

Libertas Philosophandi in the 17th Century. Some preliminary remarks¹

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In this essay I explore not the freedom of philosophical expression in the seventeenth century, but some of the reasons for the opposition to libertas philosophandi. After noting briefly the cases of Giordano Bruno and Galileo Galilei, I turn to two lesser known cases where philosophers were prevented from discussing their views in public. The first was a group of three young scholars who, in a public disputation held in Paris in August of 1624, attempted to refute Aristotle, then central to both theology and university philosophy. They were shut down by the civil authorities at the recommendation of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Paris, and sent out of Paris. The second was the actions, including legal action, taken against Descartes and his followers in Utrecht in the early 1640s, attempting to prevent his ideas from being taught at the University of Utrecht. The reasons for this resistance to intellectual innovation and change include fear of religious heterodoxy, the view that those who promote such novelties are more interested in personal fame than in the truth, and the resistance to changing an entrenched university curriculum, among other reasons. The claim is made that if we are to understand the arguments for libertas philosophandi, we must also understand what they were arguing against.

Keywords: Libertas philosophandi, Antoine Villon, Jean-Baptiste Morin, Descartes, Utrecht.

The question of the freedom to philosophize, the *libertas philosophandi* was a celebrated issue in the seventeenth century, widely discussed, and widely debated.

A central task of the history of philosophy is to explain why smart people held views that we now find so strange and uncongenial, to try to understand what the philosophical world looked like to our philosophical ancestors. In our round table today, we are going to explore an issue in seventeenth-century philosophy that we now find relatively unproblematic: the question of the freedom

¹ These were introductory remarks given at a session of the "Fifth Conference of the European Society for Early Modern Philosophy", meeting in Bologna on 9-11 September, 2019. The session was a round table discussion on *Libertas Philosophandi* in the seventeenth century and included remarks by Diego Donna and Pina Totaro.