (and so is easily changeable, despite protestations of friendship, when other attractions come into full view).³⁸ Bensalem's marriage customs diminish family authority and stability while augmenting adolescent freedom. Given Joabin's silence, then, the narrator seems entitled to infer that Bensalem's marriages are not necessarily happy or long, or if happy need not be long and if long may not be happy.

Joabin's spirited if hypocritical endorsement of Bensalemite marriages anyway seems connected with his understanding of just what it is which Bensalem's premarital couples in their nakedness would be ashamed to refuse each other. Arguably it is not marriage, but intercourse. Assuming that Joabin's "wise" expectations gravitate that low, they may extend as well to the groom's best man inspecting the bride and the to bride's maid (or matron) of honor inspecting the groom. His unblinking worldliness in such matters, combined with his resolute loyalty to his sovereign, would resemble that of his namesake Joab, the biblical King David's nephew, military commander and political

troubleshooter. Joab implicitly understood the dangers which resulted from David's immoderate looking on the nakedness of a beautiful woman. David's subsequent liaison with Uriah's wife Bathsheba and her becoming pregnant by him led to his covertly ordering Uriah's death--and to Joab's politic compliance even at the cost of other innocent deaths.³⁹ David was eventually called to account by the prophet Nathan, though Joab seems to have escaped direct prophetic censure. Are Joabin's politic hypocrisies now excused by the absence of a prophet, hence by the low view of morality and politics which seems to result from the loss of prophetic authority?⁴⁰ In any case, it follows that the dangers of erotic license here are not just private but political, and perhaps this insight allows the narrator to round out his understanding of the Tirsan feast as seen through Joabin's eyes. Three apparent incongruities remain: the meaning of the term Tirsan, the reason for his intermittent absence, and the invisibility of his wife. If the foregoing interpretation of Joabin is correct, the apparent incongruities may have a common cause in the private desires which the feast is designed both to arouse and, ultimately, to reward. The invisibility of the Tirsan's wife (or alternatively, the shunning of his concubines) would eliminate from the scene at least one clear and present reminder of past sexual promiscuities or frustrations, and so prevent possible soap-opera confrontations which would spoil the outward reverence of the occasion. The Tirsan's intermittent absence in addition lets him offer private prayers and thanks to

God for continued protection against David-like competitors for the things he desires. Finally, the Tirsan, like Joabin himself, would seem at least as "wary" as he is "Godfearing," for he finds himself in a state in which, governed openly by his private desires, he must secretly worry about meeting a Uriah-like fate, the violent and permanent termination of his private satisfactions at the hands of some equally fearful rival. In the almost Bensalemite language of Bacon's younger friend Thomas Hobbes, the Tirsan's fearful private state is the "state of nature."⁴¹

Joabin's poker-faced hypocrisies in presenting the attractions of private life in Bensalem would seem intolerable, unless offset by more compelling reasons befitting the narrator's description of him as wise, learned, statesmanlike, etc. After all, perhaps Bensalem's need to maintain or augment its population, especially given its imminent re-entry into world commerce, is greater than would appear at first glance, and therefore Joabin has a patriotic duty to present an embarrassingly vulgar subject in its most alluring, not lurid, light; perhaps Bensalem needs the narrator and his shipmates even more than the shipmates need Bensalem. But this consideration raises the further question of just how far Joabin may be expected to go in that direction, and to what end. Are his diplomatic efforts to attract outsiders to Bensalem as "the virgin of the world," ripe for gazing upon and embracing, no more than elaborately veiled efforts to sustain Bensalem's (and

Joabin's personal) wealth-producing capabilities? Does Joabin the merchant do what he does just for the money?

