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AQUINAS: POLITICAL WRITINGS

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ST THOMAS AQUINAS
POLITICAL WRITINGS



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R. W. DYSON



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FOR JESS

*Ne gloriaris de die crastino, quia nescis
quid pariturus sit dies*

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Preface

This book has taken a long while to complete, and has accrued many debts. In particular, I mention Professor Antony Black and Dr P. J. Fitzpatrick who, as always, shared their scholarship with me without stint. I mention also the editorial staff of the Cambridge University Press, and above all Virginia Catmur, to whose amazing skills as a copy-editor this volume, like my edition of Augustine's *De civitate Dei* in the same series, owes so much. Finally, I thank my colleagues and students at the University of Durham for their unfailing support, encouragement and stimulation.

R. W. Dyson
Durham
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Abbreviations

BE	Blackfriars Edition: i.e. <i>Summa theologiae</i> , trans. Thomas Gilby <i>et al.</i> (61 vols., London and New York, 1964–80)
CIC	<i>Corpus iuris canonici</i> , ed. E. Friedberg (2 vols., Leipzig, 1879)
CICiv.	<i>Corpus iuris civilis</i> , ed. P. Krueger, Th. Mommsen, R. Schoell and G. Kroll (Berlin, 1872–7)
DE	Dominican Edition: i.e. <i>Summa theologiae</i> , trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (2nd, rev. edn., 22 vols., London, 1912–36)
NCE	<i>New Catholic Encyclopaedia</i> (New York and London, 1967)
PG	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series Graeca</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1857ff)
PL	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series Latina</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1844ff)
SCG	St Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summa contra gentiles</i> , ed. C. Pera, P. Marc and P. Caramello (Turin and Rome, 1961–7)

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Introduction

St Thomas Aquinas

St Thomas was born in 1225¹ into a wealthy and influential south-Italian family. Landulph, his father, was Count of Aquino; Theodora, his mother, Countess of Teano; the family was related to the Emperors Henry VI and Frederick II, and to the Kings of Aragon, France and Castile. He began his education in 1230 as an oblate at the Benedictine monastery of Monte Cassino, where his uncle, Landulph Sinibaldi, was Abbot. In 1238 he entered the *Studium generale* at Naples. In 1245, despite great opposition from his family, he became a member of the Dominican order and went to the University of Paris, where the German theologian Albertus Magnus introduced him to the study of Aristotle. In 1248 he followed Albertus to Cologne. Between 1252 and 1256, as part of his preparation for his *licentia docendi*, he compiled his *Scripta super libros sententiarum*, the treatise on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, which had become a standard part of medieval university education. He received his licence to teach in 1256. The next eighteen years were spent teaching and studying at Paris, Naples, Orvieto, Viterbo and Rome. His *Summa contra gentiles* – a manual for missionaries to the Moslems and Jews of Spain and north Africa – was completed at Orvieto in 1264. He began the *Summa theologiae* at Rome in 1266 and worked on it until forced by ill health to desist in 1273. During a final stint at the University of Paris between 1269 and 1272 he wrote twelve commentaries on the works of Aristotle, including the *Ethics* and *Politics*.

¹ St Thomas's earliest biographer, Peter Calo (1300) gives 1227 as his date of birth. See D. Prümmer, *Fontes Vitae S. Thomae Aquinatis, notis historicis et criticis illustrati* (Toulouse, 1911), pp. 28; 45. Fr Prümmer accepts 1227, but 1225 seems more likely on the whole.

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It is a remarkable fact that St Thomas's literary output was compressed into a life of only forty-nine years. Not surprisingly, in view of his ferocious workload, he suffered a sudden and debilitating illness – perhaps a stroke – at Naples in December 1273. The story that he ceased work on the *Summa* because of some mystical experience is apparently due to the fact that the onset of this illness came while he was saying Mass. Evidently in a weakened condition he left Naples in February 1274 to attend the second Council of Lyons. He died at the Cistercian abbey of Fessa Nuova on 7 March 1274. He was canonised by Pope John XXII in 1323.

