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Introduction: New Studies on Seventeenth-Century Scottish Philosophy

Until recently, Sarah Hutton could say quite correctly that ‘the seventeenth century is something of a blind spot in the history of Scottish philosophy’ and that, as a result, ‘the seventeenth-century [Scottish] hinterland of the Scottish Enlightenment has hitherto remained almost entirely *terra incognita*’ (Hutton 2015, 4, 3). In similar terms, Aaron Garrett and James Harris have suggested that there might be

intellectual roots of Enlightenment thought to be found in the Scottish philosophy of the seventeenth century. We believe that it is too soon responsibly to offer a hypothesis about what those roots may be. Too little is known as yet about the philosophical culture of the pre-Enlightenment period in Scotland (Garrett and Harris 2015, 4).

In the past few years, there has been a collective effort to investigate seventeenth-century Scottish philosophy. This effort originated primarily, but not exclusively, from the Leverhulme project *Scottish Philosophers in Seventeenth-Century Scotland and France* (2010–14), led by Alexander Broadie. Several publications have appeared which include (but are not limited to): two edited volumes on a general history of seventeenth-century Scottish philosophy (Broadie 2017; Broadie 2020); one journal special issue on tolerance regarding religion (Maurer and Gellera 2020); several articles in journals (e.g. Gellera 2015; 2017a; Raffe 2015; Schultz 2022) and in edited volumes on cognate areas (e.g. Broadie 2017; Fergusson and Elliott 2019; Broadie 2021); a volume of translations (Broadie forthcoming); and monographs on Andrew Melville and the universities (Reid 2011), on the Scots in France (Tucker 2020), and on James Dalrymple, Viscount Stair (Bogle 2023). Research on James Dundas (c.1620–1679), First Lord Arniston, a judge and a philosopher, comprises a critical edition and translation of the *Idea philosophiae moralis* (1679) (Broadie and Gellera forthcoming), a philosophical introduction (Gellera forthcoming) and several articles (e.g. Broadie 2013; Broadie in Reid and McOmish 2017; Gellera 2019; 2020). Some recent works have drawn on seventeenth-century Scottish philosophy to shed light on relevant aspects of the eighteenth century (e.g. Ahnert 2015; Heydt 2018; Maurer 2019; articles in Garrett and Harris 2015). As a result, seventeenth-century Scottish philosophy is a much more familiar territory than it was when Broadie originally ventured into ‘Some seventeenth-century texts’ (Broadie 2009, ch. 5.5).

The present special issue of the *Journal of Scottish Philosophy* is the first entirely dedicated to the seventeenth century and comes on the heels of the recent interest in seventeenth Scottish philosophy. It comprises five articles which discuss six authors who were either professional philosophers or had profound philosophical interests. They are James Sibbald (c.1595–1647), university regent and Aberdeen Doctor; Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661), philosophical theologian, Presbyterian minister and Westminster Assembly divine; two Catholic Scots, Robert Balfour (c.1555–c.1621), Aristotelian scholar and William Chalmers (c.1596–c.1678), scholastic and Jesuit; James Dalrymple (1619–1695), Viscount Stair, legal theorist, judge and philosopher; and Archibald Pitcairne (1652–1713), philosophical physician. The articles focus on specific aspects of these authors’ thought in original ways in terms of the content discussed, some methodological suggestions, and an interdisciplinary scope which includes views from theology, law and medicine, the three higher faculties in the early modern universities.

In the first article, Matthew Baines takes on the question of the direct or indirect influence of the metaphysics of John Duns Scotus (1265/66–1308) on early modern Scottish scholasticism. Baines focuses on the graduation theses of James Sibbald, an Aberdeen Doctor and ‘the most Scotist of the Scottish regents’. Baines argues that Sibbald is a ‘direct Scotist’ in the metaphysics of essence as well as in ‘qualified pluralism in the body-soul composite’, both taken from Scotus directly, without the mediation of early modern Jesuits such as Fonseca or Suárez. Baines also weighs in on the question about the definition and use of the category of Scotism, long and hotly debated in Reformed studies (see Burton’s paper for a selected bibliography) and is relevant for historians of philosophy as well. He makes the interesting suggestion that Scotism is best defined in a flexible and case-by-case way, ‘according to a principles-based approach’ and not according to a quasi-falsificationist approach which seeks to define Scotism around some supposedly central views.

