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Giovanni Gellera

Introduction

I shall investigate aspects of the philosophy curriculum that Thomas Reid studied during his student years in Aberdeen, and shall therefore be focusing on the decade or so from about 1720. A few theses from the Arts Faculty of that period survive. They are by P. Hardie (1719, 1722), J. Anderson (1720), D. Verner (1721, 1730), G. Turnbull, Reid's regent (1723, 1726), and W. Duff (1732).[1] I believe that in order to assess the nature of philosophy teaching in early eighteenth-century Aberdeen, graduation theses must be read with reference to the philosophy of the period but also must be included in a longer and established tradition of teaching, which reaches back into the seventeenth century. I shall trace some debates and themes back to the 1680s, with a view to shedding light on the graduation theses from the 1720s.[2]

My main sources are a form of text peculiar to Scottish universities, the graduation theses (usually under the Latin title of *Theses philosophicae*), which were written by the regent for the class of students. In the 1720s, a graduation thesis is a work of about 8–12 pages in quarto, while in the previous century it can even take the form of a short treatise (up to 120 pages, as for Andrew Cant, *Theses philosophicae*, Marischal College, Aberdeen 1658) or, more rarely, of a short commentary on Aristotle. Graduation theses usually cover all

[1] Patrick Hardie, *Dissertatio Philosophica de Immortalitate Animae*, Aberdeen 1719, SBL 1719 N 1, AUL; John Anderson, *Theses philosophicae*, Aberdeen 1720, SBL 1720 N 1; David Verner, *Dissertatio Philosophica de Passionibus*, Aberdeen 1721, SBL 1721 N 1, AUL; Patrick Hardie, *Theses hasce Philosophicas*, Aberdeen 1722, SBL 1722 N 2, AUL; George Turnbull, *Theses philosophicae de Scientiae Naturalis cum Philosophia Morali Conjunctione*, Aberdeen 1723, SBL 1723 N 1, AUL; *Theses academicae de pulcherrima mundi cum Materialis tum Rationalis Constitutione*, Aberdeen 1726, SBL 1726 N 1, AUL; David Verner, *Dissertatio Philosophica de Finibus Bonorum et Benevolentia*, Aberdeen 1730, Sp Coll BG57-k.34, GUL; William Duff, *Dissertatio Philosophica, de Natura et Legibus Materiae*, Aberdeen 1732, SBL 1732 N 2.

[2] Christine M. Shepherd in her Ph.D. thesis *Philosophy and Science in the Arts Curriculum of the Scottish Universities in the 17th Century* (Edinburgh 1975) set the agenda for later study of philosophy teaching in Scotland in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century.

areas of philosophy, offering in a concise and precise format the sum of the undergraduate curriculum. Given the significant freedom granted to regents, these works are not repetitive and standardized; rather, regents expound their own philosophy.

Thanks to the graduation theses of the 1720s we now have a brief yet revealing insight into the philosophy of the two colleges of Aberdeen, King's and Marischal. Regents were discussing some of the most debated topics of the early eighteenth century, with particular attention to physics and philosophy of mind. Graduation theses display both tradition and innovation. On the one side, 'tradition' means the rich background stemming from the seventeenth century: Scottish academic philosophy was taught in the Scholastic fashion, and it appears as a lively, debateful common philosophy lasting from the Reformation until at least the start of the Enlightenment. Key aspects of Scottish academic philosophy in the seventeenth century are the influence of Scholasticism in the shape of a Reformed Scholasticism and the uninterrupted tie with continental philosophy. As regards the latter, Scottish regents in the 1660s quickly adopted Cartesian elements in their teaching, in such a way as to permit us to speak of 'Scottish Cartesianism'. On the other side, 'innovation' points to the beginnings of the Scottish Enlightenment.

The graduation theses show evidence of these great philosophical movements, and I shall seek to show that Scottish Reformed Scholasticism did not die out in the seventeenth century but continued in the eighteenth, thus prompting the question of its influence on the Scottish Enlightenment. Until at least the 1720s all developments in academic philosophy occurred sometimes in contrast with, sometimes as a further development in continuity with Scholasticism, but always with an eye to Scholasticism, which was the main philosophical background and was a significant part of the philosophy that Reid's teachers learnt as students. I shall suggest that early modern philosophy was not the only background of the Aberdeen regents, that they were still committed to the Scholastic way, and, finally, that this legacy with the past might have decisively influenced some features of the early Aberdeen Enlightenment.

In order to understand the type of philosophical text at issue, further historical details are required. The authors of these works were the regents in charge of the four-year curriculum; the theses were not written by the students. This is the most distinctively Scottish feature of graduation theses. In the rest of Europe, universities favoured the practice of individual graduation theses, written by the students. In the 1720s (and until Reid's *Orations* around

the 1750s) Aberdeen colleges still maintained the regenting system, and class graduations theses were part of the system.[3] They consist of paragraphs of variable length, usually arranged in the order of the teaching during the four years Arts curriculum (logic, metaphysics, ethics, physics), summing up the most important and debated theories.