In 1277, a number of propositions representing his views were officially condemned by the Church. Even after his canonisation, St Thomas did not enjoy the status he was later to be accorded. The virtually exclusive place occupied by Thomist doctrines in Catholic philosophical education during most of the twentieth century is due to the encyclical *Aeterni patris* (4 August 1879) of Pope Leo XIII, which recommended scholastic philosophy, and especially the work of St Thomas, as an antidote to the threat of liberal thought in the Church. 'Let carefully chosen teachers strive to implant the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas in the minds of students, and set forth clearly his soundness and excellence over others. Let the universities . . . illustrate and defend this doctrine, and use it for the refutation of prevailing errors.'²

Notes on the edition

Anyone who sets out to compile a work of this kind is confronted by a problem of selection. It is inevitable that not everyone will approve of how the problem has been solved. My brief was to present the essence of what St Thomas has to say about government, politics and related matters, and to do so in a book of fairly restricted size. This brief has governed my selection in two ways. First, I have thought it necessary to choose, as far as possible, material of a kind accessible to readers who have no specialised background in scholastic philosophy. There seemed no point in including passages so recondite as to be unintelligible without an apparatus of commentary more extensive than space would permit. Second, where St Thomas says the same thing more than once, I have avoided repetition by selecting the passages which, in my estimation, make the point most clearly and economically. The result is a volume

² *Acta Leonis XIII*, 283–5 (Rome, 1879).

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which defines St Thomas's 'political thought' in terms of the following: the longish fragment usually called *De regimine principum*; the letter to the Duchess of Brabant usually called *De regimine Iudaeorum* (here included as part of Chapter 5); extensive extracts from the *Summa theologiae*, including the whole of the non-biblical parts of the so-called 'Treatise on Law';³ and two excerpts from the *Scripta super libros sententiarum*. It will be as well to say something about each of these in turn.

De regimine principum, 'On the Government of Princes' – known in a number of manuscript sources as *De regno*, 'On Kingship' – is part (Book I and the first six and a half chapters of Book II) of a much larger treatise, the rest of which is attributed to Tolommeo of Lucca (Bartolomeo Fiadoni). It is dedicated *ad regem Cypri*, 'to the King of Cyprus', the king in question probably being Hugh II of Lusignan, who appears to have had a particular affection for the Dominican order. There has been a good deal of dispute over the authorship and authenticity of *De regimine principum*, but the view still prevailing is that St Thomas abandoned the treatise after the death of its dedicatee in December 1267, and that Tolommeo subsequently continued and finished it.⁴ It is St Thomas's longest strictly political piece, dealing mainly with kingship and tyranny, and containing in its final chapters some discussion of the material conditions necessary to found a successful kingdom. Book I is closely based on Aristotle's *Politics*. What there is of Book II reflects an acquaintance with two texts influential in the middle ages: Vitruvius's *De architectura* and Vegetius's *Epitoma rei militaris*.

De regimine Iudaeorum ('On the government of Jews'), known alternatively as *De regimine subditorum* ('On the government of subjects'), is not

³ The misleading expression *Tractatus de legibus* is sometimes used to refer to *Summa theologiae* IaIIae 90–108.

⁴ The whole treatise is available in an edition and English translation by J. M. Blythe, *On the Government of Rulers: De Regimine Principum. Ptolemy of Lucca with Portions Attributed to Thomas Aquinas* (Pennsylvania, 1997). A conspectus of the manuscript tradition and some account of the difficulties which it presents is given by I. T. Eschmann, OP, 'A Catalogue of St Thomas's Works', in E. Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas* (New York and London, 1961), pp. 412ff. On questions of authorship, date and authenticity, see especially M. Browne, 'An sit authenticum opusculum S. Thomae "De regimine principum"', *Angelicum* 3 (1926), pp. 300ff; A. O'Rahilly, 'Notes on St Thomas IV: *De regimine principum*', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 31 (1929), pp. 396ff; 'Notes on St Thomas V: Tholomeo of Lucca, Continuator of the *De regimine principum*', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 31 (1929), pp. 606ff; W. Mohr, 'Bemerkungen zur Verfasserschaft von *De regimine principum*', in J. Möller and H. Kohlenberger (eds.), *Virtus politica* (Stuttgart and Bad Cannstatt, 1974); J. Echard, 'S. Thomas de Aquino', in Quétif-Echard, *Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum* 1 (Paris, 1719), pp. 511ff. See also A. Black, *Political Thought in Europe, 1250–1450* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 22.

