

PHLB16H3S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: ANCIENT GREECE AND MIDDLE AGES

STUDY QUESTIONS (III): AQUINAS & DEBATE ON PAPAL AUTHORITY IN THE 14TH C

A. Short Answer Questions

Instructions

Choose four of the seven expressions, terms or phrases listed below and give a **brief explanation** following these instructions:

- (A1) **Scholasticism**
- (A2) ***Summa Theologiae***
- (A3) ***On Kingship***
- (A4) **Mirrors for Princes (*Specula Principum*)**
- (A5) **Double Goal of Human Beings**
- (A6) **Life According to Virtue *plus* Enjoyment of God**
- (A7) **Natural and Divine Goal of Political Communities**
- (A8) **Monarchy as the Best Political Regime**
- (A9) **Democracy as the Best of the Corrupted Political Regimes**
- (A10) **Hierarchical Order of the Universe**
- (A11) **Secularism**
- (A12) **Secular Powers vs. Spiritual Powers**
- (A13) **Dualism about the Authority of the Prince and the Pope**
- (A14) **Hierarchy of Wills**
- (A15) **Obedience to God vs. Obedience to Other Human Beings**
- (A16) **Human Fallibility**
- (A17) **'Fullness of Power' (*plenitudo potestatis*)**
- (A18) **Coercive Power of the Church**
- (A19) **Guidance vs. Coercion**
- (A20) **Dante's Principle of Unity**
- (A21) **Universal Monarchy**
- (A22) **God as Source of all Authority**
- (A23) **Question about the Source of Authority (or Source of Power)**

B. Textual Analysis Questions

Instructions

Choose 2 of the following 4 sets of questions.

Questions

Question 1. In his treatise *On Kingship* Aquinas follows Aristotle in his explanation of the **origin of the state**. Comment on the following passage by answering the questions below:

For other animals are furnished by nature with food, with a covering of hair, and with the means of defence, such as teeth, horns or at any rate speed in flight. But man is supplied with none of these things by nature. Rather, in place of all of them reason was given to him, by which he might be able to provide all things for himself, by the work of his own hands. One *man, however, is not able to equip himself with all these things, for one man cannot live a self-sufficient life. It is therefore natural for man to live in fellowship with many others.* (On Kingship 1.1)

- (a) What is the main difference between human beings and other animals according to this passage? (5)
- (b) What is the reason that Aquinas, following Aristotle, uses in this passage to explain the origin of political community? (5)
- (c) Socrates uses a similar strategy to explain the origin of his ideal state in the *Republic*. What is the name of the principle that Socrates uses and what does it say? (5)
- (d) Why does Aquinas say that living in community is “natural”? (5)

Question 2. In *On Kingship* Aquinas offers a second explanation of the **origin of political communities**. Comment on the text by answering the questions below:

Man, however, has a natural understanding of the things necessary to his life only in a general way, and it is by the use of reason that he passes from universal principles to an understanding of the particular things which are necessary to human life. But *it is not possible for one man to apprehend all such things by reason. It is therefore necessary for man to live in a community, so that each man may devote his reason to some particular branch of learning: one to medicine, another to something else, another to something else again.* (On Kingship 1.1)

- (a) Express in your own words the argument presented in the passage in favor of life in community. (5)
- (b) Socrates appeals to a similar idea in his explanation of the origin of the ideal state in *Republic*. What is the name of the principle used by Socrates, and what does it say? (5)
- (c) What immediate consequence for the organization of the city does Socrates’s principle have? (5)
- (d) Does Aquinas’ argument lead him to the same proposal? Explain your answer briefly.(5)

Question 3. In *On Kingship* Aquinas presents his criterion for distinguishing **good forms of government** from unjust and corrupted ones. Comment on this criterion by answering the questions about the text:

If ... a community of free men is ordered by a ruler in such a way *as to secure the common good*, such rule will be right and just inasmuch as it is suitable to free men. If, however, the government is directed not towards the common good but *towards the private good of the ruler*, rule of this kind will be unjust and perverted. (On Kingship 1.2)

- (a) What is, according to the text, the main characteristic of a good government? And of a bad one? Does Aquinas agree with Aristotle on this point? (5)
- (b) Name the three main forms of good government and the three main forms of unjust government according to Aquinas. How do they differ from one another? (5)
- (c) What is the best kind of government according to Aquinas? Why? (5)
- (d) Does Aquinas agree with Aristotle's views on the best form of government? Explain your answer briefly.