IV

The insufficiency of wealth or its ambivalence is revealed in Joabin's concluding action, which draws him away from the preceding conversation with the narrator.⁴² He begs the narrator's pardon for being "commanded away in haste." Next morning he returns to tell the narrator, on the authority of the governor of the city, about the impending visit of the Father of Salomon's House on a mission whose purpose is secret; yet Joabin will arrange an audience with the sailors. Joabin departs after hearing the narrator's thanks and gladness at the news. If Joabin's comings and goings are commanded by the governor of the city, or by the king, then evidently Joabin's wealth does not relieve him of political or diplomatic responsibilities, but on the contrary, especially in wealth-gathering and wealth-producing Bensalem, it may in part dictate those responsibilities. The indispensability of politics in turn raises questions about the role of Salomon's House. Is Bensalem's science a merely apolitical institution, whose main public role is to provide the technology for aiding private wealth-gathering and bodily well-being? Or is science rather an arm of government, and the Father of Salomon's House either subject or supervisory to the political authority of men like Joabin, so that its technology is above all instrumental for Bensalem's imperial politics and diplomacy? That is to say, are men like Joabin first and foremost ~~all~~ the

consumers and admirers of scientific technology, or are they rather its political commissars?⁴³

The narrator himself passes over this question, as the Father outlines to him privately the aim, facilities, staff and quasi-religious functions of Salomon's House.⁴⁴ Perhaps he is overwhelmed by the ceremonial presence of the Father and the astonishing content of his message. Still the question remains, for scientific and political elements here seem inextricably mixed. The stated aim of Salomon's House is not only the (technical) "knowledge of Causes, and secret motions of things," but also the (quasi-political) "enlarging of the bounds of Human Empire, to the effecting of all things possible."⁴⁵ Its facilities sustain projects related to military as well as consumer uses: experimental laboratories for producing and preserving bodies and bodily life (human as well as non-human) and for construction materials and fertilizers; underwater farming; mineral wells; weather control devices⁴⁶ and air-conditioners; medicinal baths; farms for producing year-round hybrids; experimental zoos, aquariums, insect farms, kitchens, and medical dispensaries; factories for producing rare fabrics, heat generators, lenses, and precious stones; audio laboratories; perfume houses; mobile weapons production, including nuclear bombs, airships, and submarines; mathematical instruments; and finally the aforementioned laboratory for "deceits of the senses." The scientist-priests swear themselves to secrecy, even from the state when necessary, and publish only after mutual

consultation, although this may well include consideration of their collective dependence on state support and funding. And the facilities house a museum for venerating scientific innovations and inventors, but whether their larger innovative purposes are broadly humanitarian, as typified by the advanced medical and consumer technology, or more narrowly imperialistic, as typified by the sophisticated military and dirty-tricks capabilities, is not yet clear. That is, is the public role of Salomon's House best emblemized by Bensalem's compassionate rescue and rehabilitation of the sailors, or perhaps instead by its deliberately causing a storm which might bring badly needed immigrant prospects to its hidden shores?⁴⁷

The foregoing question cannot help bearing on Joabin's private life as a Jew. If Joabin's Judaism has been reformed to suit the requirements of modern life in Bensalem, then the question becomes whether the new modern Judaism is intended as a convenience for the sake of the fruits of scientific progress or for the fruits of imperial politics--or both, or neither? In the first case mentioned, Joabin would appear to be placing his final trust, as citizen and Jew, in the kindly humanitarian face of Bensalem's public policy. Yet what if implementing that policy requires immoderate means--the "unjust acquisitiveness and power" pointed to by Plato's Critias--as suggested already by Joabin's hypocrisies designed to win the narrator to Bensalem's cause, and hypothetically by his complicity in a possibly man-made storm? Morally speaking, does not Joabin then go the way of Marlowe's

Barabas, except that his ruthlessness is corporate rather than individual, and premised on the projected compatibility between the spread of scientific technology and the public good--a compatibility which the Critias, etc., would have us call into question? In the second case, however, if Joabin understands Bensalem to be subordinating its endorsement of scientific technology strictly to the requirements of practical politics, then he must trust first and foremost in his own political prudence and in the particular regime he represents. But to that extent, Joabin's prominent place in Bensalem must depend on his usefulness to the regime, a usefulness which need not be permanent, as suggested by the biblical David's deathbed advice to his royal son and heir Solomon to have Joab killed.⁴⁸ In this case, however, would not Bacon's Joabin resemble a more sophisticated and prudent but otherwise equally vulnerable Shylock, who has merely replaced a self-defeating religious chauvinism with a (temporarily) self-serving political one? Or is there, finally, a third possibility for Bacon's modern Jew, a firm and desirable middle ground between the extremes of Marlowe's Barabas and Shakespeare's Shylock?