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strictly speaking a contribution to ‘political theory’. From the historian’s point of view, it is an interesting example of political advice given by a medieval intellectual to a concerned and evidently pious personage. In particular, it is an illustration of the social and political status of Jews in mid-thirteenth-century Europe, and of the Church’s attitude to the important economic question of usury: an issue with which St Thomas deals in a more technical way in the *Summa* (at IIaIIae 78: see pp. 220ff, below). It also has something to say about the sale of offices. It is addressed *ad ducissam Brabantiae*, ‘to the Duchess of Brabant’, although there is doubt over who this Duchess was, and therefore over the exact dating of the letter. She may have been Aleyde or Alix of Brabant, who was regent of the duchy after the death of her husband Henry III in 1261 until her son, John I, came of age in 1267. Or she may have been Marguerite, daughter of Louis IX, who married John I in February 1270 and died in 1271. The former seems more likely, but we cannot be certain; nor, of course, is the question a particularly important one.⁵

The great preponderance of what is here offered consists of material excerpted from St Thomas’s great *Summa theologiae*. The passages from it, and the two passages from his treatise on the *Sentences*, have been chosen to illustrate his views on obedience (Chapter 2); law (Chapter 3); right, justice and judgment (Chapter 4); property relations (Chapter 5); war, violence and sedition (Chapter 6), and the interactions between religion and politics so central to medieval political thought (Chapter 7). Although I have been selective – more selective, on the whole, than I would have wished to be – I have let the author of the *Summa* speak with an uninterrupted voice as far as possible. To reproduce whole *Quaestiones* may seem to present the reader with much that is irrelevant to ‘political thought’ as the term is usually understood; but this, I contend, is not a valid objection. That St Thomas thought it right to consider such questions as (for instance) ‘whether natural contingents are subject to the eternal law’ (IaIIae 93:5: p. 109, below) *is* relevant to our understanding of how he thought about law. To pick and choose only those bits and pieces which fit our preconceived ideas of what a theory of law should look like would be to betray our author. Moreover, the excessive condensation practised by some of St Thomas’s previous editors – particularly, though not only,

⁵ For the manuscript evidence and a list of editions, see Eschmann, ‘Catalogue’, p. 422; see also P. Glorieux, ‘Le *De Regimine Judaeorum*: hypothèses et précisions’, *Divus Thomas* 39 (1936), pp. 153ff.

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Professor d'Entrèves⁶ – gives a distorted picture of St Thomas's literary and philosophical method. It fails to show the movement and expression of his thought within the highly formal structure of the *Summa*; and such failure is a short-changing both of St Thomas and of his modern students. I have, therefore, selected; but, with a few exceptions, I have not abridged the selected passages.

De regimine principum and *De regimine Iudaeorum* are straightforward and comparatively undemanding pieces. By contrast, and despite the care taken in choosing them, at least some of the passages from the *Summa* are likely to present the reader with problems. Putting the matter generally, these problems are of two kinds. First, as a distinguished medievalist has observed, modern education does not equip us to understand scholastic thought;⁷ nor does it dispose us to be sympathetic towards its agendas. The twenty-first-century reader wonders why it ever occurred to anyone to be interested in some of the things to which St Thomas devotes pages of careful analysis. He is steeped in Aristotle, Roman law, the Bible and the Fathers: we are not. His intellectual objectives, and the presuppositions, beliefs and attitudes which he takes for granted in his audience, are of a kind almost wholly foreign to us. We are unaccustomed to the language of scholasticism and the subtle distinctions and analyses which it enables its exponents to make. This kind of difficulty will be felt especially in some parts of Chapter 3 and in the long and technical discussion of right, justice and judgment in Chapter 4. Second, St Thomas's writing tends to be obscure apart from the intractability of his subject matter. He is often repetitious, clumsy and opaque, and inclined to spend a great deal of time on points which seem to us trivial. It should be remembered that much of the *Summa* was written in haste, often by the expedient of dictating to several copyists at once, working in different rooms;⁸ and in an age when material could be committed to paper only by manual and laborious means, opportunities for polishing and revision were limited. I make no apology for including material of this difficult and sometimes unflattering kind. There is no virtue in suppressing St Thomas's

⁶ *Aquinas: Selected Political Writings*, ed. with an Introduction by A. P. d'Entrèves; trans. J. G. Dawson (Oxford, 1959).

