FOR KING OR CATHOLICISM: SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS ON POLITICAL RESISTANCE

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Abstract : The Thomistic response to the tyrant is one emphasizing obedience, patience, and prudence. Revolution, although perhaps at times necessary or morally obligated, should never be committed to lightly, due to the significant repercussions felt by a society after insurrection. While Aquinas instructs men to be obedient to their ruler through times of mild tyranny, he urges the polis beware hasty actions of war, even under extreme tyranny. Utilizing an early depiction of civil disobedience theory, Aquinas outlines burdens which must be met before committing to a political coup d'état or civil disobedience. This work will engage the nuances of Aquinas' justification for political resistance after working through the philosophical foundations of his claims, including his view of law, the meaning of the political common good, and the duties which bind the ruler to his people.

Key words : Thomas Aquinas, catholicism, low, political common good.

Saint Thomas Aquinas recounts the story of Dionysius' rule over the city-state of Syracuse. A cruel and tyrannical leader, the Syracusans hoped and begged the gods for Dionysius' death. The one citizen to stand apart was a small, elderly woman. Rather than praying for her ruler's death, she appealed to the gods that he might outlive her. When this story came to the ears of Dionysius, he immediately sought to know why. The woman pensively responded, "When I was a girl[,] we were oppressed by a tyrant, and I desired his death; he was slain, but was succeeded by another who oppressed us even more harshly; and again, I was greatly pleased to see the end of his reign. But he was succeeded by you"[1].

Throughout his extensive tomes of literature, Aquinas addressed thousands of questions of Catholic doctrine, virtue, and society. This work is particularly concerned with his literature on tyranny and resistance as it pertains to governments, and the significance of a ruler properly safeguarding the common good. It will begin with an explication of Aquinas' views of law, man, and society, in order to set the proper philosophical foundation, then shift into more comprehensive discussions of the meaning Aquinas applies to the language of "political common good", rulers' duties toward their citizens, as well as princes' common descent into tyranny and the citizenry's obligation to resist. Ultimately, we seek an answer to the question: according to Saint Thomas Aquinas, when is it permissible for a citizenry to resist against or

[1] Thomas Aquinas, "The treatise *'De regimine principum'* or *'De regno'* ", in *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought: Aquinas*, ed. and trans. R.W. Dyson, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, Book VI, 18: *Puella, inquit, existens, cum gravem tyrannum haberemus mortem ejus cupiebam quo interfecto, aliquantum durior successit; eius quoque dominationem finiti magnum existimabam: tertium to importuniorem habere coepimus rectorem. Itaque so tu fueris absumptus, deterior in locum tuum succedet.*

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overthrow their political ruler? He will answer us with a far more conservative sentiment than many modern reformers would prefer – prudence being the primary characteristic[2].

Men ought to obey their political leaders, even in the face of moderate tyranny. It is only in instances concerning extreme levels of tyrannical rule that resistance even enters into the possible equation; yet, even then, Aquinas urges men away from such a radical response. In order for resistance to be morally defensible, there must be certainty that the resistance – including the resulting bitterness toward the society, the replacement regime, and the necessary violence – will be less tyrannical than the reigning ruler. Such a burden is weighty to meet.

I. FOUNDATIONAL EXPOSITION: LAW, MAN, AND SOCIETY

There saw I some – plunged eyebrow-deep they stood;
And the great centaur said to me: "Behold
Tyrants, who gave themselves to ravin and blood.

Here they bewail oppressions manifold;
Alexander's here; Dionysius too, whose brute
Fury long years vexed Sicily uncontrolled.[3]

Before a discussion can be had concerning when the law may be violated, there must first be clarity about what is specifically meant by the term *law*. Aquinas outlines four different kinds of law: eternal law, divine law, natural law, and human law[4]. *Eternal law* is representative of God's perfect, unblemished plan, which it is impossible for humans to know. Held in the mind of God, His eternal law directs the universe timelessly, governing "things such as how animals and planets behaved and how people should behave"[5]. *Divine law* is revelation from God, most clearly seen through His holy scriptures passed down from the disciples and early church. Ultimately, it guides men "beyond the world to 'eternal happiness' "[6] in the City of God.

Natural law, in contrast, governs man through "the light of reason"[7]. This law is limited to human use, who, "alone among God's creatures"[8], have the opportunity to access it through their natural faculties. *Human law* is law by men, determined largely by time, place, and society, as they seek to govern their communities in a manner that upholds the "common good"[9]. As Dr. John Goyette notes,

[2] St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiæ of St. Thomas Aquinas*, second and revised edition., trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, London, Burne Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1920, 2–2, q. 47, a. 50, URL: [http://www.newadvent.org/summa/].

[3] Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy 1: Hell* [Inferno], trans. Dorothy L. Sayers, England, Penguin Classics, 1949, Canto XII, Circle VII, Ring I, 103–108.