It would appear that Bacon himself, while leaning toward this last possibility, leaves the issue somewhat open. The New Atlantis ends suddenly, after all, with the Father's recruiting the narrator to publicize Salomon's House on his return to Europe.⁴⁹ Here too Bacon's book resembles its ancient literary model Plato's Critias, in compelling its reader to speculate on

the significance of what has gone before, and of what is to come, from the perspective of its all-too-brief final scene. Perhaps Bacon, like Plato, is more concerned to alert readers to pressing but unresolved issues, than to offer purportedly final but practically evanescent solutions. If so, then the details of the New Atlantis must have been constructed, like those of earlier books both biblical and philosophic, so as to provide a practical course in Joabinic or more-than-Joabinic political wisdom. Bacon's book would then be a kind of test-run through the peaks and valleys, or clouds and abysses, which would come to situate the modern Jew among others in a new technological age. Bacon would attract the general reader to the modest but palpable private satisfactions which the new age would try to supply en masse--including bodily health and comfort, wealth, and a semblance of domestic peace--while at the same time he would alert the discerning reader to the attendant risks, both public and private, surrounding the public emancipation of private desires necessary to that end.

Yet perhaps our question can be answered in a more affirmative way by speculating on what must have occurred during Joabin's unrecorded conversations with the narrator. What did they talk about? Presumably it was the details which finally found their way into narrator's book. What then did the narrator learn from Joabin? Maybe it was, in a word, moderation. Given his practical acceptance of the political authority of Salomon's House, at any rate, Joabin displays moderation, if not in his

public-spirited silence over the morally dubious implications of private life in Bensalem, at least in his philosophic allusiveness in pointing out those implications more fully without at the same time overlooking Bensalem's obvious public virtues: the quiet decorum of its citizens, the incorruptibility of its officials, its openness to science (albeit in the problematic service of the productive arts), its compassion for human suffering, and of course its tolerance for mutually tolerant Jews.⁵⁰ Although such virtues are hardly sufficient to meet the full political demands which remain part of the Solamonic way of life, must they not be considered a fortunate heritage from Bensalem's ancient lawgivers and others, including those preceding Solamona? Consider that the virtues in question are not taught by any of the sciences researched in Salomon's House, which does not count political science among its subjects.⁵¹ Nevertheless Joabin seems to know something of this last science, if by it is meant knowledge of what is good and bad for society, or of what is noble and base, decent and indecent. If so, then to judge from Joabin's allusions as the narrator has rendered them, he must have learned it in turn from his wise reading of old, pre-Solamonic books, particularly Plato and the Bible. Must we not therefore conclude that for Joabin's narrator (as indeed for Marlowe and Shakespeare), the innovative and renovated--that is to say problematic--modern Jew cannot be adequately understood without recourse to his distant and easily

forgotten roots, as both citizen and Jew, in the philosophical and biblical literary-pedagogical traditions?

NOTES

1. New Atlantis, p. 48 (§10): page (and paragraph) numbers as found in The Great Instauration and New Atlantis, ed. J. Weinberger, Crofts Classics (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1980).
2. Weinberger, "Introduction" to idem, p. viiif., follows Howard B. White, Peace Among the Willows: The Political Philosophy of Francis Bacon (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), pp. 104n30, 121f.
3. New Atlantis, p. 36.
4. New Atlantis, pp. 52ff. (§14).
5. New Atlantis, pp. 63ff. (§17).
6. Gen.11:26-29; 22:20-24; 24:15, 24, 47; 29:5. Or "Nachoran" (as Joabin calls him) may refer to Abraham's grandfather, Gen. 11:24f.
7. New Atlantis, pp. 46ff. (§6-10), with p. 45f. (§9).
8. New Atlantis, pp. 78 (§43), with p. 76 (§37). Laurence Lampert calls attention to Descartes' purely mechanical explanation of the pillar and cross in Meteorology VIII; see his "Who Rules in Bensalem?" (unpublished ms.).
9. New Atlantis, pp. 49-59 (§11-15).
10. Plato, Critias 113a-121d, with Timaeus 21e-25d.
11. Cf. Aristotle, Poetics 1451a37-b11. Whereas for Plato poetry imitates nature (see Republic 393c-398b, 595a-603c; cf. Aristotle, Poetics 1447a14ff. and passim, with Physics

