Protestant Intellectual Culture and Political Ideas in the
Scottish Universities, ca. 1600–50

Karie Schultz

➡ *For additional information about this article*
   https://muse.jhu.edu/article/847820

Protestant Intellectual Culture and Political Ideas in the Scottish Universities, ca. 1600–50

Karie Schultz

The relationship between Reformed and modern political thought has long preoccupied historians. Faced with persecution in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many Reformed intellectuals developed political theories to justify resistance to magistrates. Drawing on printed canonical works in this Reformed tradition—such as Theodore Beza's *De jure magistratum* (1574), the *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* (1579), and Johannes Althusius's *Politica* (1603)—some scholars have argued that the Reformed legitimized holy war as being waged at God's command to protect the true religion against idolatry and blasphemy.[1] Others have interpreted their ideas about self-defense, natural rights, and constitutionalism as central to secularization

[1] Edward Vallance, "Preaching to the Converted: Religious Justifications for the English Civil War," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 65, no. 3/4 (2002): 395–419; Glenn Burgess, "Was the English Civil War a War of Religion? The Evidence of Political Propaganda," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (1998): 173–201; James Turner Johnson, *Ideology, Reason, and the Limitation of War: Religious and Secular Concepts, 1200–1740* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975); Roland Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1960).

and the emergence of the modern state.[2] However, both interpretations are based predominantly on printed treatises that do not reflect the development of Reformed political ideas on a broad social basis. In this article, I look beyond printed texts to examine the teaching of political ideas in the seventeenth-century Reformed Scottish universities instead. Early modern universities were wealthy, powerful, and culturally significant institutions that educated thousands of students in philosophical and theological doctrines each year.[3] Students then transmitted the ideas they learned to the wider population through sermons, correspondence, books, pamphlets, and conversations. University education provides crucial insights into how ordinary individuals were trained to think about and understand the religious and political conflicts facing early modern Europe. The Scottish universities are especially ideal for an examination of Reformed political thought. Scotland was one of Europe's most staunchly Reformed polities, and religion deeply permeated its cultural landscape.[4] This half-century is also significant because many Scots who developed political theories in response to the British civil wars of the 1640s studied or taught at Scottish universities in the preceding decades. These institutions were thus essential training sites for ministers, lawyers, and statesmen who advanced political doctrines (many of which are commonly regarded as foundations of the modern secular state) to legitimize or denounce resistance to King Charles I.

In this article, I use Latin-language *Theses Philosophicae*, lecture notes, and student notebooks from 1600 to 1650 to reconstruct the teaching of political ideas at the five universities in existence at the time: St Andrews (founded 1410–13), Glasgow (1451), King's College (1495), Edinburgh (1583), and Marischal College (1592). I analyze how regents taught their students about four doctrines: virtue, the highest good, the role of law, and the purpose of civil authority. Through this analysis, I demonstrate that regents did not teach their students one universal Reformed perspective on

---

[2] Michael Baylor, "Political Thought in the Age of the Reformation," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Political Philosophy,* ed. George Klosko (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 227–45; Annabel Brett and James Tully, eds., *Rethinking the Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought,* vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

[3] Hilde de Ridder-Symoens, ed., *A History of the University in Europe, Volume II: Universities in Early Modern Europe (1500–1800)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[4] R. Scott Spurlock, "Polity, Discipline and Theology: The Importance of the Covenant in Scottish Presbyterianism, 1560–c.1700," in *Church Polity and Politics in the British Atlantic World, c. 1635–66,* ed. Elliot Vernon and Hunter Powell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 80–103.

political life. Instead, regents and students explored complex Augustinian and Aristotelian dimensions within Reformed thought about human nature, politics, and the civil state. University education challenged students to think about whether political participation was a duty mandated by God to control sinfulness and protect the true religion, or whether it was an exercise in free will and rationality for the good of the commonwealth. By focusing on university education rather than on printed works, it is possible to demonstrate that students in Reformed universities were not predetermined toward either perspective and that they made deliberate choices from cross-confessional intellectual traditions when responding to the conflicts of the 1640s. This analysis ultimately challenges us to reconsider studies of Reformed political thought which simplistically or monolithically portray these individuals as holy-war advocates or secular theorists whose ideas laid foundations for modern liberalism.

An examination of how regents taught their students about political life in the Reformed Scottish universities is timely. Scholarship on the early modern Scottish universities has long been plagued by a misconception that Scottish intellectual life was stagnant until the Enlightenment, an idea that Enlightenment *philosophes* also advanced.[5] According to this perspective, the focus on Aristotelian scholasticism in the universities meant that there was no significant innovation in teaching or curriculum until the Enlightenment.[6] Negative stereotypes about Scotland's religious culture further exacerbated this misconception. Hugh Trevor-Roper claimed that a "dictatorial, priestly, theocratic" Calvinist elite ruled Scotland, while Michael Walzer emphasized the country's "tightly disciplined social order, dominated by the 'elite of the word.'"[7] Such descriptions portrayed Scottish society as oppressed by a fanatical Reformed clergy, an oppression that likewise infiltrated the universities and prevented intellectual advancement. Indeed, the Scottish

---

[5] For views of Enlightenment *philosophes,* see David Allan, *Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment: Ideas of Scholarship in Early Modern History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 1–9.

[6] Christine M. Shepherd, "Newtonianism in the Scottish Universities in the Seventeenth Century," in *The Origins and Nature of the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. R. H. Campbell and Andrew S. Skinner (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1982), 65–85; Christine M. Shepherd, "Philosophy and Science in the Arts Curriculum of the Scottish Universities in the 17th Century" (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 1975); Hugh Kearney, *Scholars and Gentlemen: Universities and Society in Pre-Industrial Britain, 1500–1700* (London: Faber, 1970).

[7] Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century: Religion, the Reformation, and Social Change,* 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), 354; Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 127.

universities did require students to subscribe to a Protestant Confession of Faith to attend, forcing Catholic students overseas for their education.[8] But recent scholarship has challenged negative stereotypes about the Reformed nature of the universities by proving their cultural and intellectual significance before the Enlightenment. For example, Steven Reid discussed how Andrew Melville sought to develop an Aristotelian arts course "that embraced new and experimental approaches to humanist studies alongside the traditional Aristotelian curriculum" while elevating the study of divinity to train students in Reformed orthodoxy.[9] Following the drafting of the National Covenant (1638), the universities also emerged as arenas where the political and religious conflicts of the 1640s played out.[10] Reid analyzed how the Scottish Covenanters offered students practical instruction in rhetoric, logic, and divinity through a "systematic and carefully planned programme of reform," one that prepared them to serve the ministry effectively.[11] Salvatore Cipriano also demonstrated how "The universities were mobilized to promote the agendas of those in power and emerged as vital centers of identity formation in Scotland," especially during the 1640s and under Oliver Cromwell's rule.[12] These works have usefully revealed the universities' cultural value for confessionalization and identity-formation in pre-Enlightenment Scotland.