The occasion for the writing of these theses was the graduation ceremony, which took the form of a public debate among students before local authorities, students' families and members of the university, following the medieval practice of *disputationes*. Students were supposed to engage in debate by defending or attacking a thesis, mainly in order to show their logical and rhetorical skills. Despite the *ad hoc* nature of the theses, they are invaluable source materials for the historian of philosophy. Regents were free to teach their own doctrines on many topics, and in no way are graduation theses (and philosophy teaching) a mere repetition of an impersonal, 'official' philosophy.

With regard to the strictly philosophical theories, external political and religious authorities did not shape the teaching in significant ways. Throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, theses show continuity and unity which allow the historian of philosophy to read them without reference to the historical events which shaped modern Scotland. This does not mean that universities as a whole did not suffer or benefit from such political and religious influence: the history of universities is rich with depositions and appointments of regents on the basis of changed political and religious conditions. What I mean is that the content of the philosophy taught was unaffected by external authorities. Two considerations might explain this evidence: 1) graduation theses are part of the undergraduate teaching, whose aim was to be philosophically advanced but also pedagogically effective. The Scholastic curriculum was still held in high esteem, and universities resisted the several attempts to reform the curriculum. 2) There is evidence in the theses that the philosophy taught had a Reformed character, but further political or religious divisions within Scotland did not play a role at the undergraduate level of university life.

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[3] This is not true for all Scottish universities. Edinburgh and Glasgow abandoned the regenting system in 1707–8 and 1727 respectively, later followed by St Andrews (1747). Aberdeen colleges were the last, Marischal in 1753 and King's in 1800. To my knowledge, the only example of class graduation theses in Arts in the seventeenth century written by a student is to be found in G. Meldrum, *Theses philosophicae* (Marischal College, Aberdeen 1659): in the *Nuncupatio*, p. 6, the regent warns the readers that the *Theses mathematicae* were written by Gulielmus Sanderus, who is listed among the candidates to graduation on the same page.

An example can be taken from political philosophy, a discipline which by its nature is open to changes according to political events. For a period after 1707 Aberdeen teaching in political philosophy continued to have much the same content that it had a century earlier. Regents still taught the traditional Scottish Scholastic political philosophy of the early seventeenth century, without mention of authors such as G. Buchanan, or of any of the events which preceded or led to the Acts of Union. University political philosophy insisted for example on the divine origin of political authority, on the absolute power of monarchs and on the traditional parallel between state and family. Many of the developments of seventeenth century political philosophy are thus rejected. This prompts the question of the social influence of university teaching, since generations of clergymen and laymen were taught a philosophy apparently unrelated to historical events in Scotland.[4]

I am not directly concerned here with either Reid's *Orations* or with Turnbull's theses, on which scholarly work has already been done.[5] In Thomas Reid's *Orations* and earlier graduation theses, two main disciplines appear to be at the centre of the debate: on the one side philosophy of mind and on the other an engagement with the heritage of the past (an approach that today we would possibly call history of philosophy). Until Reid's time this engagement took the form of an explicit rejection of Scholasticism in favour of the new philosophy and science. Yet, this rejection might be less clear-cut than commonly believed. As I will show, regents in Aberdeen taught a philosophy that was original in many aspects, that originated and influenced debates, and that contributed to the philosophical formation of Thomas Reid, but that was nonetheless a philosophy still much indebted to Scholasticism.

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[4] In political philosophy, Gershom Carmichael in Glasgow is a remarkable exception. J. Martin's *Positiones philosophicas* (Marischal College, Aberdeen 1681), are a set of theses almost entirely ad hominem against Buchanan, and are very representative of academic political philosophy.

[5] As a short and not complete list: P. Wood, *The Aberdeen Enlightenment: the Arts curriculum in the Eighteenth Century* (Aberdeen, 1993, part 1); A. Broadie's and P. Wood's contributions to T. Cuneo and R. van Woudenberg (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid* (Cambridge, 2004); A. Broadie, *A History of Scottish Philosophy* (Edinburgh, 2009), ch. 6. Reid's *Orations* have been published and translated: W. R. Humfries (ed.), Thomas Reid, *Philosophical Orations of Thomas Reid* (Aberdeen, 1937); D. D. Todd (ed.), trans. A. D. Sullivan, *The Philosophical Orations of Thomas Reid* (The Journal of the History of Philosophy Monograph Series, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1989).

