

The author

Ben Slingo is a Junior Research Fellow at Clare College, Cambridge. He received his BA, MPhil, and PhD from the University of Cambridge. ‘Civil power and the deconstruction of scholasticism in the thought of Marc’antonio de Dominis’ was published in the *History of European Ideas* in 2015, and ‘Salas *contra* Suárez on the origins of political power’ in the collection *The concept of law in the moral and political thought of the ‘School of Salamanca’*, ed. K. Bunge, M. Fuchs, D. Simmermacher and A. Spindler, in 2016. He is working on a book provisionally entitled *Scholastic republicanism: Power, freedom, and democracy from the eve of the Reformation to the Gunpowder Plot*, and a new project about patriarchalist political thought.

The paper

The paper treats two episodes in a larger story of late scholastic political thought—one from the start of the sixteenth century, and one from the start of the seventeenth. In each, theologians following in the tradition of Aquinas disagree in sophisticated ways on urgent political questions. What links the episodes is a particular strand of argument about freedom, slavery, and democratic self-rule.

Jacques Almain and Tommaso de Vio Cajetan debated whether the pope was supreme in the Church. They differed about where power lay, but also about what it was. Almain defined it as a right of self-conservation belonging to a community, Cajetan as a form of rule exercised through an apparatus of government. In the secular sphere, by contrast, both located power in the people, but each stuck to his conception of its nature. The surprising upshot of this pattern of dispute is the main point of the first half of the paper. Cajetan concluded that all civil commonwealths must be free and democratic, whereas the Church was a slave to Christ.

Marc’antonio de Dominis and Francisco Suárez debated whether the pope could depose a king, and this question drove them to think about civil power in its own right. Each deployed Cajetan’s account of politics, with rival ends in mind. De Dominis reversed its charge, claiming that all civil subjects were unfree—that they were in fact natural slaves. Suárez argued civil commonwealths were free democracies, but only to begin with: they could and always did submit to kings, just as individuals can—though usually do not—enslave themselves.

This strand of argument has been overlooked in discussions of late scholasticism; in drawing it out, the paper seeks to show how interesting these theologians are, and to reconsider their place in the history of political thought.