Other studies have proven that, contrary to previous assumptions, the seventeenth-century Scottish universities were far from intellectually stagnant. Aaron Denlinger, Giovanni Gellera, Alasdair Raffe, and Reid have demonstrated that these institutions operated at the forefront of international philosophical and theological debates in the period.[13] Scottish regents

---

[8] Tom McInally, *The Sixth Scottish University: The Scots Colleges Abroad: 1575 to 1799* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

[9] Steven J. Reid, *Humanism and Calvinism: Andrew Melville and the Universities of Scotland, 1560–1625* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 266.

[10] Salvatore Cipriano, "The Engagement, the Universities and the Fracturing of the Covenanter Movement, 1647–51," in *The National Covenant in Scotland, 1638–1689,* ed. Chris R. Langley (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2020), 145–60; Salvatore Cipriano, "The Scottish Universities and Opposition to the National Covenant, 1638," *Scottish Historical Review* 97, no. 1 (2018): 12–37.

[11] Steven J. Reid, "'Ane Uniformitie in Doctrine and good Order': The Scottish Universities in the Age of the Covenant, 1638–1649," *History of Universities* 29, no. 2 (2017): 13–41, at 38.

[12] Salvatore Cipriano, "Seminaries of Identity: The Universities of Scotland and Ireland in the Age of British Revolution" (PhD diss., Fordham University, 2018), 13.

[13] Aaron C. Denlinger, "Swimming with the Reformed Tide: John Forbes of Corse (1593–1648) on Double Predestination and Particular Redemption," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 66, no. 1 (2015): 67–89; Aaron C. Denlinger, "'Men of Gallio's Naughty Faith?': The Aberdeen Doctors on Reformed and Lutheran Concord," *Church History and Religious Culture* 92, no. 1 (2012): 57–83; Giovanni Gellera, "Reformed Scholastic Philosophy in the

engaged extensively with continental European intellectual trends, even if they did not incorporate them fully in the curriculum.[14] Additionally, many Scots studied or taught at Reformed universities abroad (especially in the Low Countries) where they established academic networks, learned new methodologies, and transmitted ideas back home.[15] Regents also contributed to the formation of unique institutional cultures through variations in their teaching. Christian Maurer showed how Scottish regents contested and negotiated Reformed doctrines about the Fall, predestination, and freedom of the will throughout the seventeenth century.[16] Crawford Gribben analyzed the differences in how Robert Leighton and David Dickson taught theology at Edinburgh in the 1650s, while Reid argued that the Aberdeen Doctors' approach to theological and philosophical teaching was "unique and highly progressive" compared to that of their contemporaries.[17] Such studies have unequivocally challenged the misconception that the pre-Enlightenment Scottish universities were oppressive or monolithic in their commitment to Aristotelian scholasticism and Reformed theology. Instead, the intellectual culture of these institutions enabled students and regents to engage with cutting-edge trends in philosophical and theological thought.

Seventeenth-Century Scottish Universities," in *Scottish Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century,* ed. Alexander Broadie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 94–110; Giovanni Gellera, "The Reception of Descartes in the Seventeenth-Century Scottish Universities: Metaphysics and Natural Philosophy (1650–1680)," *Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 13, no. 3 (2015): 179–201; Giovanni Gellera, "Natural Philosophy in the Graduation Theses of the Scottish Universities of the First Half of the Seventeenth Century" (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 2012); Alasdair Raffe, "Intellectual Change before the Enlightenment: Scotland, the Netherlands and the Reception of Cartesian Thought, 1650–1700," *Scottish Historical Review* 94, no. 1 (2015): 24–47; Steven J. Reid, "Reformed Scholasticism, Proto-Empiricism and the Intellectual 'Long Reformation' in Scotland: The Philosophy of the 'Aberdeen Doctors', c. 1619–c.1641," in *Scotland's Long Reformation: New Perspectives on Scottish Religion, c.1500–c.1660,* ed. John McCallum (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 149–78.

[14] Reid, "'Ane uniformite,'" 15.

[15] Raffe, "Intellectual Change," 26–27; Esther Mijers, "'Addicted to Puritanism': Philosophical and Theological Relations between Scotland and the United Provinces in the First Half of the Seventeenth Century," *History of Universities* 29, no. 2 (2017): 69–95; James K. Cameron, "Some Scottish Students and Teachers at the University of Leiden in the Late 16th and Early 17th Centuries," in *Scotland and the Low Countries, 1124–1994*, ed. Grant G. Simpson (East Linton: Tuckwell, 1996), 122–35.

[16] Christian Maurer, "'*A lapsu corruptus*': Calvinist Doctrines and Seventeenth-Century Scottish *Theses Ethicae*," *History of Universities* 29, no. 2 (2017): 188–209.

[17] Crawford Gribben, "Robert Leighton, Edinburgh Theology and the Collapse of the Presbyterian Consensus," in *Enforcing Reformation in Ireland and Scotland, 1550–1700,* ed. Elizabethanne Boran and Crawford Gribben (Farnham: Ashgate, 2006), 159–83; Reid, "Reformed Scholasticism," 150.

Despite the recent wealth of scholarship on Scottish intellectual life, the political ideas taught in the universities have not received the same level of analysis as philosophical or theological ones. This is partially a result of the apolitical nature of the university curriculum. Teaching overtly political doctrines (especially ones critical of monarchical power) would have been regarded as the indoctrination of students, and those who advanced controversial political ideas in the universities risked punishment.[18] Gellera observed that regents rarely engaged with political themes before the 1680s and that political philosophy was more "conservative and scholastic" than other disciplines.[19] Although regents did avoid discussing overtly political doctrines—such as royal supremacy and the legitimacy of resistance to civil authorities—learned reflections on how humans should live and engage in political life appeared within the study of ethics. Students and regents supplemented their analyses of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* with different Reformed approaches to human nature and the purpose of government. However, the most comprehensive overview of ethics teaching in the pre-Enlightenment Scottish universities to date—Christine Shepherd's thesis on the arts curriculum—focused nearly exclusively on evidence after 1670.[20] She presented the true innovations in ethics as ones which occurred in the latter half of the century, while evidence prior to 1670 simply showed a "mixture of Aristotelianism and Christianity" as regents trained their students to live as godly subjects.[21] This position wrongly perpetuates the idea that regents subordinated Aristotelian ethics to one monolithic body of Reformed theology throughout the early seventeenth century, a subordination that ultimately resulted in intellectual stagnation.