Philosophy of mind

Descartes set much of the philosophical agenda in Scotland after his first appearance in the graduation theses written by Andrew Cant for Marischal College in 1654. From 1680 to 1700, all regents in Aberdeen were more or less Cartesian. After this date the debate was still influenced in respect of form and content by Descartes, even if regents started to endorse Newtonianism in an enthusiastic way. Nevertheless, even at the peak of Scottish Cartesianism around the 1670s Aberdeen regents were suspicious of some Cartesian themes, such as the role of scepticism in philosophical enquiry. Regents seem not to have fully endorsed Descartes' use of scepticism as the starting point of philosophy though they also believed Descartes had finally shown scepticism to be wrong. This apparent contradiction can probably be best explained in terms of the role that faith and revealed theology played in Scottish Scholasticism in the seventeenth century: scepticism is first ruled out by true faith and revelation, and Descartes' work was welcomed as a convincing philosophical argument against scepticism. With some qualifications, regents in the early eighteenth century still read Descartes in the same way.[6]

Philosophy of mind was taught in a Cartesian form. We find a traditional definition of the Scholastic equivalent of philosophy of mind in Chauvin's *Lexicon*, published in 1692: '*Pneumatology* [this is the Scholastic term for what we now call philosophy of mind] *is the science which studies the spiritual substance, or mind, as such. […] In particular, it deals with the Divine, Angelic and human mind*'.[7] In the Scholastic curriculum it finds its place in metaphysics, understood as the science of spiritual substances, which is a common understanding of metaphysics in Scotland in the seventeenth century. I believe that a metaphysics which concentrates on spiritual substances and relegates the study of *ens* (being) to a secondary role is a feature of Scottish Reformed Scholasticism, a feature which predates Descartes. Given the serious incompleteness of present-day

[6] Another interesting feature of Scottish Cartesianism is the inversion of the relation between the Cogito and God. In *Meditationes II–III*, Descartes moves from the certainty of the Cogito to the certainty of God in the 'analytical' way, while regents favour a 'synthetical' exposition of the philosophical preminence of God over the Cogito. It appears that the role of scepticism is more limited in the interpretation of Descartes's philosophy given by the regents.

[7] E. Chauvin, *Lexicon rationale sive Thesaurus philosophicus*, Rotterdam 1692, art. Pneumatica. Chauvin's original text: pneumatology is a *"scientia quae contemplatur substantiam spiritualem, seu mentem, qua talem […] accuratius tractat in specie de mente Divina, Angelica et humana."* All translations are mine.

accounts of Protestant Scholasticism, it seems artificial to label this approach as 'Reformed' *tout court*: the qualification 'Scottish' is necessary. According to the regents, the subject of pneumatology is included in that of metaphysics, and pneumatology gradually became more important in the curriculum.[8] After Descartes regents dropped the analysis of angelic minds to focus on divine mind and primarily on human mind. Scottish regents are not an exception in this shift from metaphysics to philosophy of mind.

All regents in the 1720s hold that every substance is either spirit [*spiritus*] or body [*corpus*], and that the two differ in that spirit is immaterial and unextended, its main attribute being *cogitatio*, whereas matter is extended, divisible and possesses figure, the main attribute being *extensio*. This starting point is Cartesian, even if regents go beyond Descartes in two key aspects:

1) both *cogitatio* and *extensio* are the main attributes of spirit and matter, but are not their respective essences. When we approach the 1720s it is clear that regents dropped essentialism, as it appears from, for example, their claim that we can be certain of the existence of the soul, but cannot know its essence.[9] In so claiming, they are extending the Cartesian doctrine of our ignorance of the essence of movement to all essences. Regents claim that we have a clear idea of spirit and matter, but that we do not know their essences. It also seems that the Newtonian approach to gravity (our fundamental ignorance about what gravity is, even if we can give a mathematical and physical description of its behaviour) influenced this claim. The reception of Newton, no less than of Descartes, found its place in the philosophical agenda of the regents: for example, we read in Peacock 1714 that Newton discovered the true essence of spirit and matter. According to Peacock, the new science took the place of Scholasticism in the discovery of the essences of things, which is not Newton's position.[10]

2) The Cartesian 'dogma' that mind is always thinking and that we are always conscious of our mental processes is usually rejected after the 1690s,

[8] Anderson 1720, § IV, claims that metaphysics follows logic, and metaphysics explains '*the general affections of all things*' ('*Rerum omnium generales affectiones*') and the first principles of things. The analysis of spirits starts from the metaphysical division of all beings in substance and accident (§ VI), and is called '*de* Spiritibus *scientia*' (§ VII).

[9] Anderson 1720, § VIII: '*Unicuique patet propria Mentis Existentia; ejusdem tamen Essentia haud aeque perspecta est, neutiquam vero consistit in Cogitatione, nullam quippe praeter* actualem *agnoscimus, quae omnis, Mentis respectu, merum est Accidens sive Modus.*' Duff 1732, § VII: '*Hinc autem minime affirmamur, intimam vel totam materiae essentiam, nobis manifestam [esse]*'; only God knows it.

[10] George Peacock, *Theses philosophicae*, Aberdeen 1714, § VII: '*Hanc corporis essentiam, optime illustrat Newtonus, ostendens corpus esse substantiam extensam, solidam et mobilem*'.

while it was accepted in the 1690s. In brief, the reception of Descartes and Newton deeply influenced the regents, but interpretation followed reception: regents were always engaging with contemporary philosophies, yet never endorsed them without scrutiny.