- 194a22), for Bacon on the other hand poetry distorts history, viz. by exaggerating the heroic, the moral, and the rare in order to edify and enhance "the desires of the mind" over and against the constraints of nature (Advancement of Learning, Part II, in Works, ed. Spedding, Ellis, and Heath, vol. III, pp. 343ff.); cf. Jerry Weinberger, Science, Faith, and Politics: Francis Bacon and the Utopian Roots of the Modern Age (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 239-43; Robert K Faulkner, "Visions & Powers: Bacon's Two-Fold Politics of Progress," Polity XXI (1988-89), 116f. Cf. also Bacon, Essays #58 ("Of Vicissitude of Things").
12. For illuminating accounts, cf. especially White, pp. 112-26, and Weinberger, Science, Faith, and Politics, pp. 28-33.
 13. Republic 370b-376c.
 14. Republic 473c-d.
 15. Republic 549c-550c, 580c-583b.
 16. Republic 543a-548d.
 17. Republic 490c-d, 500b-d.
 18. Timaeus 21a-25e.
 19. Timaeus 26a-c.
 20. Timaeus 26d.
 21. Timaeus 26e. Socrates in his summary outline of the perfectly just city had appealed repeatedly to "nature": 17c, 18a, 18c, 18d; cf. 20b.
 22. Timaeus 29d, 30b, with 26e.
 23. Critias 121a-c.

24. On Bacon's own recognition of the "great distinction" between progress in "matters of state" and in the arts, see especially New Organon I.90; cf. also Wisdom of the Ancients #19, ("Daedalus, or the Mechanic").
25. Cf. Wisdom of the Ancients #13, ("Proteus, or Matter"). James C. Morrison, "Philosophy and History in Bacon," Journal of the History of Ideas XXXVIII (1977), 591ff., cites in this connection Bacon's Cogitationes de Natura Rerum III (trans. in Works V, 424f.); Richard Kennington, "Bacon's Concept of Mastery of Nature," unpublished ms., p. 5, cites among other things Valerius Terminus (Works III, 222): "To speak plainly and clearly, it is a discovery of all operations and possibilities of operations from immortality (if it be possible) to the meanest mechanical practice"--a discovery whose promise leads Bacon, in Kennington's words, pp. 21,23, "to stake all on the victory of art over nature."
26. Critias 121b.
27. New Atlantis, pp. 59-63 (§16).
28. New Atlantis, p. 59n117.
29. Cf. New Atlantis, p. 27 (§29).
30. If scientific technology outranks Christianity in Bensalem, then while the connotations of this term are Christian, its denotation might be any of the following: (a) Salomon's House, (b) Solamona, its founder, or (c) Bensalem itself.

"Bensalem" in Hebrew means "perfect son,"; cf. White, p. 152f.

31. New Atlantis, pp. 56, 58f (§15).
32. Cf. Bacon, Wisdom of the Ancients 24, ("Dionysus, or Desire"); Num. 13:20-27. See Marc A. LePain, "The Fruit of the Land: Biblical and Classical Allusions in Francis Bacon's New Atlantis," unpublished ms. White, pp. 142f, 170-78, suggests that the overtones of the feast as a whole are Egyptian, hence anti-biblical and anti-classical; cf., e.g., Timaeus 22bff.
33. New Atlantis, pp. 63-67 (§17).
34. What is said of prostitution seems meant, metonymically, for European marriage in general.
35. Gen. 19:1-11.
36. I Kings 17:18 and context. Instead of the more usual English transliteration "Zarephath" for the Hebrew name of the biblical city, the narrator in his reply to Joabin uses the Greek term as found in the Septuagint. Similarly, for the prophet's name he uses the Greek "Elias," whereas Joabin's aforementioned "Eliah" (New Atlantis, p. 64 [§17]) is closer to the biblical Hebrew. LePain, p. 27f., suggests that the narrator's appeal to the Greek points to Joabin's role as one who prophesies or moralizes only to strangers, not to his own people (who, according to Luke 4:24, would not listen anyway). In any case, the reader of I Kings 17 might well associate the putative sins of the widow's son

with either filial disobedience in general (Lev. 20:9, Deut. 21:18-21) or homosexuality in particular (Lev. 20:13, with 18:22, 24f.).