In this article, I make two historiographical interventions. First, I challenge this simplistic analysis of the teaching of ethics—and the political ideas that were discussed within the discipline—in the early seventeenth-century universities. *Theses philosophicae*, student notebooks, and lecture notes demonstrate how Scottish university regents navigated Augustinian and Aristotelian distinctions within Reformed thought regarding political participation, law, and civil authority. Even though the universities helped forge religious orthodoxy after the Scottish Reformation of 1560, regents did not subordinate their teaching on ethics and politics to one monolithic

---

[18] Richard Serjeantson, "Preaching Regicide in Jacobean England: John Knight and David Pareus," *English Historical Review* 134, no. 568 (2019): 553–88.
[19] Giovanni Gellera, "English Philosophers and Scottish Academic Philosophy (1660–1700)," *Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 15, no. 2 (2017): 213–31, at 217.
[20] Shepherd, "Philosophy and Science," 166–209.
[21] Shepherd, 168.

interpretation of Reformed theology. Rather, they exploited nuanced approaches to human nature and political life within an overarching Aristotelian curriculum. Second, this examination has implications for studies of Reformed political thought more broadly. It demonstrates that students in Scotland, one of the most staunchly Reformed countries in Europe, were not predetermined to think about political participation as a duty imposed by God for the advancement of the true religion. But they were not trained to see politics as a natural sphere based on rationality and free will either. Instead, they studied Aristotelian and Augustinian ideas about human nature and government from a cross-confessional perspective, ideas central to discourse surrounding the conflicts of the 1640s.

In what follows, I describe the source base for understanding the teaching of ethical and political doctrines in the Scottish universities. I then analyze variations in how regents approached four core ideas: virtue, the highest good, the role of law, and the authority of the civil magistrate. I situate these teachings within broader Augustinian and Aristotelian traditions that shaped the intellectual culture of the seventeenth-century Scottish universities. Finally, I briefly discuss the reception of these ideas within the political discourse of the 1640s. This analysis demonstrates that regents did not teach their students one monolithic corpus of Reformed political ideas. On the contrary, they explored multiple perspectives within Reformed thought about human nature and politics to teach their students to live as godly subjects in a covenanted nation.

I. THE SOURCE BASE

Theses philosophicae, student notebooks, and lecture notes provide critical insights into the political and ethical ideas that circulated in the Scottish universities. The philosophical theses (or graduation theses) comprise most evidence of teaching and were an essential element of academic life. At the end of each year, university regents authored a set of theses that students who were completing their four-year course defended publicly before other students, staff, and members of the local community.[22] The theses were then printed, usually by the local printer. According to Alexander Broadie, roughly 170 printed theses remain from the seventeenth century, but they represent only one-third of the entire number conducted

---

[22] Gellera, "Natural Philosophy," 14.

during the period.[23] While such theses survive from St Andrews, Edinburgh, and both colleges at Aberdeen, Glasgow did not print them until the 1640s.[24] The theses generally reflected the Aristotelian structure of the curriculum and included sections dedicated to four main branches of philosophy: logic, metaphysics, ethics, and natural philosophy.[25] The university curriculum covered multiple disciplines, but as Reid noted, "in every area of the arts curriculum Aristotle continued to be the central fount of knowledge to a near monolithic extent."[26] The content of the theses sheds light on the different approaches Reformed regents took to the teaching of ethical and political doctrines within an overarching Aristotelian framework.

However, there are some notable limitations regarding the use of the philosophical theses. First, these sources were created for oral performance and do not contain comprehensive explanations of the topics listed for discussion. The level of detail included in the theses also varied. As Gellera noted, "Given the variety of graduation theses and their broad spectrum, it is no surprise that the analysis can be detailed and long in some cases, and sketchy and incomplete in other cases."[27] Using the theses as evidence of teaching therefore requires some extrapolation from summative propositions. There are also challenges specific to using the ethics sections. The teaching of ethics took place during the third year of study and focused on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.[28] According to Shepherd, regents regarded ethics as a science that taught students how to live virtuously and their "emphasis was above all on the practical nature of ethics, and its usefulness as a guide to life."[29] As a result, regents "tended to cite authorities less frequently than in their teaching of other subjects," such as philosophy.[30] It is therefore difficult to trace the reception of ideas from continental European authors through citations in the ethics sections, especially in comparison to other disciplines. Even though the theses were often formulaic commentaries on Aristotle, the ethics sections still usefully reveal the types of ideas that students and regents examined from a range of perspectives. Additionally,

---

[23] Alexander Broadie, "Introduction: Seventeenth-Century Scottish Philosophers and their Universities," *History of Universities* 29, no. 2 (2017): 1–12, at 3.

[24] Broadie, 3.

[25] Gellera, "Natural Philosophy," 14.

[26] Reid, *Humanism and Calvinism,* 257.

[27] Gellera, "Natural Philosophy," 15.

[28] Peter John Anderson, *The Arts Curriculum [In Aberdeen from the Earliest Account to the Present Day]* (Aberdeen, 1892), 7.

[29] Shepherd, "Philosophy and Science," 168.

[30] Shepherd, iii.

Gellera, Maurer, Reid, and Shepherd have all demonstrated that the theses (despite their methodological shortcomings) are highly beneficial for analyzing the development of theological and philosophical ideas.[31] Lastly, student notebooks and lecture notes can be used as supplementary evidence to corroborate material in the theses. While notes exist in manuscript form for most Scottish universities, they too present technical challenges. Most consist of poorly written, damaged, or illegible Latin, which affects their readability and overall usefulness. Nevertheless, when examined together, the philosophical theses, lecture notes, and student notebooks provide critical insights into the numerous interpretations of ethical doctrines (and their implications for political thought) available to Scottish students.

II. VIRTUE AND THE HIGHEST GOOD

First and foremost, discussions of ethics commonly focused on how human beings might attain virtue and their highest good, both as individuals and as members of society. These ethical considerations also corresponded to reflections on the proper extent of human engagement in political life. Ideas about virtue pertained to both ethics and politics, two disciplines that focused on the individual and the community respectively. Ethics taught the individual to balance deficiency with excess to attain their own proper end, while politics was a discourse that considered how to direct the commonwealth (not just the individual) toward the good of all. Patrick Dun described this distinction between ethics and politics, or the individual and the community, in his lecture notes from Marischal College (1610–11). According to his notes on practical philosophy, ethics pertained to living wisely and considered human virtue, the highest good, and the ultimate end of human beings.[32] Ethics addressed how human beings might attain virtue (translatable as excellence) by striking the balance between the vices of deficiency and excess. His notes continued that the discipline of politics dealt with the wisdom directing the collection of many families, republics, and kingdoms.[33]

---

[31] Maurer, "'*A lapsu corruptus*'" 188–209; Reid, *Humanism and Calvinism*, chs. 6–8; Gellera, "Natural Philosophy," 14–20; Giovanni Gellera, "*Theses philosophicae* in Aberdeen in the Early Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Scottish Thought* 3 (2010): 109–25; Shepherd, "Philosophy and Science."