⁷ Janet Coleman, *A History of Political Thought from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance* (Oxford, 2000), p. 86.

⁸ The author of a fourteenth-century catalogue, quoted by Fr Eschmann, 'Catalogue', p. 430, remarks that *semper secum habebat quatuor scriptores, et in dubiis semper orabat*: 'he always had four secretaries with him, and in doubtful matters always prayed'.

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literary weaknesses merely for the sake of allowing his strengths to seem greater.

The *Summa* does, however, have a completely predictable literary and intellectual structure: a form which grew out of the practice of oral disputation in the medieval universities. The whole work is divided into three parts: Prima, Secunda and Tertia. The Second Part is divided into two sub-parts of its own: Prima Secundae ('the first part of the second part', customarily abbreviated as IaIIae) and Secunda Secundae ('the second part of the second part', or IIaIIae). Each part is divided into *quaestiones* ('questions'), each of which contains a number of *articuli* ('articles'). With rare exceptions, each *articulus* has four elements: (a) several *obiectioes*; (b) a short statement of an opposite view beginning with, and known by, the words *Sed contra*; (c) St Thomas's general *Responsio* or reply; (d) his specific replies to the original *obiectioes*, each beginning with the words *ad primum/secundum/tertium [argumentum]* (usually abbreviated in references to *ad 1, ad 2, ad 3*, etc.). The *obiectioes* are 'objections' in the sense of being arguments 'raised up against' the conclusion that St Thomas wishes to reach. References to the *Summa* usually take the following form or some variant of it: IaIIae 60:4 ad 1. This example (taken at random) expands into: Prima Secundae, *Quaestio* 60, *articulus* 4, reply to *obiectio* 1. A little practice will equip the reader to decode these references easily.

The translations have been made according to a principle which is surprisingly often disregarded: that the translator's duty is to transmit what the original author said, rather than what the translator thinks he ought to have said. It is not the translator's business to improve on the original; one has no right to paraphrase one's way out of difficulties; one certainly has no right to import clandestine elements of political correctness, or to modify religious or moral sentiments of which one does not approve. If the original is difficult, the translation should reflect that difficulty. My translations are, as far as possible, accurate representations of St Thomas's own words and arguments. I have departed from literalness only where the consequence of not doing so would have been unintelligibility. The result is not always an easy read. At places where I have anticipated that the text will mystify the non-specialist, I have provided as much in the way of gloss and annotation as there was room for. The best advice that can be given to the student is to keep at it. St Thomas's intellectual habits and literary peculiarities do become clearer with repeated readings and acclimatisation. Also, a close acquaintance with Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics* is an indispensable prerequisite, and the secondary sources

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mentioned in the Bibliography will aid understanding further. A special problem is presented by St Thomas's habit of cross-referencing his remarks to other passages in the *Summa*: passages which, in many cases, are not included in this volume. These cross references can be looked up in either of the complete English translations of the *Summa* mentioned in the Bibliography.

St Thomas's political thought

The most obvious feature of St Thomas's philosophy taken as a whole is the extent to which it is informed by the ideas and thought-patterns of Aristotle: of 'the Philosopher', as St Thomas almost always calls him. In this respect, St Thomas is the most distinguished member of a relatively new intellectual movement. Until the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, the political and ethical thought of Aristotle was unknown in the West. This fact is due largely, though not entirely, to the triumph of neoplatonism as mediated through the writings of St Augustine. Some of Aristotle's logical writings were known through the sixth-century Latin translations of Boethius (480–525), but the study of his ethical and political works was for many years the province of Arab commentators, chief among whom were Avicenna (980–1037) and Averroes (1126–96). That these works became increasingly known in the West during the thirteenth century is due to the translational and exegetical activity of a handful of adventurous scholars, notably Gerard of Cremona (d. 1187), Michael Scotus (d. 1235), Albertus Magnus (d. 1280) and William of Moerbeke (d. 1286). This renewed study of Aristotle – the 'recovery' of Aristotle, as it is called – came to be associated especially with the University of Paris. As we have noted, it was here, under the tutelage of Albertus Magnus, that St Thomas began to be acquainted with him.