37. More, Utopia, trans. Paul Turner (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 1961), p. 103f. Plato, Laws 771e-772a, speaks of the nakedness of young men and women "within the limits a moderate sense of shame sets for each" as afforded by publicly supervised choral dances; cf. also 924e-925a: is the Athenian Stranger's stricter wording here meant to suggest that, in the absence of a father et al., there is a need for even closer inspection of the young men and women?
38. Cf. Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics 1155a22-b6.
39. II Sam. 11:1-12:24. Cf. also II Sam. 3:22-32, 10:8-12, 12:26-31, 14:1-20, 24:1-10, with I Kings 1:5-49, 2:1-6.
40. "Joabin" if Hebrew would be the plural of "Joab" (i.e., "many Joabs"), or if Latin would be the dual form (i.e., "double Joabs," as "Altabin" means "twice lofty"). Cf. Weinberger, "Introduction," pp. xvii-xix, xxiv-xxvi, on the Davidic Character of the Bensalemite regime, i.e., its need for Joabs. Cf., however, note 48, below. On the dangers of gazing on naked women, see also Bacon, Wisdom of the Ancients #10 ("Actaeon and Pentheus"), #11 ("Orpheus").
41. Hobbes, De Cive, Praefatio, with, e.g., Leviathan, ch. XIII; cf. Leo Struass, Natural Right and History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 184n23.
42. New Atlantis, pp. 67-69 (§13).

43. Thoughtful commentators divide on this issue: Laurence Berns ("Francis Bacon and the Conquest of Nature," Interpretation VII [1978], 17), Kennington (pp. 18-23), Morrison (pp. 600-606), Timothy Patterson ("The Secular Control of Scientific Power in the Political Philosophy of Francis Bacon," Polity XXI [1988-89], 457-80), Weinberger ("Science and Rule in Bacon's Utopia: An Introduction to the Reading of the New Atlantis," American Political Science Review LXX [1976], 865-85), and White (pp. 252-61) incline variously toward the former view; Faulkner (pp. 113f. and passim), Lampert ("Who Rules in Bensalem," unpublished ms., pp. 31ff.), and LePain (pp. 32ff.) to the latter. On the former reading, perhaps the most thoroughgoing "Baconian" analysis of Jewish history as a whole is Ellis Rivkin, The Shaping of Jewish History (New York: Scribner's, 1972); see my "Theological-Political Implications of Ellis Rivkin's Unity Concept" in a forthcoming volume of critical essays on his work, ed. Yaffe.
44. New Atlantis, pp. 69-81 (§19-55).
45. See note 25, above.
46. New Atlantis, p. 71 (§26).
47. See notes 8 and 46, above.
48. I Kings 2:5-6, with 1:5-49. Cf. note 40, above.
49. New Atlantis, p. 81 (§56).
50. Or are we left to imagine these habits to have been engineered or behaviorally conditioned under the all-seeing

yet unseen "eye" of Salomon's House or its political controllers? Consider the references to seeing and being seen at New Atlantis, pp. 43, 47, 49f., 59, 61, 64, 65, 67, 76, 78(¶3, 6, 11, 16[twice], 17[thrice], 37, 43), as well as the timely interruptions of messengers, passim; cf. Faulkner, especially pp. 127ff. Like sheep, then, the Renfusans and other Bensalemites would seem efficiently tended and attended to. Indeed, if the narrator somehow has in mind here the biblical Nathan's rebuke of David (notes 39 and 40, above), then does he imply by way of rejoinder that sheep are less vulnerable to predators when watched over in rich herds than when left alone in poor families?

51. Cf. Faulkner, pp. 133ff., who suggests that the political teaching of the New Atlantis is a deliberate if subtle transformation or corruption of traditional Christian theological-political teaching, in the direction of the modern mass state (including its more sinister features). Cf. notes 40 and 43, above.