[32] Patrick Dun, Principal of King's College: lecture notes on the works of Aristotle, 1610–1611, MS 113, University of Aberdeen Special Collections, fol. 32r–33v, at fol. 32r–32v.

[33] Patrick Dun, fol. 32r.

Although politics and ethics were distinct disciplines, they were also complementary because the habits and character traits taught through virtue ethics contributed to the ethos of the entire political community.

This distinction between the individual and wider society appeared in a range of philosophical theses from the Scottish universities. In some theses, regents concentrated most heavily on the individual, frequently connecting ideas about moral virtue to an Augustinian view of human nature that emphasized sinfulness. For example, three sets of theses supervised by John Seton and James Sibbald at Marischal College between 1625 and 1627 touched upon the importance of cultivating the habits as part of attaining moral virtue.[34] Although these theses did not include extensive analyses of the will or original sin (given the summative nature of this source material), they stipulated that human beings would never be naturally inclined toward just and virtuous actions. Instead, humans needed to direct their will toward the four cardinal virtues described by Cicero: wisdom, justice, courage, and temperance.[35] While explicit ideas about sin were not established in the theses, all three sets demonstrated a high level of interest in the natural inclination of the human will to evil and the corresponding necessity of seeking individual moral virtue.

Theses supervised by Robert Baron at St Andrews (1621) similarly highlighted the human inclination to evil. Baron became one of the leading "Aberdeen Doctors" when he taught at Marischal College, but he presided over this set of theses earlier during his time as a professor at St Salvator's College.[36] The theses claimed that human beings, from their birth, had an innate propensity to submit to their carnal desires. According to the theses, the perspective that propensity toward evil was in the superior part of the human spirit, not only in the inferior part, appeared in the arguments that "Orthodox Theologians" (Reformed theologians) advanced against Roman Catholics.[37]

---

[34] James Sibbald, *Theses philosophicae* (Marischal College, Aberdeen, 1625), "Theses Ethicae" [henceforth TE] VIII–XIV; Sibbald, *Theses philosophicae* (Marischal College, Aberdeen, 1626), TE III.1–4; John Seton, *Theses philosophicae* (Marischal College, Aberdeen, 1627), TE I.7–8.

[35] Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On Duties*, ed. and trans. Benjamin Patrick Newton (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), Bk. 1, 21–86; Sibbald, *Theses philosophicae* (1626), TE III.1–4.

[36] This was probably the Robert Baron of the "Aberdeen Doctors" because he published his famous *Philosophia theologiae ancillans* in 1621 with the script: "Autore Rob. Baronio, Philosophiae Professore, in illustri Collegio s. Salvatoris." This places him at St Andrews in 1621 at the same time the theses were conducted. See also James Gordon, *History of Scots Affairs, from MDCXXXVII to MDCXLI*, 3 vols. (Aberdeen: Spalding Club, 1841), iii, 236.

[37] Baron, *Positiones et dispvtationes aliquot philosophicae* (St Salvator's College, printed in St Andrews, 1621), Disputatio Ethica [henceforth DE] III: "Quia voluntati cujuslibet hominis à nativitate inest propensio ad obsequendum desideriis carnis, & ad appeten-

Such a view of human depravity occasionally coincided with a coercive Augustinian perspective on political participation, one which characterized government as an institution created by God to restrain human sinfulness. Another set of theses conducted under Baron's supervision at St Salvator's College (1617) stated that human perfection resulted from spending time in society and helping friends.[38] This proposition suggested that sociable instincts drove humans to live together, but these instincts did not make them fully political in an Aristotelian sense. According to Aristotle, only by ruling and being ruled could people claim to be fully rational because they possessed an inherent desire for governance.[39] However, in Baron's theses, small scale communities and friendship, rather than rational participation in political life, were prioritized as central to happiness. As a result, his theses did not reflect a fully eudaimonic perspective on human engagement in political life. However, they did place importance on friendship, which for Aristotle was still a noble small-scale political community necessary for the good of the commonwealth.[40] Although Baron's theses were primarily formulaic treatments of moral virtue derived from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, they still raised important questions about how humans should participate in different levels of society and emphasized attaining individual moral virtue first and foremost.

There are few citations within these sets of theses to demonstrate which sources Sibbald, Seton, and Baron used apart from Aristotle. Yet their emphasis on human beings' natural inclination toward evil and the need to focus on moral virtue is unsurprising given the profound influence of Augustinianism on Reformed ideas about total depravity, and on Baron himself. As David Mullan convincingly argued, Baron in particular "was consistent with Augustinian theology: he saw the human will as driven ineluctably to evil deeds by the sinful nature passed on from parents to children."[41] The Reformed doctrine of total depravity had important political implications. There is a growing consensus among historians that Reformed authors viewed politics

---

dum objecta illicita, ut patet ex argumentis Theol. Orthodox. quibus probant contra Pontificios, concupiscentiam seu propensionem ad malum non solum in inferiori; sed etiam in superiori animae parte sede suam habere." All translations mine.

[38] Baron, *Positiones aliqvot philosophicae* (St Salvator's College, printed in Edinburgh, 1617), "Positiones Ethicae" [henceforth PE] X: "Ut est perfectio hominis in societate degentis & nati prodesse amicis suis."

[39] Aristotle, *Politics,* trans. Ernest Barker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 92.

[40] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* trans. David Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 242–43.

[41] David G. Mullan, "Theology in the Church of Scotland 1618–c.1640: A Calvinist Consensus?," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 26, no. 3 (1995): 595–617, at 606.

as a God-given means of protecting the true religion via the apparatuses of the civil state.[42] The depravity of human beings meant that God instituted government as a punishment for sin and gave magistrates coercive power over their subjects. While scholars have primarily connected Augustinian ideas about the city of man with Martin Luther's two kingdoms theology, other Protestant intellectuals such as Philip Melanchthon, John Calvin, and Peter Martyr Vermigli argued that the Christian magistrate must defend both tables of the Decalogue, including punishing sin and protecting the true religion.[43] Lambert Daneau also exhibited a coercive Augustinian perspective on politics when he highlighted the effects of original sin on both virtue ethics and the political order.[44] In this sense, the focus that some theses placed on individual moral virtue and sinfulness resembled a strand of contemporary Reformed debate profoundly shaped by Augustinian thought, one which also had vast implications for how Reformed individuals considered the purpose of government and the power of the Christian magistrate.

