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Antony Black
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POLITICAL THOUGHT IN EUROPE, 1250-1450

Why did European civilisation develop as it did? Why was it so different from that of Russia, the Islamic world and elsewhere? In this Cambridge Medieval Textbook Antony Black explores some of the reasons, looking at ideas of the state, law, rulership, representation of the community and the right to self-administration, and how, during a crucial period, these became embedded in people's self-awareness, and articulated and justified by theorists. Dr Black stresses the importance of the distinction between church and state, and the maintenance of an international society in the face of independent state sovereignty.

Political thought in the later Middle Ages was diverse and complex; it developed separate 'languages' out of the Bible, Cicero, Aristotle and Roman law. Theorists arrived at different conclusions about the locus of sovereignty and the best constitution: some were for monarchy, others for 'popular sovereignty'; most espoused the rule of law and regular advice from 'the wise'; some supported representative assemblies such as parliament and church councils while others opposed these. It can be argued that by c. 1450 the idea of the modern state was in place.

This is the first concise overview of a period never previously treated satisfactorily as a whole: Dr Black uses the analytical tools of scholars such as Pocock and Skinner to set the work of political theorists in the context of both contemporary politics and the longer-term history of political ideas. Specific thinkers examined include Aquinas, Ptolemy of Lucca, Dante, Marsiglio of Padua, Ockham, Bartolus, Nicole Oresme, Leonardo Bruni, Nicholas of Cusa and many others.

This book provides students of both medieval history and political thought with an accessible and lucid introduction to the early development of certain ideas fundamental to the organisation of the modern world. *Political Thought in Europe, 1250-1450* also contains a full bibliography to assist students wishing to pursue the subject in greater depth.

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 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xii
Introduction	I
1 The political community	14
The common good	24
Liberty	28
Justice and law	34
2 Church and state	42
The papacy, France and the Empire	48
Marsiglio	58
Ockham	71
Wyclif	79
Torquemada	82
3 Empire and nation	85
International society	87
The defenders of Empire	92
State sovereignty	108
4 City-states and civic government	117
Bruni	129

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[More information](#)

viii	<i>Contents</i>	
5	Kingship, law and counsel	136
	Election and heredity	146
	Resistance	148
	King and law	152
	Counsel and wisdom	156
6	Parliamentary representation	162
	The conciliar movement	169
	Nicholas of Cusa	178
	Absolute monarchy	184
7	The state	186
	Conclusion	191
	<i>Select bibliography</i>	192
	<i>Index</i>	208

PREFACE

This book has been written in the belief that the period from 1250 to 1450 was seminal for the values and politics of the modern world, especially but by no means exclusively in Europe; that this has been strangely neglected or misunderstood; but, above all, that it is fascinating in its own terms. State sovereignty, separation of church and state, representation, the popular origin of government, property rights – these are just a few of the ideas formulated, often for the first time in their modern form, during this period. We must get away from the idea of the ‘Middle Ages’ as esoteric. Political thought then was about as varied and fluid as later.

This book is aimed at students both of history and of political thought. I have attempted to set the subject matter in the context both of contemporary politics and of the history of ideas. Nothing less would have been fair to the subjects treated. It assumes no special prior knowledge. If I have been motivated by anything other than the usual reasons for writing books, it has been a desire to set the record straight and do justice to this epoch and the thinkers in it. This has become a work of exploration in its own right because, while other and better scholars have done justice to individual thinkers and topics, this period has not been satisfactorily treated as a whole. (Indeed, it has become an adventure playground for prejudice.) And when one sets a thinker or idea in a wider context, one does not merely add to the background but sees that thinker or idea itself in a different way.

I have included the whole of Europe, in the face of a customary

division between the 'early Renaissance' in Italy and the 'late Middle Ages' everywhere else, because in politics and ideology the links seem too manifold to permit either to be comprehended alone. The book has been planned according to topics rather than time, mainly for the sake of clarity; but chronological development is observed within topics. I have dealt with major individual thinkers in different places, but most extensively in the context that seemed most appropriate (for example, Marsiglio at pp. 56–71). Chapter 1 discusses the political community or state, and values attaching to it. (I found this the most difficult chapter to write and it may be the most difficult to read.) Chapter 2 discusses the relation between spiritual (ecclesiastical, clerical) and temporal (secular, lay) power – the vertical division of authority; and chapter 3 the relation between universal and local powers – horizontal levels of authority. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 discuss the structure of authority within political societies. (These issues were often connected: the conflict between pope Boniface VIII and king Philip IV of France, for example, involved secular and ecclesiastical jurisdiction, a universal and a local ruler, and theocratic and popular conceptions of power.)

Political communities and our perceptions of them change constantly over time; the history of the twentieth century has ensured that this era is of more than antiquarian interest: we can learn from history because it is still moving and we are still in it. This stage in European political thought may be of special importance at a time when the relationship between politics and religion is again a major issue.

Information on sources used and authors mentioned in the text, together with suggestions for further reading, are in the bibliography. This is designed to be used alongside the text. It is divided into section 1, Original texts and Studies: Selections of original texts in translation; Authors, original texts and studies, Authors: original texts and studies; section 2, Further reading; section 3, Works of reference. Section 2 is sub-divided into General; Historical Background; and the following specific topics: Aristotle; Church and state; City-states and civic government; Florence; International relations and state sovereignty; The jurists; Kingship, law and representation; Liberty and the individual; Natural Law; The political community; The Renaissance; The state. For names of individuals, I have followed what I took to be convention and when in doubt used vernacular forms.

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>CC</i>	<i>De concordantia catholica (Catholic Concordance)</i> by Nicholas of Cusa
<i>CHMPT</i>	<i>Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought</i>
<i>CIC</i>	<i>Corpus iuris canonici</i>
<i>DP</i>	<i>Defensor pacis (The Defender of the Peace)</i> by Marsiglio of Padua
<i>LTK</i>	<i>Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche</i>
<i>MPI</i>	Ewart Lewis, <i>Medieval Political Ideas</i>
<i>ST</i>	<i>Summa Theologiae</i> by Thomas Aquinas