The two main faculties of spirit or mind are intellect and will.[11] Regents differ on whether we can say that intellect is only passive and will only active. In the 1720s this is the dominant position, which, with some qualifications, is to be found in medieval Scholasticism and Descartes. Intellect is understood to be passive because it perceives, or 'receives' the ideas, while will is active because it is the directive, and therefore motive principle of the mind. It is very unlikely that regents taught this theory without reference to Scholastic doctrines. For first, they engaged in proving Scholasticism obsolete up to the time of Reid (Reid himself is not an exception, as the *Orations* show), and this proves that Scholasticism was still debated. Second, regents were aware of the deep novelty represented by the recent advances made by scientists from Bacon to Newton, for they thought of themselves as living in an age crucially discontinuous with Renaissance and late medieval philosophy. Despite this conscious rejection of Scholasticism, graduation theses show a still strong link with the recent past, manifesting some deeply-rooted and long-lasting doctrines that regents did not expressly ascribe to Scholasticism.

Activity and passivity were understood by regents in the 1720s as unambiguous terms. This attitude took hold by the 1690s, and is well exemplified in Peacock 1693: matter is passive, *motus* (local movement in this context) is the active principle in the physical world.[12] Much of the later dichotomy between activity and passivity was shaped by the structure of this physical theory. Regents appear to have rejected (or simply abandoned) the Scholastic doctrine of act and potency, which, in the form it took in the Scottish universities in the seventeenth century, offered a twofold analysis of each concept: activity and passivity are not predicated of any physical thing without qualification, for something in act can always be in potency to something else and conversely something in potency to something can be in act, even if the act is imperfect (e.g. is a movement). Only God is active absolutely speaking. The stricter opposition found its way into the philosophy of the regents. For example in Verner 1721 we read of the activity of the intellect which is 'perceiving' and also 'forming' (*formare*) the perceptions of good and evil,

[11] Regents seem to employ the Latin *mens* and *spiritus* with the same meaning.

[12] George Peacock, *Theses philosophicae*, Aberdeen 1693, § VI: '*Materia est principium passivum […] Motus est principium activum qui non est de essentia materiae, sed a Deo Opt. Max.*'

which reminds us of the kind of activity ascribed by Scholastics to the 'agent intellect'. Verner offers a holistic account of the activity of mind, since mind is one in essence and in action, and it is wholly active (when desiring) and wholly passive (when perceiving), so that mind is active *and* passive, though not at the same time.[13] When referred to minds, activity and passivity seem to be only formally different: this theory is indebted to the Scotistic formal distinction, a common theory during the seventeenth century in Scotland.[14]

Comparison between graduation theses during the seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries brings to light a problem regents were facing – the role of reason. Usually, from the 1680s on, reason is the faculty of drawing inferences, so it involves syllogistic reasoning. Hence the downgrading of syllogistic logic led to a silence, in the theses, on the analysis of reason. As we read in Anderson 1720, the new logic of discovery (the Newtonian logic, as regents call it), is about apprehension and judgement (*apprehensio* and *judicium*), with no role for *ratiocinatio*.[15] This absence seems odd and needs clarification, given that the medieval Scholastics ascribed to reason the role of finding ultimate justification for claims to knowledge. This absence can be explained by the fact that ideas and perceptions are said to play what is in fact the very role ascribed by the medieval Scholastics to reason.

Thomas Aquinas defines 'idea' as the *'form of a certain thing, existing beyond the thing itself'*,[16] which can mean both the exemplar (archetype) of the thing (in the mind of God), and the principle of our knowledge of the thing as it is in the knower. In Scholastic philosophy the former meaning prevails, and 'idea' is rarely employed in theory of knowledge. This definition foreshadows the key problem in modern philosophy concerning ideas, as they can be understood to be what we know (*quid*) and to be that through which we know (*quo*). During the seventeenth century, the role of the terms 'idea' and 'perception' became more important in the theses, to the extent that they took the place of the traditional terms *conceptus* and *species sensibilis* in discussions of our knowledge of the external world.

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[13] '[mens] *verum, ubi actiones exerit, prorsus activa, ubi passiones sustinet, omnino passiva*'. Verner 1721, § IV.

[14] Also influential later on in the eighteenth century: A. Broadie, 'The Scotist Thomas Reid', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. LXXIV:3 (2000), pp. 385–407, in particular pp. 392–3.

[15] Anderson 1720, § II.

[16] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 15, a. I: idea '*Latine forma dicitur […] forma autem alicuius rei praeter ipsam existens, ad duo esse potest, vel ut sit exemplar eius cuius dicitur forma; vel ut sit principium cognitionis ipsius*'.

Regents speak of perceptions of external things, but also of perceptions of good and evil; 'perception' is often treated as synonymous with 'simple idea'. In the theory of knowledge the role of perceptions seems prior to that of ideas. Regents held natural philosophy in the highest esteem, not only for the progress in knowledge possible thanks to Newton, but also as revealing the deep harmony of the world as a moral standard for the wise man.[17] In this context, perhaps, the importance of the philosophical analysis of perception is explained by the parallel importance of natural science and the question of how we know the external world.