By contrast, other regents advanced an Aristotelian strand of political thought that portrayed society as the result of sociability, free will, and reason. This position encouraged political participation in a different way, urging subordination of the passions to civic virtue for the betterment of the entire commonwealth. The resulting focus on the community and civic virtue played a significant role in how some regents (generally those teaching at Edinburgh in the political center of Scotland) urged students to live as good subjects. Multiple theses from Edinburgh conducted between 1615 and 1640 emphasized civic virtue and political participation as central to human happiness. Civic virtue led the entire community toward its good and prioritized political relationships. Individuals could obtain civic virtue

---

[42] Michael Becker, *Kriegsrecht im frühneuzeitlichen Protestantismus: Eine Untersuchung zum Beitrag Lutherischer und Reformierter Theologen, Juristen un anderer Gelehrter zur Kriegsrechtsliteratur im 16. Und 17. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017); Glenn Burgess, "Political Obedience" in *The Oxford Handbook of the Protestant Reformations,* ed. Ulinka Rublack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 83–102; Matthew J. Tuininga, *Calvin's Political Theology and the Public Engagement of the Church: Christ's Two Kingdoms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); John Coffey, "The Language of Liberty in Calvinist Political Thought," in *Freedom and the Construction of Europe: Religious Freedom and Civil Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1:296–315; Christoph Strohm, "Melanchthon-Rezeption in der Ethik des frühen Calvinismus," in *Melanchthon under der Calvinismus*, eds. Günter Frank and Hermann Selderhuis (Stuttgart: Fromman-Holzboog, 2005), 135–57.

[43] Martin Luther, *Von welltlicher uberkeytt wie weytt man yhr gehorsam schuldig sey* (Wittenberg, 1523), fol. B3–C1; Philip Melanchthon, *Loci praecipua theologici* (Wittenberg, 1559), 161–62; John Calvin, *Institutio Christianae Religionis* (Geneva, 1559), 4.20.9, 552–53; Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Loci Communes* (London, 1576), 1014–48.

[44] Lambert Daneau, *Ethices christianae libri tres* (Geneva, 1577), I.1, 2–3.

by participating in and guiding political life toward its proper end while practicing respectable actions in the community. According to a set of theses presided over by James Fairley at Edinburgh (1615), the individual's highest good was two-fold. It consisted of individual contemplation as well as the attainment of civic virtue by partaking in noble actions in the temporal kingdom.[45] Human beings could attain individual virtue by perfecting their habits, but political participation was crucial for securing their highest good. There was no obvious implication that individuals should withdraw from political life to combat their innate sinfulness through contemplation. Rather, an inherent benefit emerged from partaking in the political order.

Theses conducted under William King's supervision at Edinburgh (1616) demonstrated a similar interest in the political community above the individual or small-scale societies. King's theses stipulated that Aristotle's books on morality did not explain how to achieve the good of every single individual but rather how to achieve the public good.[46] His theses asked students to consider how individuals might commit moral actions not just for their own benefit but for the benefit of the wider society. Both sets of theses reveal that students were actively thinking about whether rational participation in political life produced happiness by prioritizing the commonwealth over the individual, a perspective different from the Augustinian emphasis on political life as necessary for controlling sinfulness.

Another favorable approach to human participation in politics appeared in theses presided over by Andrew Stevenson at Edinburgh (1625) that discussed the importance of civic engagement through the perspective of honor. According to the theses, honor was not fundamentally defined by the merit of an individual but by their honest actions, including the habit of committing respectable actions in public.[47] This perspective highlighted the Ciceronian and Aristotelian distinction regarding the definition of honor. For Aristotle, a human being who sought honor alone ran the risk of becoming dependent on external factors and the esteem of the masses.[48] By contrast, Cicero argued that honor was one of the highest goods and that it

---

[45] James Fairley, *Theses philosophicae* (Edinburgh, 1615), TE VIII.5: "Duplex erit summum bonum, seu duo gradus summi boni; unus in praeclara actione virtutis civilis, alter in contemplatione collocatus, quorum uterque elevat ad optimum sui generis, & nos in sui genere postremam perfectionem perficit."

[46] William King, *Theses philosophicae* (Edinburgh, 1616), TE I.5: "In parte communi, seu libris de moribus non bonum singulorum hominum, sed praesertim bonum publicum explicatur."

[47] Andrew Stevenson, *Theses philosophicae* (Edinburgh, 1625), TE I.1: "Definitur hic honor non fundamentaliter pro meritis, sed formaliter pro proba actione honorantis."

[48] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 59–60; 254.

should be emphasized in teaching the young. He was less concerned about honor being predicated on the approval of the masses because human beings were born with a natural respect for honorableness (*honestas*). As Cicero stated, "for we truly call 'honorable' that which, even if praised by no one, is praiseworthy by nature."[49] As Stevenson's theses at Edinburgh demonstrated, students were aware that honor consisted of more than mere approval by others and that it also required engagement with the community. Indeed, honor resulted from publicly committing honest and respectable actions, all of which depended on active participation in political society. The final good of human beings thus included political engagement rather than individual contemplation or the perfection of habits alone.

This distinction between the individual and community was also significant for discussions of the highest good. Aristotle argued that the highest good of human beings was happiness, which he defined as the flourishing that arises when humans fully exercise their rationality through contemplation and engagement with others in political life.[50] Both elements of happiness were discussed and emphasized differently in the aforementioned theses. But other approaches to happiness appeared in university teaching. Baron's theses from 1617 outlined many sources of happiness, including wealth, virtue, pleasure, honor, and good fortune.[51] James Graham's notes, taken during his time as an MA student at St Andrews (1642–43), also addressed competing ideas about the highest good and happiness. His notes were derived from the lectures of John Alexander, a regent at St Salvator's College,[52] and consisted of annotations on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. They discussed various definitions of the highest good drawn from Aristotle and other authors, including Cicero.[53] The discussion revolved around whether the definition of the highest good might vary in response to specific situations. Whereas victory would be the highest good for the military, in other circumstances or for other individuals, the highest good might be different. Even though regents did not advance one single, sustained perspective, philosophical theses and lecture notes about the definition of the highest good indicate a sustained interest in how it might be attained both by individuals and communities.

---

[49] Cicero, *On Duties*, 28.

[50] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 64–66.

[51] Baron, *Positiones* (1617), PE V–IX.