Not surprisingly, the Church regarded the 'recovery' of Aristotle with hostility. Apart from his own paganism, the fact that Aristotle had been so much handled by Arab scholars was enough to infect him with the taint of Islam. The interpretations of Averroes were perceived as being particularly at odds with the fundamentals of Christianity; but they found a Latin champion nonetheless, in the person of Siger of Brabant (1240–81), Professor of Philosophy at the University of Paris. Repeated ecclesiastical censures culminated in 1270, when thirteen Aristotelian propositions were condemned as heretical by Bishop Etienne Tempier of Paris, a condemnation repeated and extended in 1277. Almost the whole of St Thomas's

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professional life was therefore passed in an atmosphere of hostility towards Aristotle. Despite this atmosphere – perhaps because of it – St Thomas became convinced that it is possible to reconcile the teachings of Aristotle with those of the Church. Aristotle, though he lacked the advantage of divine revelation, and though his understanding of truth was to that extent defective, had carried intellectual investigation as far as unaided reason can go. When his conclusions are properly understood and corrected by the addition of revealed truth, the resulting synthesis of reason and revelation will be an intellectually complete system. So St Thomas believed. To produce such a synthesis, and to do so by the kind of minute philosophical analysis that we find exemplified in the *Summa*, became his life's work.

As we might expect, therefore, his political thought differs much from the predominantly Platonist and Augustinian orientation of earlier generations. For St Augustine and those who wrote under his inspiration, earthly politics is on the whole a regrettable and squalid business. At best, it is a necessary evil. Political arrangements are inseparable from the sinful condition of fallen man. Government would not have come into existence at all had the Fall not occurred. It originates in human greed and in the desire which men have to dominate one another. Its redeeming feature is that it functions to limit and control man's destructive impulses, to punish the sinful and to test the faith of the righteous. Earthly peace and justice are uneasy, transient and unstable. They are pale copies of the true peace and justice laid up in heaven, which will be realised only after the end of earthly history, when the City of God enters into its inheritance of eternal bliss. Meanwhile the world grinds on through the war, greed, strife and pain generated by the ceaseless attempts of fallen men to triumph over one another.⁹ Especially during the so-called Investiture Controversy of 1075–1122, the idea gathered momentum that the only thing which can redeem human government from being wholly sinful is the complete submission of earthly princes to the spiritual power: that is, to the guidance and censure of the Church, ruled over by the Supreme Pontiff in Rome.¹⁰ This kind of political theory sets the predominant tone of political debate in the Latin West down to the thirteenth century and, in many respects,

⁹ See R. W. Dyson, *The Pilgrim City: Social and Political Ideas in the Writings of St Augustine of Hippo* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2001); H. A. Deane, *The Social and Political Ideas of St Augustine of Hippo* (New York and London, 1963).

¹⁰ See, e.g., Brian Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State, 1050–1300* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1980) pt 11; G. Tellenbach, *Church, State and Christian Society at the Time of the Investiture Contest* (Oxford, 1948).

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beyond. An oft-quoted watchword of the hierocratic theorists of the thirteenth century comes verbatim from Augustine's *De civitate Dei* (2:21): 'True justice, however, does not exist other than in that commonwealth whose founder and ruler is Christ.'