In the second article, Simon Burton discusses Samuel Rutherford’s Scotism. Rutherford is an excellent case study on the relations between theology and philosophy in seventeenth-century Scotland. He was a ‘philosophical theologian’ who was at home in both the medieval and modern scholastic traditions, was deeply implicated in politico-theological controversies, and was directly influential on the university curriculum, the main locus of philosophical production in Scotland. Burton argues that Rutherford was influenced by Scotism via the fourteenth-century theologian Thomas Bradwardine, and suggests that more attention should be paid to Augustinianism as a background of Reformed thought. On a methodological level, Burton resists the tendency to apply a univocal or ‘monolithic’ meaning of Scotism, as well as to expect that a philosopher or theologian was rigidly committed to Scotism or Thomism throughout their work. He illustrates this point in the case of physical premotion, a theory associated with Thomism and Domingo Báñez especially, which Rutherford deploys in a generally Scotist metaphysics.

The third article by Alexander Broadie turns our attention to two ‘Scottish voices that contrast with predominant [Reformed] voices’: the Scottish Catholic philosophers Robert Balfour and William Chalmers. Broadie makes a substantial contribution to our knowledge of two philosophers who have been largely neglected by scholars despite being among the most accomplished and high-quality philosophers from early modern Scotland. The late medieval Scottish scholastic tradition, represented most notably by John Mair (c.1467–1550), continued on both sides of Catholic and Reformed confessional divide. Broadie analyses a central doctrine in the so-called confessionalisation of early modern scholasticism: the (meta)physics of the Eucharist. Within the limits to orthodoxy imposed by the Council of Trent (1545–63), Scotism animated a debate on the Eucharist vis-à-vis Thomism, represented here by Chalmers and Balfour respectively. Their differences aside, however, Chalmers and Balfour are committed to a Catholic philosophy of the Eucharist grounded on the possibility of the existence of the accidents independently of their substance, a view firmly rejected by the Scottish Reformed philosophers.

In the fourth article, Stephen Bogle investigates the moral theory of James Dalrymple, Viscount Stair, by recurring to his legal works as well as to the lesser-known theological works (see also Bogle 2023). Bogle’s argument is that, besides being a jurist, Stair was also a moral philosopher. This is ‘perhaps harder to spot’, Bogle suggests, because his moral philosophy is ‘embedded in his legal treatise’, something which goes against the grain of today’s consensus that law and morality are (and should be) separate matters. But they were not in the seventeenth century: ‘a moral theory, for Stair, implied metaphysics, epistemology but also a legal theory’. Law is, therefore, a specific aspect of the more general, God-given,

moral law. Bogle's article suggests that a closer investigation of philosophy and law in the seventeenth century is very promising. Stair features rarely, if ever, in accounts of natural law in seventeenth century Scotland which typically focus on Gershom Carmichael (e.g. Heydt 2018; Gregg 2009). This bespeaks a very contemporary separation between (history of) law and (history of) philosophy which, as Bogle reminds us, was not part of the mindset of seventeenth-century authors.

In the fifth article, Sebastiano Gino investigates the medical philosophy of Archibald Pitcairne, how he was guided by Newtonianism and by the ideal of the mathematisation of the empirical sciences. Gino identifies three philosophical assumptions in Pitcairne's medical thinking: 1) methodological: medical knowledge should be in a deductive system; 2) epistemological: knowledge is sound only when 'reduced to mathematical laws'; and 3) ontological: blood is the animating substance of all life. Pitcairne was an enthusiastic proponent of iatromechanism, that is the 'theory and practice of medicine according to the principles of mechanical philosophy', which he based on Newtonianism as the model for scientific inquiry in natural philosophy. Pitcairne along with other Scots such as Colin Maclaurin played an important role in the early dissemination and acceptance of Newton's ideas. Gino also suggests that Pitcairne likely thought of applications of the Newtonian method to other disciplines beyond physics, on account of his belief in a continuum between natural philosophy, morality and politics.¹