[52] Robert Smart, *Alphabetical Register of the Students, Graduates and Officials of the University of St Andrews, 1579–1747* (St Andrews: University of St Andrews Library, 2012), 229.

[53] Notes by James Graham on the lectures of John Alexander, 1642–43, msLF1112.C42, University of St Andrews Special Collections, chs. 12–13.

Again, there are few citations to demonstrate intellectual borrowing in this material. However, these theses resembled an Aristotelian strand of political thought in university teaching, one commonly advanced by neo-Thomist and Catholic scholastics.[54] The emphasis on government as a product of human will and rational participation gave human beings greater agency over political life, a common tenet in Catholic scholastic political theory. For example, Robert Bellarmine argued that *dominium* had origins in free will and reason rather than grace.[55] It was not a product of divine law but of the law of peoples (*ius gentium*). Bellarmine claimed that God created political power only in the sense of giving humans an innate instinct to be governed and elect magistrates. As Stefania Tutino observed, the idea that temporal authority derived its legitimacy from nature was "standard fare in neo-Thomist thought" and enabled Catholic scholastics to challenge Protestant claims that "the legitimacy of government resided in God's grace."[56] This approach to government, one derived from Aristotelian and neo-Thomist views on human nature, therefore had some reception in the teaching of ethics within the Scottish universities.

However, enthusiasm for rational political participation was not unusual among Reformed intellectuals either. Some continental European Reformed authors, such as Bartholomäus Keckermann, emphasized the importance of virtue for kingship. Drawing on Aristotle, Keckermann argued that magistrates must rule in such a way that their subjects will desire to possess both virtue of character (*virtus morum*) and virtue of the mind (*virtus mentis*).[57] Civil authorities did not simply restrain sinfulness, preserve order, and protect the true religion. Instead, they directed citizens to become virtuous individuals through the model of their own rule. Scotland also had its own powerful Aristotelian tradition that focused on ideas about civic virtue and citizenship, exemplified in works by George Buchanan and David Hume of Godscroft.[58] Both authors maintained that citizens

---

[54] Annabel Brett, *Changes of State: Nature and the Limits of the City in Early Modern Natural Law* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

[55] Robert Bellarmine, *De potestate summi pontificis in rebus temporalibus* (Cologne, 1610), ch. 5.

[56] Stefania Tutino, *Empire of Souls: Robert Bellarmine and the Christian Commonwealth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 40.

[57] Bartholomäus Keckermann, *Systema disciplinae politicae* (Frankfurt, 1625), I.32, 513–14.

[58] George Buchanan, *A Dialogue on the Law of Kingship Among the Scots: A Critical Edition and Translation of George Buchanan's De Iure Regni apud Scotos Dialogus,* ed. and trans. Roger A. Mason and Martin S. Smith (London: Routledge, 2017); David Hume, *History of the House of Douglas and Angus* (London, 1644).

had a responsibility to partake in the political order and promote the common good. Buchanan, for example, argued that citizens should actively rule their communities through the exercise of civic virtue.[59] He also stressed that citizenship (denying one's private passions for the public good), was a capability inherent in each human being.[60] Additionally, Melville's poetry portrayed human beings as more capable than the Augustinian conception of total depravity suggested.[61] Thus, the more favorable interpretation of the human ability to attain civic virtue and participate rationally in political life reflected Catholic scholastic views of government and a powerful Aristotelian strand within Reformed thought. It is therefore evident that regents across Scotland did not simply merge Aristotelian ethics with a blanket "Christianity" as Shepherd initially claimed. Even as regents contributed to the formation of a Reformed orthodoxy in the universities, they exemplified different Aristotelian and Augustinian distinctions regarding the human capability to participate rationally in political life.

III. LAW AND THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE

Apart from discussions of virtue and the highest good, the philosophical theses contained reflections on the role of law and the authority of the civil magistrate. Most stipulated that laws educated citizens to act virtuously and contribute to the public good. For example, James Reid's theses at Edinburgh (1610) stated that all things were properly ordered by laws toward the public utility or the maintenance of civil society, while theses supervised by John Ray at Marischal College (1643) claimed that the law served as "the measure of moral actions" and showed humans what ought to be done.[62] Andrew Stevenson's theses from Edinburgh (1625) also stated that "the law teaches virtuous actions, it prohibits actions of vice."[63] His theses referenced Book 1,

---

[59] Arthur H. Williamson, "George Buchanan, Civic Virtue and Commerce: European Imperialism and its Sixteenth-Century Critics," *Scottish Historical Review* 75, no. 199 (1996): 20–37, at 25.

[60] Arthur H. Williamson, "The Rise and Decline of the British 'Patriot': Civic Britain, c. 1545–1605," *International Review of Scottish Studies* 36 (2011): 1–32, at 13.

[61] Steven J. Reid and Roger A. Mason, eds., *Andrew Melville (1545–1622): Writings, Reception, and Reputation* (London: Routledge, 2014).

[62] John Ray, *Theses philosophicae* (Marischal College, Aberdeen, 1643), TE I.6: "Lex est mensura actionum moralium."

[63] James Reid, *Theses philosophicae* (Edinburgh, 1610), TE II: "Justitia universa est, quae omnia quae a legibus recte latis praescribuntur efficimus ad publicam utilitatem promovendam, seu civilem societatem conservandam vel paucis, est obedientia erga omnes leges

Chapter 8 of Aristotle's *Ethics*, which specified that the end of politics was making citizens of good character who were capable of committing noble acts.[64] Alongside propositions about honor, the theses asserted that virtuous actions do not result from human nature and that legislators must direct human beings toward good and honest actions through the law.[65] Even though the theses maintained that humans would not act virtuously by nature, they also suggested that the law played an interventionist role in making people good. William King's theses from Edinburgh (1616) contained similar propositions related to Book 6, Chapter 8 of Aristotle's *Ethics* on legislative wisdom. According to King's theses, the instruction of good men could, on the one hand, be done through books pertaining to morality. On the other hand, instruction could be made through the laws and institutions that had been established in a rightly formed republic.[66] As these sets of theses demonstrated, laws ensured that humans would live virtuously and justly in political communities since they would not be inclined to do so by nature. Such theoretical approaches to the nature of law made it clear that the civil state should direct human beings toward their individual and common good to combat sinfulness.

Other theses reflected more specifically on natural law and its relationship to humans' supernatural end. Patrick Gordon's theses, conducted at King's College in 1643, stipulated that the unwritten law (natural law) was nothing other than "the reason of divine wisdom, according to which is directed all actions and motions," a position that reflected Aquinas's definition of natural law as participation in the eternal law.[67] The theses additionally contextualized natural law alongside scripture, using Romans 1:19 to argue that human beings know about God through the law of nature written on their hearts. However, as the theses also attested, natural law was insufficient to guide human beings toward their supernatural end. It could only show

---

in civili societate"; Andrew Stevenson, *Theses philosophicae* (Edinburgh, 1625), TE II: "Lex autem virtutum actiones praecipit, vitiorum prohibet."