[4] Arguably, Aquinas also presents the "law of sin" as a fifth form of law, however, it is established as more of a negative law than positive law: changing, inconsistent, encouraging disobedience to the other forms of law, urging the evil, benefiting wickedness. For this reason, we will set a discussion of sin aside and limit the scope of our discussion to the four literal forms of law Aquinas provides.

[5] *Bill of Rights in Action*, St. Thomas Aquinas, Natural Law, and the Common Good, Fall 2006 (22:4), 2.

[6] *Ibidem*

[7] *Ibidem*.

[8] *Ibidem*.

[9] Fear not at this casual use of a critical phrase; the language of "common good" will be explicated fully throughout Part II.

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> The specifications of the natural moral law that human law provides are by no means obvious or self-evident, but are the work of experience and time, and are perfected by the prudence or practical wisdom of the legislator. Indeed, Aquinas asserts that law is the work of a special kind of prudence, what he calls '*regnative prudence*,' and this virtue is the most perfect kind [of] prudence[10].

Fundamentally, it must be understood that these laws are rooted in sound reason, "because it is proper to reason to order things toward an end"[11]. The issues before us today, then, primarily fall into these latter two categories: human and natural law. Aquinas fundamentally affirms the Medieval proposition that all communities are dependent upon higher authority and must necessarily create and maintain civic laws[12]. It has been argued, by the likes of Rousseau and many other philosophers, that man is inherently an apolitical creature. He is not meant for societies, communities, or governments[13]. Aquinas' regard for law is rooted in a complete disregard for such a claim. "Perhaps the most central Aristotelian political doctrine in Aquinas' view is the inherent goodness and naturalness of political society"[14].

Aristotle proffered that man is a *ὁ ἄνθρωπος φύσει πολιτικὸν ζῷον*[15]. Rationalization for the *polis*, he wrote, can be found inherently in man's nature. Both society and law are necessarily natural to man; mankind must live within a political community. Human law is simply fulfilling the human need for order and limitation. Aristotle argued this position at length in his work, *The Politics*[16]. Several hundred years later, Aquinas reaffirmed its validity, giving us the well-known translation: "Man is by nature a social and *political animal*, who lives in a community [*in multitudine vivens*[17]]… natural necessity shows why this is so"[18]. Additionally, he expounded upon Aristotle's original thesis through the incorporation of Catholic religious tradition. "God created nature and rules the world by 'divine reason'"[19], he penned. Men living in political society with one another was

[10] Dr. John J. Goyette, "Aquinas On the Family and the Political Common Good", lecture, Thomas Aquinas College, Santa Paula, California, March 19, 2014; 4. Discussing St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiæ of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 22–22, q. 50, a. 1.

Not It is manifest that in him who has to govern not only himself but also the perfect community of a city or kingdom there is found a special and perfect kind of governance; because a government is more perfect to the degree that it is more universal, extends to more matters, and attains a higher end. Therefore prudence according to a special and most perfect sense belongs to a king to whom it belongs to govern a city or kingdom. And because of this a species of prudence is deemed *regnative*.

[11] Goyette, 4.

[12] A fuller discussion of the nuances of this argument will take place a bit further into the paper. Thomas Aquinas, *Aquinas: Selected Political Writings*, ed. A.P. d'Entréves, trans. J.G. Dawson, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1948, XXVI.

[13] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, trans. G.D.H. Cole, London & Toronto, J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1923, 47.

[14] Peter Koritansky, "Thomas Aquinas: Political Philosophy," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed April 7, 2019, URL: [https://www.iep.utm.edu/aqui-pol/].

[15] "Political animal", Aristotle, *The Politics of Aristotle*, trans. B. Jowett, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1885, 1:2, 1254a2, URL: [https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/aristotle-the-politics-vol-1—5]. Greek translation provided by Aquinas, "The treatise *'De regimine principum'* or *'De regno'* ", in *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought: Aquinas*, 6, footnote 17.

[16] *Ibidem*.

[17] "'Community' is probably as close as one can get to what St. Thomas usually means by multitude", writes translator A.P. d'Entréves. Aquinas, "The treatise *'De regimine principum'* or *'De regno'* ", in *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought: Aquinas*, 6, footnote 17.

[18] *Ibidem*, 6.

[19] *Bill of Rights in Action*, 2.

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the Lord's intention, even in Eden[20]. Mankind is not designed to live beyond the reach of the *polis.* Since we "civic and social animal[s]"[21] require a society in order to flourish[22], "In every multitude there must be some governing power"[23]. Just as the honey bees die off quickly and must cooperate for survival, so too humanity must care for the common good in order to sustain their own vitality[24].

> *Multis enim existentibus hominibus et unoquoque id, quod est sibi congruum, providente, multitudo in diversa dispergeretur, nisi etiam esset aliquis de eo, quod ad bonum multitudinis pertinent, curam habens; sicut et corpus hominis et cuiuslibet animalis deflueret, nisi esset aliqua vis regitiva communis in corpore, quae ad bonum commune omnium membrorum intenderet*[25].