The articles of this special issue further confirm Broadie's view that:

With regard to its philosophical culture, the century between the Age of Reformation and the Age of Enlightenment was demonstrably not a mysteriously dark age. On the contrary, it was an age in which there flourished in abundance the intellectual vigour that one might reasonably have expected given the philosophical achievements of the flanking centuries (Broadie 2020, 3).

Two historiographical questions therefore present themselves. The first question concerns the relations between the Reformation and seventeenth-century philosophy. The articles by Baines, Burton and Broadie contribute to situating seventeenth-century Scottish scholasticism in the broader areas of Catholic and Reformed studies, with their primary focus on the period from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century. The articles by Baines and Burton also argue for the 'Broadie thesis' (see Broadie 1995) that there was, in Burton's words, 'an important Scotist tradition, long flourishing in [...] Scotland' before the Reformation. The readers of the *Journal of Scottish Philosophy* are familiar with the second question concerning the 'hinterland' or the 'roots' of the Scottish Enlightenment. The articles by Bogle and Gino contribute to our understanding of the philosophy of the late seventeenth-century and they do so by suggesting, for example, that the relations of law and philosophy in Stair, and of medicine and philosophy in Pitcairne can be described in terms of a 'holistic approach'. Similarly, the Enlightenment literati are acknowledged to have applied a 'holistic approach' to philosophical questions (Broadie 2003, 5). While the importance of Reformed beliefs for both seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy is acknowledged, the articles by Bogle and Gino further suggest that the relations between philosophy, law and medicine constitute a promising new venue for research on seventeenth century Scottish philosophy, one that

¹ An earlier version of this article was given at the conference *La nature. 6es Journées suisses d'histoire*, Université de Genève, 29 June–01 July 2022. On Pitcairne, see also Gino 2020, ch. I and II.

complements research on theology.² Again with Broadie, ‘Such facts as these need to be in the open if the aim of the historian of philosophy is, as it should be, not simply to make sense of the writings of past philosophers, but to understand what those writings meant to the philosophers who wrote them’ (Broadie 2020, 10).

One of envisaged outcomes of this special issue is, therefore, to bring together readers from Reformed and Enlightenment studies on account of their respective interests in seventeenth-century Scottish philosophy. The underlying historical and methodological assumption is that there is a continuity (albeit one ‘amidst variety’) in terms of beliefs, principles and philosophical questions which warrants the investigation of seventeenth-century Scottish philosophy as a discernible unity, in a long (and ultimately unpredictable) trajectory from Reformation to Enlightenment. Just as it is difficult to make sense of Sibbald, Rutherford, Balfour and Chalmers without the philosophy and theology of the late sixteenth century, it is equally difficult to make sense of Stair and Pitcairne without a knowledge of how philosophy and theology developed and transformed during the seventeenth century. The perspectives from the Reformation and the Enlightenment arguably bring to the fore some characteristic aspects of seventeenth-century (Scottish) philosophy which can be spelled out in terms of a negotiation between continuity and change. So, ‘it is important not to overlook the continuities with the past, and the shaping influence of the seventeenth century’ (Hutton 2015, 223), especially in Scottish studies where Reformation and Enlightenment tend to dominate. As our understanding of seventeenth-century Scottish philosophy improves, so do the questions of its relations with the Reformation and the Enlightenment.

The recent concerted investigation has prompted a change of opinion about seventeenth-century Scottish philosophy. It is now implausible to dismiss it as theologically subservient, philosophically shallow and historically irrelevant. What did the seventeenth-century Scottish philosophers think about themselves and philosophy? There is evidence of a self-awareness and self-appreciation among the philosophers, including in the universities.