[64] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* 71.

[65] Stevenson, *Theses philosophicae* (Edinburgh, 1625), TE II.2–4.

[66] King, *Theses philosophicae* (Edinburgh, 1616), TE I.6: "Recta institutio viri probi universem ac quo ad fundamenta probitatis, pertinet ad libros de Moribus: proximem tamen & publicem debet fieri per leges rectem conditas, & particulares institutiones in rectem formatam Republicam."

[67] Patrick Gordon, *Theses philosophicae* (King's College, Aberdeen, 1643), TE I.6: "Lex non scripta est aeterna vel naturalis: illa nihil aliud est quam ratio Diviniae sapientiae secundum quod est directiva omnium actuum et motionum."; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 19151927), Ia–IIae, q. 91. a. 2.

them that God exists and that he should be worshipped.[68] There was therefore a limit on what natural law could do, and the civil state could not direct humans toward their supernatural end by regulating worship.

Apart from considering the purpose and definition of law, some theses addressed how citizens, the magistrate, and laws might work together to advance the highest good of the community. According to King's theses (1616), "Citizens are the essence of the republic. The rank, position and, chiefly, character of the magistrate is the form of the republic. Finally, the laws are the soul and spirit from which the life of the republic arises."[69] Similar reflections on the symbiotic relationship between subjects, laws, and political authority also appeared in Reid's theses from Edinburgh (1618). These touched upon ideas about the king's legal sovereignty when they stated that "no one except the supreme magistrate is named to declare law, possess power to make law, and execute law."[70] The theses also stated that "The king ought to be in charge of human laws, not be subject to them."[71] However, as Reid's theses claimed, a person who conformed to laws in a depraved republic and respected an evil administration could not be considered a good citizen.[72] Subjects had a duty to obey when the magistrate created just laws to advance the common good, but they should not conform to evil laws hostile to the end of a properly ordered commonwealth.

While most theses contained abstract reflections on the law, two sets of theses by King expanded on overtly political ideas about tyranny and the duty of obedience. When Aristotle defined tyranny in the *Nicomachean Ethics,* he stated that the tyrant pursues his own good rather than the public good, and that "tyranny is the evil form of one-man rule and the bad king becomes a tyrant."[73] King's theses from Edinburgh (1616) expanded on Aristotle's argument and discussed the proper actions to be taken in response to a tyrannical ruler. The theses claimed that tyrants did not rule simply accord-

---

[68] Gordon, *Theses philosophicae* (Aberdeen, 1643), TE I.7.

[69] King, *Theses philosophicae* (Edinburgh, 1616), TE VIII: "Cives sunt proxima Reipublicae materia, Magistratuum ordo & conditio ac praecipue constitutio primi magistratus est forma Reipublicae, leges denique sunt anima & spiritus ex quarum usu vita Reipub[licae] consurgit."

[70] James Reid, *Theses philosophicae* (Edinburgh, 1618): TE I.1: "Non nisi supremus Magistratus jus loquens, potens, & vivum simpliciter appellatur."

[71] Reid, *Theses philosophicae* (Edinburgh, 1618), TE I.3: "Rex praesse debet legibus humanis, non subjici."

[72] Reid, *Theses philosophicae* (Edinburgh, 1618), TE III.3: "Civis qui depravatae Reipub[licae] legibus obtemperat, secundum quid, & respectu illius administrationis: at absolutem, & simpliciter civis bonus non appellabitur."

[73] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* 155.

ing to their arbitrary will. Rather, they had been seized in the mind (*mente captis*) and had been goaded to violent actions. Tyrants did not choose to rule according to evil ways by their arbitrary will and must be considered powerless in the grip of their passions.[74] The theses suggested that misguided passions were the grounds for tyranny, demonstrating an interest in how sinful human nature might affect the political order. Another set of King's theses (1620) outlined appropriate measures to be taken in response to a tyrant: "If therefore, having been placed under a tyrant, we would be forced to commit a large crime or even permit ourselves to be killed, it would have to be permitted that we would be murdered; because at the time that we suffer, we are bound to endure by means of a calm spirit as we are overcome by violence."[75] King therefore asked his students to consider the extent to which subjects owed obedience to the magistrate, even if that meant bearing punishment for refusing to follow tyrannical commandments.

Like the theses which dealt with virtue and the highest good, these too lacked extensive citations beyond Aquinas and scripture, making it difficult to discern the sources that regents used to develop their ideas on law and civil authority. However, there are distinct similarities between their ideas and the contemporary debates that took place in Scotland and continental Europe. For example, the emphasis that Reid's theses placed on the king's superiority to the law resembled theories of absolute sovereignty advanced by sixteenth-century Catholic jurists, including Jean Bodin, William Barclay, and Adam Blackwood.[76] Bodin's theory of absolute sovereignty was fundamentally legislative, for he maintained that a sovereign ruler did not simply judge or enforce the law but acted as its author.[77] This meant that an absolute ruler could never be subject to the commands of an inferior or to the oversight of legislative bodies.[78] Barclay and Blackwood, two Scottish Catholic jurists, further

---

[74] King, *Theses philosophicae* (Edinburgh, 1616), TE II.5: "Ideo Tyranni dicuntur agere non quod volunt, sed quod iis mentecaptis videtur, ac stimulo perciti violento, unde impotentissimos esse concluditur."

[75] King, *Theses philosophicae* (Edinburgh, 1620), TE X.7: "Collocati igitur sub Tyranno si cogeremur vel magnum scelus patrare, vel permittere nos interfici, permittedum esset ut interficeremur; quia tunc patimur, & aequo animo tolerare debemus quatenus violentia superamur."

[76] Skinner, *Foundations*, ii, 289; Jean Bodin, *Six Books of the Commonwealth*, trans. M. J. Tooley (Oxford, 1955). See also Adam Blackwood, *Adversus Georgii Buchanani dialogum, de iure regni apud scotos, pro regibus apologia* (Poitiers, 1581); Adam Blackwood, *De coniunctione religionis et imperii libri duo* (Paris, 1575); William Barclay, *De potestate papae; an & quatenus in reges & principes seculares ius & imperium habeat* (Hanover, 1617).

[77] Bodin, *Six Books,* 28.