He points to the words of the Wise King of Old, to counteract any outstanding doubt, "*Ubi non est gubernator, populus corruet…*"[26].

Saint Augustine of Hippo rejected Aristotle's argument that society was natural, viewing it instead as a necessary evil. According to God's original intention, the rational creatures were meant to have dominion over the irrational, but that was all[27]. Sin alone brought the *polis* into existence. As such, the *polis* should be viewed soberly, not celebrated, while continuously obeyed and respected for bringing a "semblance of peace and order"[28], for battling the onslaught of sin. Augustine believed that without political restraint, "human beings acting on their lust, avarice, and desire for power would make society intolerable, if not impossible"[29]. An anecdote he penned in *The City of God* clearly conveys Augustine's view of political authority as a menace.

> When [Alexander the Great] asked [a captured pirate] what he meant by infesting the sea, he boldly replied: 'What you mean by warring on the whole world. I do my fighting on a ship, and they call me a pirate; you do yours on a large ship, and they call you Commander'.[30]

It is only as a result of mankind's inability to keep himself from sinning that the need for a ruler was produced. The *polis* is not natural to human nature, as Aristotle claimed, but necessary so that, "those who show hostility to their fellow citizens are

[20] Aquinas, "The treatise *'De regimine principum'* or *'De regno'* ", *Caput* I, Latin translation by N. P. Swartz, "Thomas Aquinas: On Law, Tyranny and Resistance", *Acta Theologica* 30, no. 1, jun. 2010, footnote 5: *Si ergo naturale est homini quod in societate multorum vivat, necesse est in hominibus esse per quod multitudo regatur.*

[21] Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiæ of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 1–2, q. 72, a. 4.

[22] Aquinas, "The treatise *'De regimine principum'* or *'De regno'* ", in *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought: Aquinas*, 6.

[23] *Ibidem*, 8.

[24] *Ibidem*, 5–8, 36–37.

[25] *Ibidem*, Latin translation by Swartz, footnote 6.

[26] *Biblia Sacra*. *Liber Proverbiorum*, *Caput* XI, XIV: "Where there is no governor, the people shall fall…"

[27] Linda C. Raeder, "Augustine and the Case for Limited Government", *Humanitas* 16, no. 2 (2003), 94–106.

[28] *Ibidem*.

[29] Paul Weithman, "Augustine and Aquinas On Original Sin and the Function of Political Authority", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 30, no. 3, July 1992, 353–376.

[30] St. Augustine, *City of God*, ed. Vernon J. Bourke, trans. Gerald G. Walsh *et al*., New York, Image Book, 1958, IV, 4.

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restrained from their evil doing through 'force and fear…'"[31]. Here Augustine made a second claim: through the *polis,* men might learn to be virtuous. He believed that, "…[they] may even eventually come 'to do willingly what hitherto they did from fear'"[32].

Aquinas amends Augustine's interpretation of political society. Although embracing Augustine's understanding of sin nature deriving from original sin (an essential property which is properly predicated upon most human beings), he found issue with the claim that society was merely remedy. "Human laws leave certain things unpunished, on account of the conditions of those who are imperfect… if all sins were strictly forbidden and punishments appointed for them"[33]. Asserting that the purpose of the *polis* is the wrangling of all sin was intellectually dissatisfactory. Instead, Aquinas accepted that society has a partial purpose of keeping sin in check ("in all multiplicity there must be some controlling principle"[34]), while counter-proffering (and once more proliferating Aristotle's thesis) that the purpose of society – and subsequently government – is the "political common good", which is "better and more divine than the good of the individual"[35], and consists "in the virtuous life of the political multitude…"[36].

This counterproposition to Augustine flips the existence of the *polis* from a negative necessity to a positive necessity: one that predated the fall and postdates the Day of Judgement. In contemporary literature, we can see this proposition (perhaps more explicitly) through the language utilized by Oliver O'Donovan in his work, *The Ways of Judgement*. He writes, "The church is not yet manifest as the self-standing political society it is destined to be, acting together with the free obedience of all mankind in the worship of God"[37]. Rather than a postlapsarian back-up plan, society, according to Aquinas and O'Donovan, is God's eternal plan. While frustrating wickedness is a political duty, the "ultimate end of man, the *perfecta beatitudo,* is the common good"[38]. A ruler's highest and most sacred duty is safeguarding this common good, of which he speaks so endearingly. Aquinas accepted Augustine's claim that virtue is attainable through the *civitas,* while adding that it is *only* thus[39]. Additionally, he insisted that "man's natural social condition as well as express ecclesiastical command obligated him to serve the political community"[40]. Participating in society is necessary for men to engage in virtuous growth, once more pointing to the naturalness of the *polis*. "The *civitas* does more than simply provide safety, security, and material prosperity. It is ordered toward the good life, the life of virtue lived in common with other members of the city"[41]. Likewise, after the end of time, the eternal political society will be defined by a perfect ordering of the loves and the spiritual virtues and the Unblemished Holy Good.