The first example is *Philosophia illachrymans*, a one-of-a-kind public lecture authored by David Leech (c. 1600/05–c. 1657/64), professor of philosophy, given in the auditorium of King’s College, Aberdeen on the graduation day of 26 July 1637.³ The lecture gives us an insight into Leech’s thoughts about philosophy in Scotland shortly before the National Covenant (1638) and the First Bishops’ War (1639–40). The dedicatee is (probably) George Gordon (c. 1590–1649), marquess of Huntly, one of most prominent Catholic politicians in Scotland. Leech proclaims himself ‘protector of philosophy’ (‘Philosophiae assertor’). The full title is: ‘a lament on behalf of philosophy and of the Scottish philosophers (especially those of the north)’.

When thinking about the customs of the present century, Leech begins, ‘I deplore the lamentable tragedy of our most innocent Philosophy’ (Leech 1637, 2).⁴ The merits of philosophy are not acknowledged or rewarded in Scotland, in favour of theology, grammar,

² For the broadening of the canon in Enlightenment studies, see chapters in Garrett and Harris 2015; and in Broadie and Smith 2019. In seventeenth century studies, see Reid and MacOmish 2017 for Scottish literature; Fergusson and Elliott 2019 for theology; Jaffro in Broadie 2020 and Bogle 2023 for law.

³ David Leech was a Church of Scotland minister, a royal supporter, a poet and a university regent. Leech was part of the network of the Aberdeen Doctors. He graduated MA at King’s College with John Forbes of Corse (1593–1648), son of Bishop Patrick Forbes. His appears on Forbes’s *Theses philosophicae* (Aberdeen: Edward Raban, 1624).

⁴ ‘Innocentissimae nostrae PHILOSOPHIAE miserabilem deploro calamitatem’. The *Philosophia illachrymans* has no page numbers. I have numbered the first page of the text (folio 2r) as page 2. Henceforth, Emphasis is original.

medicine and law: ‘philosophy alone, partly because of the injustice of the present times partly because of people’s neglect, languishes in a dark spot in utter silence’ (Leech 1637, 3–5, 5).⁵ But, Leech retorts, what is the point of being a most hardy farmer or healthy physician if philosophy did not provide advancements in knowledge and practice, such as new empirical knowledge and tools? These can be credited only to ‘the light of philosophy, and to the grinding labour of the philosophers’ (Leech 1637, 9–10).⁶ Scottish society’s disregard for the philosophical profession begets the gravest affliction of the philosophers, poverty. Poverty makes it impossible to have a tranquil mind and a most free philosophizing (Leech 1637, 6, 7–8). As a result, ‘deprived of the necessary means’, many ‘live the rest of their lives on the move, having bid farewell to their native land, willing or not. Poverty convinced them, but poverty is an ill adviser’ (Leech 1637, 11).⁷ Among these philosophical *réfugiés* because of poverty (‘prae paupertatem’) are the celebrated William Chrichton (c.1535–1617), a Jesuit deeply involved in international and Scottish politics, Robert Balfour (c.1555–c.1621), a Catholic Aristotelian scholar, and Gilbert Jack (Jacchaeus, *bapt.* 1577–1628), a Reformed with Arminian tendencies and philosophy professor in Leiden. Chrichton is ‘without a match in philosophical subtleties’, Balfour is ‘a steadfast scholar of Aristotelian subtleties, who moved over to France out of necessity’, and Jack ‘displaced by a similar hardship’ is now ‘the darling of Leiden’s literary scene’ (Leech 1637, 11–12). Interestingly, Leech praises their philosophical achievements and acumen despite their unorthodoxy or outright ‘apostasy’, thus indicating some resistance against the idea that philosophy should be judged along confessional lines only.