A further reason for the priority of perception could be that regents endorsed a specific form of the so-called theory of ideas, one in which the idea is not what we know, but that through which we know. Some regents[18] hold that perceiving is a complex act of understanding, an act that puts us in direct contact with external objects as they really are, so that perception is epistemologically richer than Scholastic sensation, which only conveys sensible species to the intellect. In the philosophy of the regents the act of the intellect, and therefore the very act of knowledge, is a perceiving (*percipere*) in general, and perceiving a single real thing in particular. Arguably one reason why scepticism did not seem a viable philosophical option was that it failed to notice this natural, constitutional openness of our intellect to truth. I believe that regents still held onto a traditional definition of truth as 'concordance' between the perceived object and its idea in our mind, but the greatest role in the process of knowledge is played by the complex and yet immediate act of perceiving, which is *the* act of the intellect. This meaning of perception seems to carry on in different forms the traditional moderate realism as expressed in Scottish Scholasticism in the seventeenth century. Thus, the aforementioned problem concerning reason is resolved: truth seems to be the natural harmony between objects that we immediately perceive and the ideas of them in our minds, rather than being a conclusion of a judgement, as in Scholasticism. The epistemological work is done with the act of perception, so intellect can be conceived of as naturally open to truth and passive in receiving truth. I believe that regents downplayed reason as a discoursive act and emphasized perception, as an immediate act, by intellectualising it. Our knowledge does

[17] G. Turnbull, *Theses philosophicae de scientiae naturalis cum philosophia morali coniunctione*, Aberdeen 1723, § IV: '*Omnino fatendum est mundi corporei ordinem elegantissimum maximeque concinnum esse. Illoque certe nobis optimum vitae et morum exhibetur exemplar.*'

[18] Not all of the regents in the early eighteenth century endorse this view: some degree of generality is inevitable in the account of philosophers belonging to the same context yet individually working out their own interpretations.

not fail us thanks to our natural constitution and to the nature of our acts of perception.[19] As already noted, differences with the Scholastic theory of knowledge regents held in the seventeenth century are remarkable; nonetheless, the presence of a moderate realism in the theses from the 1610s to the 1720s, through the reception of modern philosophy, is remarkable as well.

Two regents bring forward a more inclusive notion of perception. Hardie 1719 speaks of *perceptio persuasiva* (persuasive perception); it is different from 'normal perception' not because it puts us directly in touch with '*things as they truly exist*' (which perception does in any case), but because by necessity it draws us gently to the act of judgement, which is said to be perception's '*inseparable companion*'.[20] Judgement seems to be just a confirmation of a process whose reliability is granted elsewhere (in how things are and in the nature of perception). Verner 1721 perhaps goes a little further. Unlike Hardie he does not speak of judgement, but introduces an element which might include judgement. He claims that our perceptions (in the very broad sense of perceptions or simple ideas and of *appetitio boni*) take place '*always with participation of the will and some rational pleasure*'.[21] As noted earlier, elsewhere Verner writes that the intellect forms some perceptions, and not only receives them: perhaps this act of 'forming' a perception is carried out with the participation of will.[22]

Regents employ the term perception for both perceptions of things and perceptions of good and evil. Though not holding that good and evil are 'things', they do hold that we perceive them.[23] Moral philosophy mirrors the structure we find in philosophy of mind: we know the good and evil of things in exactly the same way we know things, by perception. In the theses we read of perceptions of good and evil which depend on the nature of things, but the overall theory is more complex than this. God has given a moral law which is valid for all things and all men, which is based on *recta ratio*, right reason,

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[19] '*Cum genus humanum, istiusmodi facultatibus instructum esse voluerit naturae Author.*' Hardie 1719, § XVI.

[20] '*Res tales, tamquam vere a parte rei existentes, perpetuo repraesentabit perceptio persuasiva, quae judicii actum, comitem suum indivulsum, necessario allicit*'. Hardie 1719, *ibidem*.

[21] '*Neque verum percipit quisquam, neque bonum appetit absque Voluntate: imo simplicissimi qui assignari possunt Mentis Actus, perceptiones sive Ideas simplices intelligo, sine lubentia sive Complacentia rationali, h.e. sine Voluntate non eliciuntur*'. Verner 1721, § XIV.

[22] A theory which might remind us of Reid: '*The faculties of* Understanding *and* Will*, are easily distinguished in thought, but very rarely, if ever, disjoined in operation*'. Quoted in A. Broadie, 'The Scotist Thomas Reid', p. 403.