[31] Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiæ of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 1–2, q. 95, a. 1.

[32] *Ibidem*.

[33] Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiæ of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 2–2, q. 78, a. 1, a.d. 3.

[34] Concept from Aquinas, "The treatise *'De regimine principum'* or *'De regno'* ", in *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought: Aquinas, Caput* II. Language from Swartz, 3.

[35] Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary On Aristotle's Politics*, trans. Richard J. Regan, Indianapolis/Cambridge, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2007, Book 1, Lesson 1, 11.

[36] Goyette, 1.

[37] Oliver O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005, 88.

[38] Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiæ of St. Thomas Aquinas,* 1–2, q. 90, a. 3, ad3um.

[39] Aquinas, *Commentary On Aristotle's*, Book 1, Lesson 1, 40.

[40] Richard Crofts, "The Common Good in the Political Theory of Thomas Aquinas," *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 37, no. 1, Catholic University of America Press, January 1973, 155–173.

[41] Goyette, 4.

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II. A THOMISTIC UNDERSTANDING OF POLITICAL COMMON GOOD

Further along, the centaur checked his pace
Beside a second gang, who seemed to start
Far as the throat from the stream's boiling race.

He showed one shade set by itself apart,
Saying: "There stands the man who dared to smite,
Even in the very bosom of God, the heart

They venerate still on Thams". Next, reared upright
Both head and chest from the stream, another hords
Appeared, full many known to me by sight.[42]

"The desire to seek their own good is present in the souls of all men"[43], Aquinas penned, quoting his predecessor, Aristotle; yet the language of *common good* doubtless tends to modern ears painfully vague and overbroad, rather as a contemporary use of the phrase '*national security policy*' might cover food, medical, technological, bio-technological, immigration, export, trade, weaponization, tariff, maritime, outer space, or military policy[44]. Aquinas' intention is not to give rulers an easy out. Certainly not! The language of 'common good' is, in fact, selected with grave analytical specification. The Medieval definition, based upon Aristotle's works, referred to, "A good proper to, and attainable only by, the community, yet individually shared by its members"[45]. The *Good* has the property of a final end or cause. It is not valued for its utilitarian use of procuring another hierarchical good, rather it is, for its own sake, valuable. The meaning of the *common good* then, "is that it is common precisely as a good… a common end"[46].

Rather than being common by predication, Dr. Goyette reminds us, common good is common by value to all[47]. We must here be clear: simply because all persons value a certain thing or predicate (think "health", "status", "transportation", "warmth during winter") does not make it a common good. Such things, though likely valued by all, are valued *individually*. In other words, Nicole values *her* warmth during winter while Jim values *his* warmth. The value of "warmth during winter" is multiple in number, whereas the common good is always *one in number*. It is not a widely held *individual* value, but a *shared* value, a shared end. "Common, not by the community of genus or species, but the community of final cause."[48]

The common good is, secondly, "not diminished by being shared"[49]. Goyette here utilizes the analogy of a bottle of wine. Although it might be a *shared good* if friends sat around and drank the bottle together, it is nonetheless true that each person individually consumes the wine. Though the bottle of wine is *one in number*, the wine in Stacy's glass is distinct from the wine in Lauren's. When Stacy drinks a second large glass, that

[42] Dante, Canto XII, Circle VII, Ring I, 115–123.
[43] Aquinas, *Aquinas: Selected Political Writings*, 22.
[44] Barack Obama, President of the United States, *National Security Strategy*, Washington, The White House, May 2010, 1–51, URL: [http://nssarchive.us/NSSR/2010.pdf].
[45] Louis Dupré, "The Common Good and the Open Society", *The Review of Politics* 55, no. 4, 05 August 2009, 687–712.
[46] Goyette, 2.
[47] *Ibidem*.
[48] Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiæ of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 1–2, q. 90, a. 2, ad2.
[49] Goyette, 2.

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means Lauren's second glass will be smaller and she will receive less. However, the common good, as Aquinas intends, is not diminished by being shared. It is not possessed, not owned. It is rather, "able to be pursued and enjoyed by many at the same time… it is capable of common enjoyment"[50].

True common goods might include victory for a body of soldiers, safe arrival at port for weathered sailors on a vessel, or children for the family[51]. Etzioni writes that these are things which "…serve no identifiable particular group", except for those in the general community to whom the good is entailed, and likely even, "serve members of generations not yet born"[52]. The highest form of common good is *political common good*, which is the "end of a perfect community [*polis*]"[53]. The concept of political common good returns full-circle to Aquinas' view of law. By definition, all law is ordered toward the common good, he writes.

