

# Phil. 401: Discussion Questions

## Baconian Methodology

February 21st, 2017

**Readings:** Bacon. *Novum Organon*.

- Book I. Aphorisms 1-3,14-15, 19, 31, 39-44, 50, 70, 100-103.
- Book II. Aphorisms 1, 11-13 (you may skim the long lists), 18, and 20.

### Avoiding Error

1. Drawing on previous assigned readings, give concrete examples of each of the four types of “idols” (i.e., of the tribe, cave, marketplace, and theater).
2. Provide a general definition of each of the four types of idols.
3. The four types of idols are examples of what Bacon calls “idols of the mind.” Try to give a general definition of the phrase “idols of the mind.” In no more than a paragraph, explain why might Bacon have used the word “idol” in this context.
4. Bacon warns us to avoid relying on authority and on the word of others. Instead, he emphasizes the value of direct experience. Experimenters in the modern period, however, often relied on others. In which texts that we’ve studied have you seen such reliance? How was that reliance similar to and different from the reliance on authority and testimony criticized by Bacon?
5. In light of your answer to the previous question, compare Bacon’s attitude towards testimony and authority with Galileo’s assertion, “nothing physical which sense-experience sets before our eyes, or which necessary demonstrations prove to us, ought to be called in question . . . upon the testimony of biblical passages.”

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1. Compare your answer to the following question from last night's reading assignment. Then pick the best answer among your group, and try to improve that answer by providing further examples of what might belong in a table of instances, a table of nearby absences, and a table of comparisons for the phenomenon under discussion.
  - In no more than two paragraphs, explain what Bacon means by constructing tables of instances, tables of nearby absences, and tables of comparisons. Here, you should illustrate your claims using an example. Because Bacon explains how to construct these tables to discover the nature of heat, you may not use heat as your example.
2. Bacon uses his tables to make an inference about what heat is; he calls this the "first harvest" of his method. What is Bacon's conclusion?
3. Is Bacon's aim to investigate heat as we feel it? Why or why not?
4. Compare and contrast Bacon's hypothesis about the nature of heat with Aristotle's explanation of heat, considered as a secondary quality.