[23] Verner 1721, § V: '*In istis de Vero et Falso, Bono et Malo, perceptionibus formandis ac recipiendis, animam, ab infimo infantiae statu, continuo occupatam deprehendimus*'.

whether divine or human. Morality involves a circular movement, starting from our perceptions of good and evil, passing through our reception of these perceptions in the mind, then past our election of them by free will, and finally to the desire for the very natures which originated our perceptions. The paradigm is always the search for conformity, either of our perceptions to objects, or of our actions to the divine law or divine reason. Verner 1730 sums this up by quoting Cicero: '*the measure of good is what is to be found in nature*'.[24] Again, we find in moral philosophy the same concept of immediate and reliable openness to the external world that we find in philosophy of mind. Turnbull appears to stand apart from the regents in respect of the fact that he places greater stress on moral law more than on moral perception.

Minor differences aside, regents taught the same theories and worked on the same problems. There is agreement on many aspects: the dual nature of mind, intellect as mainly passive (as explained), perception as playing a larger role than ideas, and the ultimate dependence of perceptions on 'how things really are'. Perceptions are the antecedently-shaped building blocks of knowledge that we receive (perceive) in fixed combinations that we cannot re-arrange at will. I believe that regents held a correspondence theory of truth: the relation is established between perceptions and things outside our mind. It seems that regents incorporated Cartesian and Newtonian themes in a still strong Scholastic frame. One sign of this attitude is the reliance on the senses, said to be '*minime fallaces*' (meaning 'hardly at all deceptive' or 'not at all deceptive'), by Peacock (1714)[25] who was still sympathetic to Cartesianism. Peacock's position could be representative of a deep and shared attitude among regents. Given this faith in our ability to acquire, via the senses, reliable information about the external world, the regents' narrative regarding God's role too is un-cartesian: God is the ultimate warrant of existence and essence of things, but he is needed less as epistemological warrant than as, say, giver of a moral law, or giver of essences.

I shall close this section with a brief comment on Locke. He is not absent from the theses, though his role is not the one we might have expected him to play. Regents were acquainted with his works, but, unlike Descartes and Newton, his reception in Aberdeen was not favourable. He is referred to almost exclusively in critical terms. Before 1700 regents, probably under the influence of Descartes, were open to a limited version of innatism, mainly concerning the idea of God. As a consequence, in order to defend their own

[24] '*Mensura boni […] quod in Natura positum est*'. § VI.

[25] '*Sensus minime sint fallaces, quippe sint ministri fidelissimi, nobis a Deo concessi*'. § IV.

understanding of the innate idea of God, regents criticised Locke's criticism of innate ideas. I think that what they had in mind is some sort of intuition of God rather than a philosophical notion of an innate idea of God, a constant which can be traced back to Scottish Reformed Scholasticism and theology in the previous century, in the form of a rejection, or at least suspicion, of natural theology and a strict distinction between philosophy and theology. Similarly, up to the 1710s Locke's philosophy is considered too close to atheism, since regents see in the reduction of all ideas to sensation and reflection a pathway to the negation of some sort of privileged status for the idea of God. We read in Smith 1712 that Locke's '*theory* [viz. that all ideas come from sensation and reflection] *weakens piety and virtue, and favours Atheism too much*'.[26] Locke's theory of ideas favours atheism too much because if we do not accept an intuition of God or an innate idea of God, the idea of God too could be a mere product of our *praejudicia*. I have found no direct discussion of Locke in the theses of the 1720s.[27] In general, he seems to have exerted little influence on the regents; arguably they misunderstood him on innate ideas and they do not mention him in respect of a series of doctrines to which Locke made important contributions.

Regents' look to the past: tradition and innovation

During the first decades of the eighteenth century, the two colleges in Aberdeen lived through a period of profound transformation, yet at the same time the philosophy of mind in the theses of the 1720s tends to support the claim that regents were still under the influence of the Scottish Scholastic tradition. In this paper I highlight continuities rather than differences, because differences are evident (just as they were to the regents themselves) whereas the continuities are less apparent even if no less influential. Continuities, which profoundly connect this period to the previous century, are not restricted to philosophy of mind. They are to be found in other areas of philosophy also.

We have considered the formal distinction between intellect and will, the 'correspondence' theory of truth, the particular meaning of metaphysics and

[26] William Smith, *Theses philosophicae*, Aberdeen 1712, § II: Locke's '*commentum hoc pietatem et virtutem enervat, atque Atheismo nimium favet*'.

[27] With the exception of a brief remark in Hardie 1719, § I. The regent writes that Locke, along with other very famous recent philosophers, deals with the prejudices of the senses '*prolixe ac accurate*'.

the ongoing influence of Reformed Scholasticism. A clarification is necessary. My emphasis on the role of Reformed Scholasticim is an acknowledgement that all philosophical activity is historically situated and that in Scotland influence was exerted on the philosophers by a form of Calvinist confession that itself had a Scholastic background. I shall now seek to clarify this influence in terms of two philosophical doctrines which represent a continuity from the seventeenth to the early eighteenth century: 1) the relation between substance and accident; and 2) matter as extension; and I shall close by noting the fact that, despite Newton, the regents were still in part under the influence of a Scholastic concept of gravity.