The ultimate end of human life is happiness or beatitude… it is necessary that law properly [*proprie*] should look to the ordination toward communal happiness [*felicitatem communem*]. Whence, the Philosopher, in the definition of legal matters mentions both happiness and the political community… 'we call those legal matters just that produce and preserve happiness and its parts for the political community…'[54] .

Just laws are those that preserve the happiness of the *polis*. For this reason, rulers' obligations toward both law and society are fundamentally grounded in the defense of this common good.

III. PRINCES AND RULERS: UNLAWFUL DESCENT TOWARD TYRANNY

Thus shallow and shallower still the red blood poured
Till it was only deep enough to cook
The feet; and here it was we passed the ford.

And the centaur said to me: "Now, prithee, look:
Just as, this side, it ever grows less deep,
On that, I'd have thee know, the boiling brook"

Lowers its rocky bed, down-shelving steep,
Until it comes full circle, and joins its ring
There where the tyrants are condemned to weep.[55]

The office of the ruler is a gift from God which demands honor. In his *Summa Theologiæ*, Aquinas supports this proposition through a reflection upon God's demands of Old Testament rulers. In Exodus, we read, *Provide autem de omni plebe viros*

[50] *Ibidem*.
[51] Goyette, 2.
[52] Amitai Etzioni, "Common Good", *The Encyclopedia of Political Thought*, 15 September 2014.
[53] Goyette, 3. Discussing Aquinas, *Commentary On Aristotle's Politics*, Lect. 1, n. 4: "Every association of men is ordered to something necessary for life, that community will be *perfect* which is ordered to this… men not only live but that they live well insofar as by the laws of the city human life is ordered to the virtues".
[54] Goyette, 3. Discussing Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiæ of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 1–2, q. 90, a. 2.
[55] Dante, Canto XII, Circle VII, Ring I, 124–132.

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potentes, et timentes Deum, in quibus sit veritas, et qui oderint avaritiam, et constitue ex eis tribunos…[56]. While in Deuteronomy, *Date ex vobis viros sapientes et gnaros, et quorum conversatio sit probata in tribubus vestris, ut ponam eos vobis principes*[57]. Political leaders ought not to be random, but those who are the wise, the true, the noble, the God-fearing, the understanding. "Moreover", Aquinas writes, "as Plato says: 'The best gives of the best' "[58].

According to Aquinas, this prudently chosen political leader has four central duties to which he is obliged. He is first charged with maintaining peace and order throughout the kingdom: to take responsibility for any treacherous circumstances and seek peaceful resolution and restoration[59]. He must secondly ensure that all of the necessary services (such as those of judicature, of defense, and of administration) are attended to. The government's outstanding obligations toward their citizens must continue onward under the ruler's reign[60]. Third, the ruler is given the duty of correcting those abuses which either occur or are brought to the *polis'* attention during his reign. Justice and mercy are the ruler's intimate allies[61]. He must finally remove any hindrances of and harms toward the common good and good life. Recall that his utmost duty is the preservation of the *political common good* – to this end, he is placed in authority, to this end, the *polis* exists[62].

Additionally, Aquinas writes, there are three duties concerning the *political common good* to which the ruler is bound[63]. (1) He must ensure the welfare of the community, or, positively *promote* the common good of the *polis*. (2) He is charged with *ensuring that nothing undermines* the political common good which he has established. (Bullinger's *Second Helvetic Confession* echoed this sentiment: "The chief duty of the magistrate was to procure and maintain peace and public tranquility…"[64]). He must preserve the positive status quo. (3) He must continually *extend* the political common good.[65] These moral duties to which the ruler is bound defend *against* the human condition which is predicated upon citizenry and royalty alike.[66] Princes, prone toward the proliferation of violence, cannot be trusted with limitless power.

Limitation is proper, as it points to the higher order. As such, the primary characteristic of the rising tyrant is the refusal to uphold obligations, a failure to "discharge the duties of his office"[67], in essence, a denial of the proper order of the

[56] *Biblia Sacra*, *Liber Exitum*, *Caput* XIV, XXI: "Moreover, you shall provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating unjust gain; and place such over them captains of thousands…".

[57] *Ibidem*, *Liber Deuteronomium*, *Caput* I, XIII: "Let me have from among you wise and understanding men, and such whose conversation is approved among your tribes, and I set them for your heads…".

[58] Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiæ of St. Thomas Aquinas,* 1–2, q. 105, a. 1. Quoting Aristotle, *Politics*, 3:6, line 1278b10.

[59] *Bill of Rights in Action*, 2.

[60] *Ibidem*.

[61] *Bill of Rights in Action*, 2.

[62] *Ibidem*.

[63] *Ibidem*: *…quod quidem studium in tria dividitur, ut primo quidem in subiecta multitudine bonam vitam instituat; secundo, ut institutam conservet; tertio, ut conservatam ad Meliora promoveat.*

[64] Andries Raath and Shaun De Freitas, "Heinrich Bullinger and the Marian Exiles: The Political Foundations of Puritanism", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56 (2003): 208, 7.

