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Political science in sixteenth century Europe

In the late-sixteenth century, the starting point for academic political reflection remained Aristotle's *Politics*, a text which underlined the importance of participation in the constitution. Although Jean Bodin's alternative concept of sovereignty was widely admired, many readers were troubled by Bodin's political and religious ideas and wanted to preserve a role for the Aristotelian idea of political justice and for the Church. The effect was a revitalization of politics as an academic discipline or science, in which the civil community was examined alongside the Church. In this talk, I will suggest that the Aristotelian tradition remained important as a way of portraying a hierarchically organized political society as natural to human beings, but that in the wake of Bodin's writing there was a shift in emphasis away from questions of virtue and distributive justice and towards a discussion of the nature of sovereign power.