The 'recovery' of Aristotle equips St Thomas to forge a new kind of political theory: a political theory which we may characterise as milder and more optimistic precisely because it lacks Augustine's stringent insistence on the unworthiness of this world and its ends. In this sense, St Thomas's remarks may be taken as a turning-point in the history of political thought. Augustine, with his eyes fastened upon on the world to come – the transcendent other world of the Christian platonist – had found the present world unnatural, sin-laden, destructive and disordered, and its politics harsh and coercive merely. To Augustine, the individual is aligned either with earth or with heaven. To be the ally of the one is to be estranged from the other. St Thomas, by contrast, finds nothing to quarrel with in the rational, humane and ordered world depicted by the Philosopher. He never explicitly disagrees with Augustine; but he sees no irreconcilable tension between the acquisition of present goods on earth and the achievement of eternal ones in heaven, provided that the former are directed towards the latter and the latter are not neglected in favour of the former. The interests of this world and the next can coexist. St Thomas quotes with approval the famous maxim of Aristotle, that 'man is by nature a political animal' (Ia 96:4 (p. 4, below); *De regimine principum* 1:1 (p. 6, below)). This is a maxim which runs counter to the Augustinian insistence that God 'did not intend that His rational creature, made in His own image, should have lordship over any but irrational creatures: not man over man, but man over the beasts' (*De civitate Dei* 19:15). To be sure, man has a true and final end of which Aristotle knew nothing. His true destiny is eternal beatitude with God in heaven. But earthly wellbeing, as far as it goes and as long as it is valued at its proper worth, is both possible and desirable, and the political means by which it is secured are valid. Even the rule of unbelievers over the faithful is legitimate provided that it is not scandalous or dangerous to the faith. Dominion and rule were introduced by human law; but the Divine law, which is of grace, does not abolish the human law, which arises from natural reason. Of itself the distinction between believers and unbelievers does not remove the authority of unbelievers over the believer (IIaIIae 10:10 (p. 270, below)).

Life on earth, then, is not the welter of misery that St Augustine depicted, and the achievement of earthly wellbeing is an end which, though

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limited and secondary, is positive and worthwhile, and of which human beings have no reason to be ashamed. The achievement of such earthly wellbeing requires government; but this is not 'Augustinian' government. It is not ordained to do little more than hold the lid on human destructiveness by force and fear. It is a benevolent administration suited to the kind of sociable and co-operating creature that man is by nature. No one is able to provide himself with all the necessities of life: we need to co-operate in order to secure the benefits of a division of labour. Though rational, we are in some ways more vulnerable than the beasts, who are equipped by nature with the means of defence or flight and who know by instinct what is harmful to them. There may be more than one way to achieve our ends, and we need to be guided wisely towards them just as a ship needs to be steered into harbour. These are facts which have nothing to do with sin. They are facts of human nature simply. They are the facts which make it necessary for a community to be knit together in a collective purpose by wise leadership directed to the common good (see *De regimine principum* 1:1 (pp. 5ff, below)). The purpose of secular government is not suppression and punishment, but the achievement of earthly wellbeing.

Nor is earthly wellbeing only a matter of bodily protection and economic satisfaction. An ordered and co-operative life with others of our own kind can be a positive source of happiness and virtue. '[T]he end for which a community is brought together is to live according to virtue; for men come together so that they may live well in a way that would not be possible for each of them living singly. For the good is life according to virtue, and so the end of human association is a virtuous life' (*De regimine principum* 1:15). What St Thomas has to say about obedience at *IIaIIae* 104 (p. 57, below) is in some ways ill expressed; but in essence it is straightforward. Subjection is not foreign to our nature. Just as it is natural for material objects to be moved by stronger forces of nature, so is it natural for human beings to be moved by the commands of their natural superiors. Obedience is the virtue which reinforces all the other virtues in us. The subjection of inferiors to superiors is part of the divinely willed order, and it is God's will that we should obey our natural superiors in all that they can lawfully command: in all, that is, that does not contravene His will. Christians must not suppose that the fact of their having become Christians exempts them from obedience to the secular powers.

At *De regimine principum* 1:3 (p. 10, below), St Thomas holds that the kind of leadership which our condition requires is best provided by a king. Kingship, because it is government by one, is the most natural and

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therefore the best kind of government. Its archetype is God's government of the universe, and we see it mirrored everywhere in nature. St Thomas follows Aristotle in referring to the 'king' bee. It is the most efficient kind of government because a king's power is undivided and his freedom of action unlimited. The king has no one to compromise with, dissent from or consult. Also, although monarchy perverted into tyranny is the worst kind of bad government, monarchy is the form of government least likely to become perverted because it is not subject to the kind of internal stresses which subvert government by several (*De regimine principum* 1:6 (p. 16, below)). The discussion of governmental forms in *De regimine principum* is left incomplete, and St Thomas abandoned the treatise before taking the subject up again. In the *Summa*, he recommends a kingship tempered or limited by elements of democracy and oligarchy (IaIIae 105:1 (p. 52, below)), an arrangement also hinted at in *De regimine principum* 1:7 (p. 17, below). This, of course, reflects Aristotle's preference for mixed government. St Thomas follows Aristotle in supposing that this kind of government will derive stability from the fact that it will please all sections of the community.