[65] Aquinas, "The treatise *'De regimine principum'* or *'De regno'*, *Caput* XV.

[66] "Due to man's sinful nature… authority ought to be limited. It should only be exercised in accordance with law", Swartz, 3. Sabine, 249–250.

[67] Swartz, 2. Aquinas, "The treatise *'De regimine principum'* or *'De regno'*, *Caput* XI.

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universe. Whereas the Wise Ruler would reaffirm alongside Aquinas: *Quod quisque iuris in alterum statuit, ipse eodem iure uti debet. Et Sapientis dicit auctoritas: Patere legem quam ipse tui eris*[68], the tyrant scoffs at his supposed limitations. Aquinas writes, "It is a saying worthy of the majesty of a ruler, if the prince professes himself bound by the laws: for even our authority depends upon that of the law. And, in fact, the most important thing in government is that power should be subject to laws"[69]. The *vis directiva* is nothing if not an expression of the "natural order of justice"[70]. Truly, the function of the law culminates in the two maxims: *quantum ad vim coactivam legis* and *quantum ad vim directivam*[71].

A possible initial notion in response to a tyrant throwing off his duties toward the *polis* is the proposition: *If the tyrant refuses to abide by his obligations, the citizenry is freed from their own*. After all, Saint Matthew writes pointedly concerning division: *Omne regnum divisum contra se desolatur: et omnis civitas vel domus divisa contra se, non stabit*[72]. Yet, Aquinas dismisses this proposition, urging, "Wayward rulers or tyrants must also be obeyed"[73]. Reminiscent of Antigone's argument for civil disobedience, Aquinas writes that tyrants will truly receive their reward: in the after-life. *Privatur insuper tyrannus excellentissima beatitudine, quae regibus debetur pro praemio* […].[74] Rather than eternal praise and glory, he will not only lose the right to beatitude, which is owed Kings and Princes, but, "still more serious"[75], ensures great eternal suffering for himself. The recourse is infinite, as the rebellion was infinite. Beyond a mere resistance against human institutions, the tyrant is a "rebel against the whole divine system by which God rules the world"[76]. It is for this reason that Dante places Tyrants in the Ring of Violence in *The Inferno*. They engage in vicious, ineffable acts toward both their citizenry and Heaven[77].

A second characteristic of the rising tyrant is closely linked to the first; alongside the rejection of proper duties, there is a substitution of the *personal good* for the *common good*. Rather than helping his fellow soldiers achieve the possible *political common good* of 'winning a victory over the enemy', the substitution of the *personal good* for the tyrant might look like refusing to travel to the battlefield, declining to acknowledge a shortage of food among the men, or demanding hasty, doomed unit movements at great cost to the soldiers within them. These instances of personal good overriding common good outline the shape of a tyrant: injustice. "A tyrannical government is not just, because it is directed not to the common good, but to the private good of the ruler, as the Philosopher says."[78] A society which has been wholly rearranged to benefit the interests of the Prince, has been

[68] Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiæ of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 1–2, q. 96, a. 5 ad3um.

[69] *Ibidem*, 1–2, q. 96, a. 5 ad3um.

[70] Swartz, 3.

[71] Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiæ of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 1–2, q. 96, a. 5 ad3um.

[72] *Biblia Sacra*, *Liber Matthaeus*, *Caput* XII, XXV: "A kingdom divided against itself is destroyed, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand".

[73] Swartz, 3.

[74] Aquinas, "The treatise *'De regimine principum'* or *'De regno'* ", *Caput* XII: "The tyrant, moreover, loses the surpassing beatitude which is due as a reward to kings…".

[75] *Ibidem*.

[76] George H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*, 3rd ed., London, George G. Harrap, 1963, 251.

[77] Dante, Canto XII, Circle VII, Ring I, 103–139.

[78] Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiæ of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 2–2, q. 42, a. 1.

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perverted by a tyrant[79]. Rather than ruling justly, fairly, and Heavenly, he has violated his royal duties and chosen to oppress the people with a demand for disorder.

This point of tyrannical distortion is reached in a number of ways. Either the *ruler's authority* was (1) obtained improperly: "due, [(a)] to a defect in the person, if he is untrustworthy"[80], or, (b) due to immoral acquisition, "through violence or simony or some other illegal method"[81]. Alternatively, (2) it has been made use of immorally. The abuse of *laws* (specifically) is a result of (3) "that which is ordered by law" being "opposed to the object for which that law was constituted"[82], or, (4) the ruler exceeding the proper limitations upon his authority.

