

Lecture by Dr. Giovanni Gellera  
September 5, 11–12  
Senior Common Room, Birks building

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***James Dundas (1620–1679) on Natural law, Religious tolerance,  
and the Hobbesian Human Nature***

**Abstract**

The first part of the talk focuses (mostly) on natural law and (time permitting) on tolerance regarding religion. I will argue that James Dundas construes a strong natural legal framework around the ideas that 1) divine law and natural law are one and the same; and 2) that either are perfectly known to humans, hence humans are inexcusable. He understands, inspired by Grotius, divine and natural law as a core of moral laws which bind society together. Consequently, tolerance ought to be extended to all law-abiding Christians, regardless of their confession. The second part of the talk explores Dundas's ambivalent relationship with Thomas Hobbes. On the one side, Dundas predictably demolishes the Hobbes political, from the state of nature to contractualism. On the other side, however, Dundas seems close to Hobbes on several views which were relevant to seventeenth-century Reformed theology: psychological determinism and compatibilism above all. Finally, Hobbes's description of human psychology and agency seems to be accepted by Dundas as a helpful description of what has gone wrong in the post-lapsarian human mind. The connection between the two parts of the paper is the relevance of the doctrine of the Fall for seventeenth-century philosophy. Belief in the Fall motivates Dundas to seek intelligibility and inexcusability vis-a-vis the natural law, and a strong authority to supply for the humans' lack of moral self-regulation; and to endorse psychological determinism as the psychology most compatible with god's irresistible persuasion by grace and with divine foreknowledge and omnipotence.

**Dr. Giovanni Gellera** currently works as a postdoc in the project Tolerance, Intolerance and Discrimination regarding Religion (2016–2020), PI Professor Christian Maurer, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) and based at the philosophy department, University of Lausanne, Switzerland. He was awarded the Ph.D. by the University of Glasgow in 2012 for a thesis entitled *Natural Philosophy in the Graduation Theses of the Scottish Universities* in the first half of the seventeenth century, supervised by Professor Alexander Broadie. His main research area is seventeenth-century Reformed scholasticism, especially Scottish, with specific attention to the influences of the Reformation on early modern and on Enlightenment philosophy. With Alexander Broadie, he is working on the critical edition and translation of the *Idea philosophiae moralis* (1679), an unfinished and unpublished Reformed scholastic treatise written by James Dundas (c.1620–1679).