

MEDIEVAL POLITICAL THOUGHT (AQUINAS, DANTE)
Influence of Christianity on western Political thought.
Controversy between Secular and Spiritual authority.

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS (1227-74): Theory of Law and Justice.



St. Thomas Aquinas was a champion of the Church in Europe in the 13th century. He was the greatest philosopher of the Middle Ages. He was born in noble family in Sicily. He moved among Kings and Popes. Aquinas lived at a time when Papal authority was a political institution. It was both spiritual and territorial.

The intellectual tradition of 13th century is known as Scholasticism. It had two characteristics. Firstly, it held that the Church is infallible and unquestionable. Secondly, it tried to

reconcile Faith and Reason, i.e. theology and science. All branches of science must be in tune with theology. In the contest between the Holy Roman Empire and Papacy, the latter became victorious

Then there was the rebirth of Plato, Aristotle and Cicero. This was because of the fact that the Spaniards, who were conquered by the Arabs, learned the worth of ancient knowledge. Thus three intellectual currents were available in the Middle Ages namely Scholasticism, Aristotalianism and Universalism. All the three streams converged in Aquinas. He was something like a Christianized Aristotle.

Aquinas agreed with Aristotle that man is a social animal. Man realizes his perfection through the state. The state is not the product of human sin. But it is a positive product. It is the embodiment of Reason. The state is necessary to provide the conditions of good life. Aquinas adds that the church also is necessary to secure the eternal good. He holds that the church is the highest human institution. It is not the rival of the state, but its completion and perfection.

On Law: there are four kinds of laws namely **Eternal, Natural, Divine and Human**. Eternal Law is the reason existing in the **mind of God** by which the whole universe is governed. This law regulates the heavenly and earthly spheres and the animate and inanimate worlds. Natural Law is the **reflection of the divine law** in human beings. It is reflected in the natural inclination of men to live in society. Divine Law consists of **direct revelation by God** through saints or through Bible. **Human law is derived from Natural Law** and is subordinate to the latter. It is not conflict with Natural Law. It is based on **reason**; it for the **common good** and it should be **published** to be noticed by people.

Short Essay:

1. St. Thomas Aquinas: Describe the **contributions** of <> to Political Philosophy. 06 03

Short Answer.

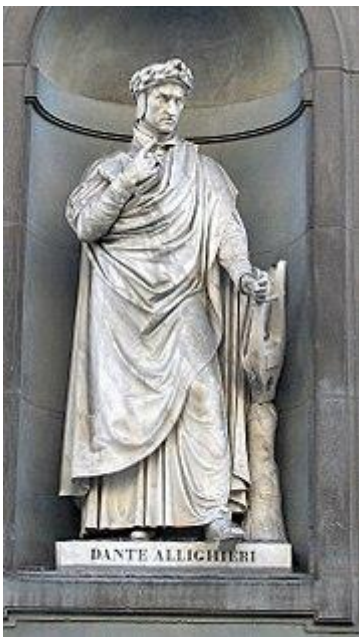
1. St. Thomas Aquinas **on Law**. 07 2008
2. Medieval Political Thought: bring out the **characteristics**. 07 05 04
3. **Scholasticism**. 04

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MEDIEVAL POLITICAL THOUGHT (AQUINAS, DANTE)

Influence of Christianity on western Political thought—Controversy between Secular and Spiritual authority.

DANTE ALIGHIERI: (1265- 1321): Theory of Universal Monarchy



Dante lived during a time of constant quarrel between the factions supporting the Emperor and the Pope. Like a true Italian, Dante also believed that the Italians are destined to rule the world. Therefore, they should continue to do so.

In *De Monarchi*, Dante is concerned with three problems. 1. Is there a need for a **world government**? 2. Is **Monarchy** the best form of world government? 3. Whether the **authority** of Holy Roman Emperor came directly from God or from Pope.

Dante considered **Monarchy** as the best form of government because peace, a necessary condition to all other virtues¹ could be maintained only by a monarch.

Statue of Dante at Florence.

Like other medievalists, Dante advocated an **unlimited monarchy**. He was not only for a monarchy, but for a **Universal Monarchy**. This was necessary for the **peace** of all mankind and that the monarch will have **no fear** and **no ambition** to have, would rule **justly and wisely**.

There were particular ends for smaller communities like the household, village, city or kingdom. But there was only a general end for all mankind. World Empire and World Emperor were necessary because **smaller communities were not self sufficient** and **could not generate peace**, without which good life was impossible. He was for a **strong secular Universal Empire** and for **depriving the Pope of all secular authority** and power of interference in secular affairs. The **universal society** should be governed by two divine authorities i.e. the Emperor and the Pope. They should have their separate and well defined jurisdiction. They must **not interfere in the affairs of each other**. The secular government was **independent of spiritual authority**. The power of the emperor, just like the pope, came **from God directly**.

The monarch shall rule according to justice and law. The state shall perform both **material** and **moral** functions. The monarch is the **representative of God on earth**. He must rule **through the**

¹ Virtue = goodness

monarchs of other kingdoms. He is **not a despot**². But he prevents the monarchs from fighting. He must maintain **peace**. He is a **guardian of peace** and not an actual ruler. He must not destroy national or individual independence. It must be permitted as far it is compatible with world peace. For full **individual self realisation**, peace is necessary. Therefore, the world emperor exists for the people. He is only a **servant of the servants**. He is the **law personified**³, **law throned and crowned and invested**⁴ **with majesty and honour**. Dante's universal monarchy is not a super state. But it is the regime of supreme law. The supreme law may be called justice, which could be maintained by one man.



Short Essays:

1. Dante: Comment on Dante's **Universal Monarchy**. 07 05 03
2. Dante: Give an account of Dante's theory of **Universal Empire**. 06
3. **Medieval Political Thought**: bring out the characteristics. 07 05 04

² Despot = absolute ruler, tyrant

³ Personify = represent, symbolize, embody

⁴ Invest = attribute or entrust a quality