Aquinas advises the *prevention* of Tyrants through three methods. First, the selected King shall be of "such character that it is unlikely that he will become a tyrant"[83]. Second, the *polis* shall be established in such a way that there "is no opportunity for the King, once he is reigning, to become a tyrant"[84]. Third, the King must be restricted to avoid his turning into a Tyrant. Despite these best efforts, Aquinas acknowledges that it is at times inevitable for Tyrants to arise. Under those circumstances, we ask: what is the role of the citizen?

Here, we enter into the mixed thoughts of Aquinas. Whereas he is typically quite pragmatic, Aquinas' political writings tend more toward the abstract and philosophical treatise than literal instructions concerning proper Catholic governing. His contention concerning political disobedience is two-fold:

> On the one hand, he is of the opinion that law is always from God and therefore even an unworthy office bearer must be obeyed and on the other hand, he believes that there can be no duty of obedience towards a person (tyrant) whom it is permissible or even praiseworthy to kill[85].

One finds charges such as, "To [a tyrant] no obedience is owed"[86], alongside spirited discouragement from civil disobedience. Identifying the nuanced *reasons* for the resulting tyranny is critical to Aquinas' interpretation of civil disobedience. Under (3) where the ends of law are misdirected, "there [is] no obligation to obey the law, but one is obliged to disobey it"[87]. Examples are given of the Saints and Martyrs who refused the impious orders of various tyrants to the point of death[88]. Whereas, when a tyrant simply exceeded his duties as in (4) a citizen may choose to obey *or* engage in civil disobedience. He is enslaved only to his own conscience[89].

[79] Aquinas, "The treatise *'De regimine principum'* or *'De regno'* ", *Caput* I.
[80] Swartz, 2.
[81] *Ibidem*, 2.
[82] *Ibidem*, 3.
[83] Aquinas, "The treatise *'De regimine principum'* or *'De regno'* ", *Caput* VI.
[84] *Ibidem*.
[85] Swartz, 2–3.
[86] Aquinas, *Scriptum Super Libros Sententiarum: Magistri Petri Lombardi Episcopi Parisiensis*, trans. R. P. Mandonnet, O.P., and Paris, Sumptibus P. Lethielleux, 1929, Vol. 2, Dist. XLIV, Q. II, A. 2
[87] Swartz, 3.
[88] Swartz, 3.
[89] *Ibidem*.

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IV. THE BEATING OF THE DRUMS: POLITICAL RESISTANCE TO TYRANNY

Here doth the heavenly justice rack and wring
Pyrrhus and Sextus; here it overbears
That scourge of earth called Attila the King;

And here for ever it milks the trickling tears
Squeezed by the scald from those rough highwaymen
The Pazzian and the Cornetan Riniers."

With this he turned and crossed the ford again.[90]

The Thomistic response to the tyrant is one emphasizing obedience, patience, and prudence. All power is derived from God. *Non est enim potestas nisi a Deo quae autem sunt a Deo ordinatae sunt.*[91] Obedience ought always to be a Catholic's initial reaction to a ruler. *Tunc ait illis reddite ergo quae sunt Caesaris Caesari et quae sunt Dei Deo.*[92] It should not be a surprise, therefore, that Aquinas instructs men to be obedient to their rulers through times of *mild* tyranny. Disobedience should never be a Catholic's instinct. Further, he gravely urges the *polis* to beware hasty actions of war, even under *extreme* tyranny[93].

Aquinas' exposition of scripture on the topic of the tyrant is here helpful. He moves through a series of *Old Testament* passages which depict the markings of the Tyrant. Tyrants do not feed their sheep or care for their flocks. *…Vae pastoribus Israhel qui pascebant semet ipsos nonne greges pascuntur a pastoribus.*[94] Tyrants destroy their own lands. *Rex iustus erigit terram vir avarus destruet eam.*[95] Tyrants war upon the people's common good, provoking outrage in their lands. *Patres nolite ad indignationem provocare filios vestros ut non pussillo animo fiant.*[96] Under the tyrant, there is no glory, only ruin. *In exultatione iustorum multa gloria regnantibus impiis ruinae hominum.*[97] Tyrants beget misery and scorn the women's wailing. *In multiplicatione iustorum laetabitur vulgus cum impii sumpserint principatum gemet populus*.[98] The Tyrant's shadow spreads cowardice – mothers hide their children. *Cum surrexerint impii abscondentur homines cum illi perierint multiplicabuntur iusti.*[99] As a beast, the Tyrant devours the weak. *Leo*

[90] Dante, Canto XII, Circle VII, Ring I, 133–139.

[91] *Biblia Sacra*. *Vulgatae Editionis*. *Epistola Beati Pauli Apostoli ad Romanos, Caput* XIII, I: "For there is no power but from God: and those that are ordained of God".

[92] *Ibidem, Vulgatae Editionis. Evangelium Secundum Matthaeum. Caput* XXII, XXI: "Then he saith to them: Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God, the things that are God's".

[93] Aquinas, "The treatise '*De regimine principum*' or '*De regno*' ", *Caput* VI.