Question 4. In his treatise *On Kingship* Aquinas identifies “**living according to virtue**” as the goal of political communities. Comment on this claim by answering the questions below:

But it seems that the 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.*

(On Kingship 1.15)

- (a) What notion of human flourishing (or happiness) does Aquinas assume *in the quoted text*? (5)
- (b) Aquinas says that the virtuous life is the ultimate “end of human association”, but later in the treatise he recognizes the existence of another goal of human beings. Which one? Does Aquinas agree with Aristotle on this issue? (5)
- (c) Does the achievement of the second goal depend on the existence of human communities? Explain your answer briefly. (5)
- (d) What is the relationship between the two goals of human beings? In other words, are these goals independent in some sense? Explain. (5)

Question 5. The main aim of Aquinas' *On Kingship* is to offer a **defence of monarchy**. Comment on the following argument about the advantages of monarchy by answering the questions below:

The more effectively government preserves the unity of peace, therefore, the more beneficial it is; for we call something 'more beneficial' when it leads more effectively to its end. Clearly, however, something which is itself one can bring about unity more effectively than something which is many can Government by one is therefore more advantageous than government by several.
(*On Kingship* 1.3)

- (a) According to the quoted argument, why is monarchy more beneficial than the government of the many? (5)
- (b) In this text Aquinas seems to agree with Plato about the central goal that government should have to achieve a well functioning society: "The more effectively government preserves the unity of peace, therefore, the more beneficial it is". Name two measures that Plato proposes in the *Republic* to achieve and preserve this "unity of peace".
- (c) Is Aquinas' conclusion about the best form of government also in agreement with Plato's views in the *Republic*? Explain your answer.
- (d) Does Aquinas agree with Aristotle about the best form of government? Explain briefly.

Alternative question: (d') What is, according to Aquinas, the main risk of monarchy? (5)

Question 6. Aquinas argues in his treatise *On Kingship* that **democracy is the best of the perverted regimes**. Comment on Aquinas' views about democracy by answering the questions below:

The further it departs from the common good, therefore, the more unjust will the government be. But there is a greater departure from the common good in an oligarchy, where the good of the few is sought, than in a democracy, where the good of the many is sought; and there is a still greater departure from the common good in a tyranny, where the good of only one is sought. A large number comes closer to the whole than a small one, and a small one closer than only one. Tyranny, therefore, is the most unjust form of government.
(*On Kingship* 1.4)

- (a) What do tyranny, oligarchy and democracy have in common in Aquinas' view? (5)
- (b) Why is democracy better than tyranny and oligarchy? (5)
- (c) What are the forms of good government, and how do they differ from tyranny, oligarchy and monarchy? (5)
- (d) What is the best form of government according to Aquinas? Why? (5)

Question 7. In the treatise *On Kingship* Aquinas recognizes **two different human goals**, from which he derives conclusions about the goal of political community and about the relation between the political powers and the spiritual powers. Answer the questions below about these two texts:

[I]t seems that the 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. (*On Kingship* 1.15, p. 41)

But there is a certain extraneous good which awaits man after he has lived this mortal life: namely, the final blessedness to which he looks forward in the enjoyment of God after death. (*On Kingship* 1.15, p. 41)

- (a) What is the end of political communities according to Aquinas? (5)
- (b) Who is, according to Aquinas, the highest authority that should be in charge to lead citizens towards their temporal goal? (5)
- (c) What is the second human goal that Aquinas acknowledges? And who is, in Aquinas' opinion, the adequate ruler in relation to that goal? (5)
- (d) Does Marsilius of Padua agree with Aquinas about the existence of these two goals? And does he agree with the distribution of authorities that Aquinas proposes? (5)

Question 8. In *On Obedience* Aquinas recognizes the existence of a **hierarchy of wills** and he uses that hierarchical structure to justify our obligation to obey superiors. Discuss this issue by answering the questions about the text:

In the natural order, it happens of necessity that higher things move lower things by the excellence of the natural power divinely given to them. Hence in human affairs also superiors must move inferiors by their will, by virtue of a divinely established authority. (*On Obedience*, ST IIaIae 104 art. 1, p. 58)

- (a) What is the main characteristic of those who are at the top of the hierarchy? (5)
- (b) What is, then, the justification for obedience and authority? Why should we obey some people? (5)
- (c) Who are the superiors in the hierarchy of wills that Aquinas is referring to? (5)
- (d) Is there for Aquinas a conflict of powers at the top of the hierarchy? Why?/Why not? (5)

Question 9. In some passages **Aquinas** appears to maintain conflicting views concerning the question about the **relation between temporal and spiritual powers**. Explain the following passages from *On Obedience* by answering the questions below:

The order of justice requires that inferiors obey their superiors; otherwise the condition of human affairs could not be preserved. And so *the faithful are not excused by the faith of Christ to obey secular princes*.
(*On Obedience*, ST IIaIae 104 art. 6, p. 71)