The relation between substance and its attributes is a good example of continuity between Scholastic and early eighteenth-century philosophy in Aberdeen. It was commonly held during the early modern period that every accident inheres in its substance. The very definition of accident includes such inherence. Descartes and Boyle were among those who held that while each substance in the natural world exists independently of every other substance, there is no such thing as an accident that inheres in no substance. Also, all substances are either material or immaterial: we cannot find material minds or immaterial bodies, or better, extension cannot be a property of minds and thinking cannot be a property of matter. In 1719 Hardie structures his graduation theses on this fundamental distinction. The importance of this last theory will be clear in the analysis of matter.

The theory of the essential inherence of an accident in its substance is not exclusive to the so-called modern philosophy. It plays a role in Scottish Scholasticism as early as the 1610s. This theory is usually found in the context of the Reformed reading of the dogma of transubstantiation. Reformed Scottish philosophers and theologians did not believe that the accidents of bread and wine could exist without their substances, in order to inhere in the substance of Christ.[28] The philosophical point is that on the basis of Aristotelian philosophy it is not possible to accept the notion of an accident which is not inhering in its natural substance. More precisely, in the seventeenth century regents read the Catholic theory of transubstantiation as implying that an accident can exist with *no* substance at all. Thus, regents rejected the

[28] Eustachius a Sancto Paulo for example offers a different account of the substance-accident relation, which is explained by theological more than by philosophical means. The notion of *inhaerentia aptitudinalis* as belonging to the formal *ratio* of the accident responds to the Catholic need for an accident clearly and essentially connected to its substance *but also* potentially separable (by God) from it. Eustachius a Sancto Paulo, *Summa philosophiae quadripartita* (Paris 1609), IV, II, II, VIII.

Catholic account of the miracle of the eucharist, and duly criticised Descartes for not doing likewise.[29] This is a central aspect of Reformed Scholasticism that we still find operating in Scottish graduation theses at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The origin of this theory is a Reformed reading of the Bible, and Scottish regents identified a deep agreement between this reading and the Aristotelian theory of substance. We thus find within a Scholastic tradition a philosophical theory of the necessary inherence of the accident in its substance, which originates from theology and predates its version in 'modern philosophy'. In this regard, Scottish Reformed Scholasticism is part of modern philosophy.[30]

A similar point has to be made about matter and extension. As early as the 1610s Scottish regents were teaching that prime matter is essentially a quantified metaphysical act, the quantification being understood as spatial extension (parts outside parts). This theory has a direct bearing on the understanding of the relation between substance and accident. In fact, no extension, which is an accident of matter, is possible without its substance. Conversely, matter is not possible without extension. In Scottish universities, this theory is not indebted to Descartes, but is Scholastic in form and limits, and originates within the Scotistic tradition. The concept of matter as a metaphysical act and as having the attribute of extension is closer to *materia extensa* than is the Thomistic *materia ut pura potentia*. Thus, it is little surprise that Descartes' theory of matter was quickly integrated into the teaching of the Arts curriculum in Scotland, for the form of Scholasticism which was being taught in the seventeenth century contains anticipations of the early modern narrative.

Natural philosophy saw great changes in the seventeenth century, while, as Turnbull's writings bear witness, moral philosophy benefited from the new scientific method. The authority of traditional syllogistic logic was diminished

[29] J. Buchan, *Theses philosophicae*, King's College, Aberdeen 1681, § XLI: the regent holds that the Cartesian hypothesis subverts the Catholic dogma, and that Descartes was under the threat of ecclesiastical censorship, and was thus not acting freely when accepting the dogma.

[30] By 'modern philosophy' I mean here non-scholastic philosophy of the seventeenth century. The distinction between non-scholastic and Scholastic philosophy is still regarded as a valid historiographical distinction. It relies on the assumption that Scholasticism is by form and content an alternative to modern philosophy, which has its beginning in the period of Descartes. Scottish regents of the seventeenth century seem to be conscious of the division among philosophers, whom they call either *Scholastici* or *Moderni*. I argue that the picture is more complex than this: some modern Scholastic philosophy is part of modern philosophy.

despite asseverations of respect. Anderson 1720 (§ II) defends what appears at first sight to be traditional logic, the defence being that it is a science that enables us both to discover truth and to expound it. But on closer inspection the logic in question turns out to be based on apprehension and judgement alone, and to have little in common with Scholastic logic. The new inductive logic from Bacon to Newton, which regents in the 1720s regarded as a unitary scientific enterprise, had replaced it.[31]

In natural philosophy, the theses show evidence of a confident endorsement of the new science. One interesting aspect of the endorsement is the respect shown for a new concept of physical law. Duff titles his 1732 theses *Dissertatio Philosophica de Natura et Legibus Materiae.* Regents (for example Turnbull 1723, § III, who claims that physical causes are only *vires et leges*, forces and laws) abandoned the traditional concept of cause. In Scholasticism substances alone can properly be called 'causes', since they alone can act. A force is a power through which a body acts, a law is a rule given by a mind (either divine or human) and always related to a mind which thinks of the law. Regents were familiar with the concept of law in moral philosophy: moral law is binding for all men because it is based on right reason and divine essence. Implicit in the concept of law is universality. In Scholastic natural philosophy universality is not explained in terms of a physical law which describes the behaviour of bodies, but in terms of the immutability of natural genera. By induction we can conclude to the essences of bodies and by deduction the essence is then predicated of individuals. The physical world is a world of individual substances, whose behaviour is not characteristically described by Scholastic philosophers in terms of law.