The Latin text of *Philosophia illachrymans* is not always straightforward and is replete with classical-humanist references which are, arguably, a statement of intention in their own right. At one point, Leech polemically compares the tasks of the philosophy professors to those of ‘Paedonomi’ (public magistrates responsible for policing male youth in ancient Greece, mentioned in Aristotle, *Politics* bk. IV, ch. 12), and refers to the etymology of ‘bursarii’ (‘academic stipend-holders’) as ‘bribe takers’. But, rhetoric aside, Leech’s grievance seems clear enough: the woes of Scottish philosophy at home are due to society’s disregard for the philosophical profession, which results in a lack of funding. It is not due to a supposed absence of philosophical talent, for the Scots do not naturally ‘wrap up obscure matters in dark clouds’ (notice the play on words: ‘An quaeso quod Scoti nos σκοτίας nube obvolvamur?’), Leech 1637, 13).⁸ Instead, ‘there will be many among us Scots who will compete with Scotus in subtlety and with Thomas in erudition’ (Leech 1637, 19).⁹ Leech attributes high value and autonomy to philosophy, the ‘most free and most desirable’ of the human disciplines (Leech 1637, 15).

Fourty years and several major political events later, simmering tensions between philosophers and theologians resurface in the *Theses philosophicae* written by Alexander Grant, regent at St Leonard’s College, St Andrews in 1676. The Grant theses are a good example of the Aristotelo-Cartesian eclectic philosophy which constituted the curriculum in the Scottish universities from the 1670s onwards. The general tone is set in Thesis 1 where it

⁵ ‘Sola, sola interim illa nostra [...] PHILOSOPHIA, partim temporis injuria, partim hominum incuria, in obscuro profundissimi silentii angulo obtorpet’.

⁶ ‘Hoc quicquid operae est, PHILOSOPHICO lumini & PHILOSOPHORUM molimini unice ascribendum erit’.

⁷ ‘Hic, necessariis orbatus subsidiis, residuum vitae peregrinando transigens, natali solo nolens volens valedicere cogitur, paupertate malesuada suadente’.

⁸ ‘Σκοτία’ means ‘darkness’, ‘gloom’, as in *Matthew* 10:27: ‘What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light’ (*King James Version*).

⁹ ‘Amodo inter nos qui cum Scoto Scoti in subtilitate, qui cum Thoma in eruditione decertarent non pauci’.

is written that the great advancements in the arts are due especially to Descartes' works, who was 'born under a lucky star'. The theses include an appendix, purportedly written by the students, which critically breaks down the *Anatome Cartesianismi* (London 1676) by Alexander Pitcairne (d.1695), published the same year as Grant's graduation theses. There is little doubt that, in an Episcopalian-controlled university, Grant publicly criticised Pitcairne's anti-Cartesianism also with an eye to his Presbyterianism.¹⁰ But, on the final page, Grant elaborates on the theses' opening statement and hints at disagreements between philosophers and certain theologians concerning the universities and, in general, the present times. Those who accuse Descartes of atheism and scepticism, Grant contends, have no valid arguments and foment many

unfortunate and unfair grievances *about the idleness of the present century, and about our own schools* (there is no doubt that the author [i.e. Pitcairne] has in mind the British academies) *which falter and lack a firm footing in both philosophy and theology*. These are [Pitcairne's] own words in *Anatome [Cartesianismi], art. 56*.¹¹

As university regents, Leech and Grant passed on their beliefs about the importance and autonomy of philosophy to their young students who remembered them and, perhaps, put them into practice later in their lives, as they became ministers but also teachers, merchants, lawyers or physicians. Leech's self-awareness as a philosopher takes on an additional and intriguing dimension. In his polemical assessment of the material conditions of the philosophical production in Scotland, Leech arguably also gave an early account of 'Scottish philosophy'.

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¹⁰ Opposition to Descartes was more common among Presbyterians. On Pitcairne, see Raffe 2015, 35–36.

¹¹ 'Miseras, sed injustas fundit querelas *de ignavia hujus aevi, deque scholis nostris* (procul omni dubio Britanniae [sic] Academias intelligit) *titubantibus, nusquam pedem figentibus, nec in campo philosophico nec theologico; ipsius verba sunt anatom. Artic. 56*'. Quoted (with modifications) from Gellera 2017b, 186–7. Descartes uses the expression 'pedem figo' ('to set down a firm foot') in *Meditation II* to describe his initial inability to find a way out of the sceptical doubt.

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