Man is bound to obey secular princes *insofar as the order of justice requires it*. ... if they command something which is unjust, their subjects are not bound to obey them.
(*On Obedience*, ST IIaIae 104 art. 6, p. 71-72)

- (a) Name and explain briefly the general position that Aquinas generally adopts concerning the relationship between spiritual and earthly powers. Name another author that shares this view with Aquinas. (5)
- (b) Why could someone think that there is a conflict between the two above-quoted passages? (5)
- (c) How can we interpret what Aquinas is saying in these two passages so that it presents a unified view? (10)

Question 10. In some passages **Aquinas** appears to maintain conflicting views concerning the question about the **relation between temporal and spiritual powers**. Explain the following passages from *On Kingship* by answering the questions below:

But because the enjoyment of Divinity is an end which a man cannot attain through human virtue alone, but only through Divine virtue, This, then, is the government given to Him, which shall not pass away and by reason of which He is called in Holy Scripture not only priest but king. ... The administration of this kingdom, therefore, is entrusted not to earthly kings, but to priests, so that spiritual and earthly things may be kept distinct; and in particular to the Supreme Priest, the successor of Peter, the Vicar of Christ, the Roman Pontiff, to whom all the kings of the Christian people should be subject, as if to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.
(*On Kingship* 1.15, p. 42)

... under the old law, priests were subject to kings. But under the new law there is a higher priesthood, by which men are conducted towards heavenly goods; and so, under the law of Christ, kings must be subject to priests.
(*On Kingship* 1.15, p. 42)

- (a) Name and explain briefly the general position that Aquinas generally adopts concerning the relationship between spiritual and earthly powers. Name another author that shares this view with Aquinas. (5)
- (b) How does Aquinas justify his view on the relationship between spiritual and earthly powers appealing to the notion of human goal? (5)
- (c) In what way is that line of justification characteristic of the medieval way of thinking about authority (as opposed to the modern one)? (5)
- (d) Does Aquinas deviate from his general position in the quoted passages? Why?/Why not? (5)

Question 11. In his bull *Unam Sanctam* (1302) Pope **Boniface VIII** presents his views on the **relationship between temporal and spiritual powers**. Explain the Pope's position by answering the questions below:

For, according to the Blessed Dionysius, it is a law of the divinity that the lowest things reach the highest place by intermediaries. Then, *according to the order of the universe, all things are not led back to order equally and immediately, but the lowest by the intermediary, and the inferior by the superior*. Hence we must recognize the more clearly that spiritual power surpasses in dignity and in nobility any temporal power whatever, as spiritual things surpass the temporal. This we see very clearly also by the payment, benediction, and consecration of the tithes, but the acceptance of power itself and by the government even of things. For with truth as our witness, *it belongs to spiritual power to establish the terrestrial power and to pass judgment if it has not been good*.

(Boniface VIII, *Unam Sanctam*)

- (a) What kind of authority does the Boniface VIII think that Popes should have over the rest of human beings? Give the technical term and explain it briefly. (5)
[Remember the conclusion of the bull: “we declare, we proclaim, we define that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff.”]
- (b) What general conception of the structure of the universe is assumed by Boniface VIII in his argument? (5)
- (c) How does the argument used by Boniface VIII in the quoted text work? In other words, how does he derive his view about the authority of the Pope from his conception of the structure of the universe? (5)
- (d) How does Marsilius of Padua respond to the Pope's claim that “it belongs to spiritual power to establish the terrestrial power and to pass judgment if it has not been good”? (5)

Question 12. In the Second Discourse of *The Defender of Peace*, Marsilius of Padua presents his views on the **relationship between temporal and spiritual powers**. Explain his position by answering the questions below:

... suppose that some sinner has confessed his wrongdoings fictitiously and unduly, and has thereby received absolution and blessing *as a result of the priest's ignorance, malice, or both*. Suppose again that someone else has confessed his sins to the priest adequately and as was due, and *the priest, through ignorance, malice, or both*, has refused to give him absolution from his wrongdoings and a blessing. Are the sins of the first, who made a fictitious confession, then forgiven, and those of the latter, the true penitent, retained? No: as we must maintain firmly and without doubt.

(*The Defender of Peace*, Discourse II, ch. 6, p. 201)

- (a) What is Marsilius of Padua's general view about the relationship between temporal and spiritual powers? Name his position and explain it briefly. (5)
- (b) What kind of authority does Marsilius concede to priests, and what kind of authority does he think is beyond their power? (5)
- (c) In the quoted text Marsilius presents one of the main reasons why he thinks that priests should have limited authority. What feature about human beings does he appeal to in his argument? How does the argument work? (5)
- (d) According to Marsilius, who can exercise full power in spiritual matters? Why? (5)

Question 13. In the Second Discourse of *The Defender of Peace*, Marsilius of Padua presents his views on the **relationship between temporal and spiritual powers**. Explain his position by answering the questions below:

He alone exercises the rights of power in these matters, therefore, and is the judge with *coercive power*, who alone can neither be deceived concerning human thoughts and deeds, since ‘all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him,’ Hebrews 4, nor wills anything perversely, since ‘thou art just, O lord, and all thy judgements are just, and mercy, truth and judgement are in all thy ways,’ Tobias 3; and so he alone is such a judge.