Difficulty arose when regents had to deal with concepts different from traditional ones while yet employing the terminology inherited from Scholastic Latin. For example, some regents indicated certain kinds of activity (that of a faculty of mind, or a principle and so on) with the word *actuosus*, to mark the difference from the semantic field of the Scholastic 'act', a term too compromised by the old act/potency theory. This is the case as regards Smith 1712: '*since all the movements of the universe cannot be derived from a passive principle* [matter]*, we must admit some actuous* [actuosa] *principles […].*'[32]

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[31] On the favourable reception of Newtonianism in Scotland, see David B. Wilson, *Seeking Nature's Logic* (Pennsylvania, 2009), ch. 1.

[32] '*Sed quum a Passivo hoc Principio* [matter] *omnes in universo motus provenire nequeant, Actuosa quaedam Principia, unde generentur et conserventur motus, Gravitatem vel Attractionem […] admittenda esse statuit*'. § XI.

Gravitas has a particularly interesting history. In Scholastic Latin the term denotes heaviness, or the form of a heavy body. Regents in the seventeenth century preferred to speak of gravity (and levity) in terms of *gravia et levia*, 'heavy things and light things'. But in the early eighteenth century regents introduced both a new meanings and new grammatical uses. The noun 'gravity' and the verb '*gravitare*' answered to new theoretical needs prompted by Newton's work. Gravity became a law, and an activity of bodies. Of course, such far-reaching changes cannot take place overnight, so regents sometimes seemed to ascribe to 'gravity' a meaning that was a mixture of the old and the new. In the space of few lines, Anderson 1720 uses the term in three distinct grammatical forms and with three different meanings: '*it is demonstrated that all terrestrial bodies gravitate* [gravitant] *towards the centre; those bodies, which are called light, are pushed upwards because they are less heavy* [gravia] *than the air fluid in which they swim. In the same way by gravity* [gravitas]*, as a universal natural law, all physical bodies are impelled mutually one against the other, as the celebrated author demonstrated*'.[33]

Conclusion

In the early eighteenth century the graduation theses still reveal influences stemming from, and some doctrines rooted in, the seventeenth century. We might conclude that the open rejection of the 'old Scholasticism' usually claimed by the *Moderni* is perhaps less strong in the case of the regents than we would expect, given the way regents themselves describe their work. As I hope to have shown, the eighteenth-century moderate realism nuanced by Reformed religion and Scotism is inherited from the generations of regents before the 1700s.

I have sought to expound a few theories we find in some graduation theses from Aberdeen in the 1720s. Above all in philosophy of mind and epistemology, but also in metaphysics, natural and moral philosophy, there are still strong ties with theses of the previous century, though it has to be acknowledged that there are also discontinuities with the past, especially in consequence of the arrival of Newtonianism.

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[33] '*Demonstratum est ipsum Aerem, aliaque omnia Corpora Terram ambientem versus ejus centrum gravitare. Ea vero, quae Levia dici solent, sursum pelli, propterea quod fluido Aeris, cui innatant, minus sunt gravia. Idem gravitate, tanquam universali Naturae Lege, omnia Systematis mondani Corpora, versus se mutuo urgeri, demonstravit praedictus Eximius Auctor*'. § XIX. The 'eximius auctor' is Newton.

From the point of view of historiography, Scotland's relatively coherent and limited Scholastic philosophical production can help us gain a better understanding both of Scotland's later philosophical achievements and also of Reformed Scholasticism, the latter an area of research sadly neglected as compared with Catholic Scholasticism. In the early years of the Scottish Enlightenment the philosophical debate in Aberdeen's two universities was rich and groundbreaking, but in order to understand the depth of this change it is necessary to provide an account of the various philosophical horizons and backgrounds of the regents, and Scholasticism is part of that narrative. Some Scholastic theories might, more than is generally acknowledged, have left a mark on the young Thomas Reid and influenced (or at least favoured) the beginning of the Scottish Enlightenment. Such researches as I outline here should also give us at least a partial idea of what being a Scottish Reformed philosophy regent meant in the early eighteenth century. In a regent's own words, '*philosophers seek truth, theologians find it, only true believers own it*'.[34]

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[34] '*Veritatem Philosophi quaerunt, Theologi inveniunt, soli Religiosi possident*'. G. Peacock, *Theses philosophicae*, Aberdeen 1711, title page.