[78] Bodin, 88.

developed Bodin's theory to challenge Buchanan's argument that "the Law is more powerful than the King, and the People more powerful than the Law."[79] Although this sixteenth-century debate was not directly referenced in the theses, regents and students would certainly have been aware of the wider discourse on absolute sovereignty, further evidenced by the holdings of Bodin's *De republica libri sex* in the Edinburgh and Marischal College libraries.[80]

Such ideas discussed in the Scottish universities also resembled political theories which emerged in the 1640s. For example, royalist bishop John Maxwell authored a foundational treatise in 1644—one which prompted Samuel Rutherford to respond with his famous *Lex, Rex*—in which he argued against the Covenanters' validations of resistance. He drew on ideas about absolute sovereignty derived from Bodin, Blackwood, and Barclay to such an extent that David Stevenson recognized him as "the first in Britain's mid-seventeenth century revolutions to place Bodin's concept of sovereignty at the centre of royalist theory in a published work."[81] Maxwell directly cited the three jurists as those most "excellent and eminent in the knowledge of the Law," who wrote divinely and rationally about the "sacred right and person of Kings."[82] Maxwell used their work to argue that the king created the law and therefore could not be held accountable by inferior magistrates, such as the parliamentary estates or ecclesiastical authorities.[83] Maxwell's argument therefore reflected the treatments of law that appeared in theses from the Scottish universities in earlier decades. Another royalist, John Corbet, similarly rejected the Covenanters' agenda by arguing that they improperly took upon themselves a power "not only Directive, but also Coactive" to force the king to obey civil and ecclesiastical laws rather than simply urge his obedience.[84] The nature of the law and the king's relationship to it therefore proved essential for royalist discourse, bearing resemblance to similar ideas which had been debated earlier through the teaching of ethics.

Furthermore, Scottish royalists emphasized subjects' duty of obedience to all magistrates, even tyrants, similar to the position advanced in King's theses from 1620. For example, Maxwell argued that "Christian obedience

---

[79] Buchanan, *De jure regni apud Scotos,* trans. Philalethes (London, 1689), 59.

[80] Press Catalogue, 1636, EUA IN1/ADS/LIB/1/Da.1.14, Edinburgh University Special Collections; Catalogue of Thomas Reid's Library, 1624, MARISCHAL/5/1/3/4/1, Aberdeen University Special Collections.

[81] David Stevenson, "The 'Letter on Sovereign Power' and the Influence of Jean Bodin on Political Thought in Scotland," *Scottish Historical Review* 61, no. 171 (1982): 25–43, at 43.

[82] John Maxwell, *Sacro-sancta regum majestas* (Oxford, 1644), 144.

[83] Maxwell.

[84] John Corbet, *The Ungirding of the Scottish Armour* (Dublin, 1639), 17.

and sobriety teacheth us to reserve the rectifying of the Soveraigne, and his Errours in Government, to God himselfe."[85] If the magistrate issued a commandment which contradicted natural or divine law, subjects must obey God's law instead while bearing the consequences. The Aberdeen Doctors, of whom Sibbald and Baron were two leading members, also engaged in a pamphlet war with the Covenanters following the drafting of the National Covenant in 1638. They accused the Covenanters of rebellion and political sedition while maintaining that subjects had an essential duty to obey their magistrates. Drawing on 1 Peter 2:13–14, the Doctors concluded that, "it is unlawfull for subjects in a monarchicall estate, (such as this Kingdome of Scotland) to take Armes for religion, or for anie other pretence, without warrand and power from the Prince, and Supreame Magistrate."[86] While the Doctors' opposition to the National Covenant was also certainly motivated by their Episcopalian and pro-monarchical views (perhaps more than by their abstract reflections on political participation), they too embraced an Augustinian view of government that focused on the unchallengeable coercive authority of the civil magistrate as a justification for obedience. Ideas about law and authority discussed in the Scottish universities therefore resembled contemporary intellectual trends and reflected the development of royalist political theory during the 1640s.

However, it is also notable that ideas about the duty of subjects and magistrates to protect and defend the true religion through the force of arms (an argument common in Reformed printed works on resistance) did not appear in universities during this period. Covenanting political theory commonly justified resistance as the protection of Reformed Protestantism against Charles's idolatrous and "popish" reforms.[87] But the absence of such a theory in university teaching is not surprising. Most theses from the period analyzed (1600–40) were written before Scots needed to think seriously about armed resistance. Additionally, articulating ideas critical of monarchical authority and supportive of resistance would have been dangerous for regents who might have lost their university positions. It is likely for these reasons that the few overtly political discussions in the teaching of ethics reflected justifications of absolute sovereignty and obedience rather than resistance for the sake of religion. However, some university regents did demonstrate extensive engagement with Aristotelian ideas about political life, crucially urging students to think of civic participation in ways

---

[85] Maxwell, *Sacro-sancta,* 157.
[86] John Forbes, *Duplyes of the Ministers and Professors of Aberdene* (Aberdeen, 1638), 26.
[87] Samuel Rutherford, *Lex, Rex; or, the Law and the Prince* (London, 1644).

foreclosed by the Augustinian emphasis on sinfulness, obedience, and coercive government.

As this examination has demonstrated, the teaching of ethics (and intrinsically connected political doctrines) at the Scottish universities did not include the simple subordination of Aristotelian ethics to one monolithic Reformed perspective on politics. Although regents guided their students to live in a godly and virtuous manner, their approaches to how students should engage in political life differed. On the one hand, some regents demonstrated a coercive Augustinian approach to the temporal kingdom, arguing that God ordained magistrates to restrain sinfulness and protect the true religion. This often meant that subjects must obey their rulers, even tyrannical ones. On the other hand, some regents advanced an Aristotelian perspective that encouraged political participation as an exercise of free will and human rationality. This gave humans agency over political life in a way that the coercive Augustinian interpretation excluded. Although ethics teaching at the universities was intentionally apolitical, the ideas raised about virtue, law, and civil authority reflected broader cross-confessional traditions of political thought across Scotland and continental Europe. Regents ultimately asked their students to consider multiple ways of engaging in political life for the benefit of the individual and the community. Focusing on the teaching of these doctrines on a broader social basis (rather than on the printed works of Reformed political theory, which were often authored to defend resistance) highlights multiple strands of Reformed thought about how humans should engage in politics. This analysis ultimately challenges monolithic perceptions of the Reformed as either holy war advocates who saw government as crucial to the protection of true worship, or as precursors to secularization who viewed the state as a sphere for rational participation apart from religion. The teaching of ethics and politics within the Scottish universities therefore provided students with a variegated intellectual framework for approaching political life, one that they adapted to create their own languages of political legitimacy during the civil wars of the 1640s.

University of St Andrews.