(*The Defender of Peace*, Discourse II, ch. 7, p. 210)

- (a) Who is Marsilius referring to in this passage as the only one who can exercise spiritual powers? (5)
- (b) How does Marsilius justify his position about who can exercise spiritual powers? (5)
- (c) Marsilius talks in the text about judging with “coercive power”. What does he mean? (5)
- (d) What other kind of power does Marsilius recognize in relation to spiritual matters? And who can exercise this other kind of power according to Marsilius’ own view? (5)

Question 14. In the Second Discourse of *The Defender of Peace*, Marsilius of Padua presents his views on the **authority of the Pope and other members of the Church**. Explain his position by answering the questions below:

For this reason, a priest in respect of his office should not be compared by way of simile to a judge in the third signification but in the first, sc. *one who has the authority to teach or to practise*, just as does a physician, *but not to do so upon anyone with coercive power*.

(*The Defender of Peace*, Discourse II, ch. 7, p. 210)

Now analogously with human law there is another judge in accordance with gospel scripture, who is a judge in the first signification: sc. the priest, who is *a teacher in this world of the divine law and of the commands it contains of what is to be done or avoided in order to achieve eternal life and escape penalty*, but who nevertheless has *no coercive power in this world to constrain anyone to the observance of the things it commands*.

(*The Defender of Peace*, Discourse II, ch. 9, p. 221-222)

- (a) What two kinds of power concerning spiritual matters does Marsilius of Padua identify in the quoted text? (5)
- (b) What kind of power does he think that corresponds to priests in this world? Why? (5)
- (c) What consequences does this view have concerning the relationship between spiritual and temporal powers? In other words, how does Marsilius limit the power of the Pope? (5)
- (d) How does Marsilius’ view differ from Aquinas’ view on the relationship between spiritual and temporal powers? (5)

Question 15. In his treatise *On Monarchy* Dante uses a number of fundamental **assumptions about human nature and the structure of the world** to support his arguments in favour of universal monarchy and his views concerning relationship between temporal and spiritual powers. Explain Dante's assumptions by answering the questions below:

§2. Let us set up, then, this indisputable truth, that *whatever is repugnant to the intention of nature is contrary to the will of God*. If this were not true, its contrary would not be false, that whatever is repugnant to the intention of nature is not contrary to the will of God. [...]

§4. I demonstrate as follows the verity of what has been said. *That God wills an end for nature is manifest*; otherwise the heavens would move to no purpose, which it is not possible to claim. If God should will an obstruction to this end, He would also will an end for the obstruction, or He would will to no purpose. [...]

(*Monarchy*, Book III, ch. 2, §§2-4)

- (a) What relationship between nature and God's will is assumed by Dante according to the text? (5)
- (b) Name two main features of Dante's approach to the study of nature, i.e. the view that assumes that *nature has an ultimate goal* or end and that *all natural beings have their own goals, which are in turn subordinate to the ultimate goal of nature*. (5)
- (c) How does this approach affect the way that Dante thinks about political theory? In particular, *to which feature(s) of human nature* should we attend to find out the best way of organizing political societies? (5)
- (d) In what sense can we call Dante's framework Aristotelian? (5)

Question 16. In his treatise *On Monarchy* Dante presents his views on the **relationship between temporal and spiritual powers**. Explain Dante's position by answering the questions below:

11. In like manner, I say, the temporal power receives from the spiritual neither its existence, nor its strength, which is its authority, nor even its function taken absolutely. But well for her does she receive therefrom, through the light of grace which the benediction of the Chief Pontiff sheds upon it in heaven and on earth, strength to fulfill her function more perfectly.

(*Monarchy*, Book III, ch. 4, §11)

- (a) Name and explain briefly the general position that Dante adopts concerning the relationship between spiritual and earthly powers. Name also another author that shares this general view with Dante. (5)
- (b) How does Dante justify his view on the relationship between spiritual and earthly powers by appealing to the notion of human goal? (5)
- (c) The main characteristic of Dante's discussion is that he focuses on the question of the *source of authority* to support his views on relationship between spiritual and earthly powers. Where does the political authority of the king (or emperor) come from according to Dante? And how does that affect the status of the authority of king in relation to the Pope? (5)
- (d) In what way does Marsilius of Padua's view differ from that of Dante in relation to the authority of the Pope?