But the Christian king must understand that his function is not merely to rule externals. In the final analysis his task is to create conditions within which men will be able to achieve the supernatural end which lies beyond earthly prosperity and wellbeing. Whatever he does must have material benefit only as an intermediate goal. His ultimate aim must be the virtue and salvation of his subjects. His true reward is not any material gain; nor is it the passing glory which comes from the renown of men. It is the eternal blessedness of heaven (*De regimine principum* 1:9–16 (pp. 24ff, below)). This kind of thing is, of course, a stock in trade of ecclesiastical writers. Such pious advice to rulers goes back to St Augustine's famous panegyric on Christian emperors at *De civitate Dei* 5:24, a passage which St Thomas approvingly paraphrases at *De regimine principum* 1:9 (p. 26, below):

[W]e do not call Christian princes happy because they ruled for a longer time, or because they died in peace and left behind sons to rule as emperors, or because they subdued the enemies of the commonwealth, or because they were able to avoid and suppress uprisings against them by the citizens. Rather, we say that they are happy if they rule justly; if they prefer to govern wicked desires more than any people whatsoever; if they do these things not out of craving for empty glory, but from love of eternal felicity. We say that, for the time being, such Christian emperors are happy in hope and that, in time

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to come, when that to which we now look forward has arrived, they will be so in possession.

It is at first sight odd that, despite his interest in how rulers should behave, St Thomas does not offer an extended treatment of the question of 'Church and State'. An obvious explanation is the fact that he was not himself involved in any particular political controversy. The major medieval treatises dealing with the question of *regnum* and *sacerdotium* were, after all, without exception produced as contributions to a specific dispute. St Thomas's several remarks may be regarded as evidence of a consistent if unelaborated position (see *De regimine principum* 1:15 (p. 39, below); *IIaIIae* 12:2 (p. 276, below); and *Scripta super libros sententiarum* 11, Dist. 44, quaest. 3, art. 4 (p. 277, below)). He states in a general way that the Supreme Pontiff is the representative of Christ on earth; that the king should submit to the spiritual guidance of the priesthood; that in certain cases he is subject to the temporal authority of the Church; that spiritual and temporal power come together in the Supreme Pontiff; and that the subjects of a king who apostasises from the faith can be released from their oath of fealty to him. His fullest statement is as follows (p. 278, below):

Spiritual and secular power are both derived from the Divine power, and so secular power is subject to spiritual power insofar as this is ordered by God: that is, in those things which pertain to the salvation of the soul. In such matters, then, the spiritual power is to be obeyed before the secular. But in those things which pertain to the civil good, the secular power should be obeyed before the spiritual, according to Matthew 22:21: 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's.' Unless perhaps the spiritual and secular powers are conjoined, as in the pope, who holds the summit of both powers: that is, the spiritual and the secular, through the disposition of Him Who is both priest and king, a priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek.

The conclusion to which this and related passages point is that St Thomas subscribed to the *ratione peccati* doctrine usually associated with Innocent III's decretal *Novit*:¹¹ that the jurisdiction of kings is separate from that of popes; that popes should not ordinarily interfere in temporal affairs; but that they may judge and punish kings 'by reason of sin'. This, broadly speaking, was the standard position of the papacy between the pontificates

¹¹ See especially Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State*, pt 111, ch. 4; see also S. R. Packard, *Europe and the Church under Innocent III* (New York, 1927); H. Tillmann, *Pope Innocent III* (Amsterdam, 1978); J. A. Watt, *The Theory of Papal Monarchy in the Thirteenth Century* (London, 1965).

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of Innocent III (1196–1216) and Boniface VIII (1294–1303), and it would be surprising had St Thomas held any other view. The fact that he does not elaborate it or illustrate it with the standard historical examples is not, in itself, remarkable.

Because, for St Thomas, politics is a benign and positive activity, and civic happiness a worthwhile end, he takes a different view of tyranny from the ‘traditional’ Augustinian one. For Augustine, the power of even the cruellest tyrant has a divine origin and therefore a kind of divine validity. God has bestowed power upon the tyrant to punish sinners and try the faith of the righteous. If we find ourselves under a tyrant, we should reflect that this is no more than our sinful condition deserves, and submit with as good a grace as we can muster. The only exception arises if the tyrant requires us to do something plainly contrary to God’s will. In such a case – if, say, he requires us to sacrifice to an idol – our proper course is to decline to obey and suffer the consequences. We may not resist. Augustine will countenance nothing more than civil disobedience. Where we cannot in conscience obey, we should follow the example of the martyrs.¹² St Thomas, by contrast, though his thought on the subject is not wholly divested of Augustinian elements, does not regard tyranny simply as a divinely intended punishment; nor does he hold that the right to disregard a tyrant’s commands extends only to those commands which directly contradict the divine will. Kings exist to do more than merely suppress wickedness and test faith. They exist to secure a common good or a public interest. If, therefore, instead of this, the king devotes himself to his own private good – if he becomes a tyrant in the sense specified in Book 111 of Aristotle’s *Politics* – he has betrayed the purpose for which God appointed him, and his people have no obligation to obey. They can, indeed, take action against him – on one occasion (IaIIae 96:4 ad 3 (p. 145, below)) St Thomas uses the word *resistere* – in appropriate circumstances.

What action St Thomas thinks them entitled to take is not entirely clear, at least partly because he himself does not think the question amenable to a straightforward answer. Some commentators have thought him inconsistent or pusillanimous on this issue. In his relatively youthful *Scripta super libros sententiarum*, speaking with apparent approval of the assassination of Julius Caesar, he seems to subscribe to a version of tyrannicide, at least when the tyranny is extreme and no other course of action is available (p. 72, below). At *De regimine principum* 1:7 (p. 17, below), he takes the view

¹² See Dyson, *The Pilgrim City*, ch. 2.

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that action may be taken against tyrants, but only by those who are in some sense authorised to do so: either because they have a formal ‘kingmaking’ role, or because they are carrying out the will of an oppressed community. Tyrants may not be overthrown merely on the private judgment of someone who happens not to like the king. Those who think otherwise are a source of danger to everyone. Again, at *De regimine principum* 1:7 (p. 17, below) and in the *Summa* (IIaIIae 104:6 ad 3 (p. 71, below); IIaIIae 42:2 ad 3 (p. 250, below)) he holds that tyranny of a relatively mild kind ought to be tolerated and that action should be taken only where the harm involved in doing so is not greater than the advantages which taking action may be expected to secure. We may read these statements in conjunction with what he says about war and violence (Chapter 6): that wars waged to repel aggression or escape oppression, and reasonable force used in self-defence and without malice, are morally justified, but that one must always be careful not to do more damage than one averts. His position on the question of tyranny is not really inconsistent with itself or with his general view of how people who are threatened or aggrieved ought to behave; nor, strictly, does he fudge the issue. His remarks, taken together, add up to an intelligible position of cautious conservatism which recognises that extreme measures may be justified sometimes but should be avoided if at all possible.

St Thomas’s willingness to engage in a positive spirit with the institutions and practices of the secular world is illustrated also by his attitude to private property and his interest in some of its minutiae (Chapter 5). He does not abandon the traditional belief which St Ambrose and St Augustine had taken over from the Roman Stoics that by nature all things are common. Departing once more from the Augustinian view of things, however – although, again, without overt disagreement – he does not associate private property merely with sin and greed and fallen human nature. It is by human law that we possess property; but our possession of it is justified by reference to practical considerations which are entirely benign. Human laws regulating property ownership are additions to, but not departures from, the law of nature. If there were no private property the earth’s resources would not be as well managed as when they are owned and cared for by determinate individuals. Individuals will inevitably bestow more care on what belongs to them than they will on common property. This is not because human beings are sinful or depraved, but because our view of things is by nature limited or partial. If there were no laws to make clear who owns what, quarrels would occur more frequently than they do.