[94] *Biblia Sacra*. *Vulgatae Editionis*., *Liber Ezechiel, Caput* XXXIV, II: "Woe to the shepherds that feed themselves (because they seek their own benefit). Should not the flocks be fed by the shepherd?"

[95] *Ibidem, Vulgatae Editionis, Liber Proverbia, Caput* XXIX, IV: "A just king setteth up the land: a covetous man shall destroy it".

[96] *Ibidem, Vulgatae Editionis*., *Epistula Ad Colossenses, Caput* III, XXI: "Fathers, provoke not your children to indignation, lest they be discouraged".

[97] *Ibidem, Vulgatae Editionis., Liber Proverbia, Caput* XXVIII, XII: "In the joy of the just there is great glory: when the wicked reign, men are ruined".

[98] *Ibidem, Vulgatae Editionis*., *Liber Proverbia, Caput* XXIX, II: "When just men increase, the people shall rejoice: when the wicked shall bear rule, the people shall mourn".

[99] *Ibidem, Vulgatae Editionis*., *Liber Proverbia, Caput* XXVIII, XXVIII: "When the wicked rise up, men shall hide themselves: when they perish, the just shall be multiplied".

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rugiens et ursus esuriens princeps impius super populum pauperem.[100] Thus scripture paints the Tyrant's portrait. Against him, Catholics may resist.

Revolution, although perhaps at times necessary, should never be considered lightly. Aquinas emphasized that the repercussions felt by a society after insurrection are penetrating. Before a citizen acts he must consider the bitterness of the community after resistance, Aquinas insisted; for there will certainly be "strife and grave discord among the populace, either in the moment of rebellion or after his overthrown when opinion in the community is divided as to the new form of government"[101]. He must also consider the possibility of a more tyrannical ruler arising as replacement, as the fable of Dionysus articulated[102]. Increased justice and virtue is seldom guaranteed. Ultimately, the collective members of the *polis* must determine whether revolution would, in fact, cause greater harm to the community's political common good.

Aquinas is clear to state that an individual taking it upon himself to kill a Tyrant would violate Apostolic teaching. *Quæ enim est gloria, si peccantes, et colaphizati suffertis? Sed si benefacientes patienter sustinetis, hæc est gratia apud Deum.*[103] Peter instructed an attitude of reverence, even unto tyrannical leaders. *Individuals* are called to obedience; however, a *people* may resist extreme tyranny. "Justifiable resistance is a public act of a whole people"[104], which is "…justified only in so far as it serves the common good"[105]. Aquinas provides an example of Ahoth (Ehud) killing Eglon, King of the Moabites, as a representation of a justified killing. He argues that Ahoth was rewarded by God and went on to become a Judge over the children of Israel due to the fact that rather than killing a legitimate ruler, he killed an enemy[106]. Conversely, the murderers of Joas, King of Judah, were put to death despite Joas being an apostate ruler[107]. It is acceptable, it seems to Aquinas, for the collective whole of the citizenry to revolt against a tyrant in so far as they are acting on the behalf of their *nation*, rather than toward *individual* ends.

Community should also not be accused of disloyalty for thus deposing a tyrant… for the tyrant lays himself open to such treatment by his failure to discharge the duties of his office as governor of the community, and in consequence his subjects are no longer bound by their oath to him[108].

For example, the people revolted against Tarquinius the Proud and put him to death due to he and his descendants' tyranny[109]. Domitian was also slain as a result of his tyrannical rule over Rome[110]. In neither situation were the people violating their solemn duty of obedience.

[100] *Ibidem*, *Vulgatae Editionis*., *Liber Proverbia*, *Caput* XXVIII, XV: "As a roaring lion, and a hungry bear, so is a wicked prince over the poor people".

[101] Swartz, 4.

[102] Aquinas, "The treatise *'De regimine principum'* or *'De regno'* ", *Caput* VI.

[103] *Biblia Sacra. Vulgatae Editionis. Epistola Beati Petri Apostoli Prima, Caput* II, 20: "For what glory is it, if, committing sin and being buffeted for it, you endure? But if doing well you suffer patiently: this is thankworthy before God".

[104] Swartz, 4.

[105] *Ibidem*, 4. Sabine, 251.

[106] *Biblia Sacra. Vulgatae Editionis. Judicum, Caput* III, XII–XXX.

[107] *Ibidem, Vulgatae Editionis*. *I Regnum, Caput* XII, XX.

[108] Swarts, 4. Aquinas, "The treatise *'De regimine principum'* or *'De regno'* ", *Caput* VI.

[109] Aquinas, "The treatise *'De regimine principum'* or *'De regno'* ", *Caput* VI.

[110] *Ibidem*.

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Before revolution, a *polis* must consider one final factor: whether the Tyrant has been sent to their nation as a punishment from God, a chastisement for their sins. Aquinas used the language, the "anger of God"[111], to discuss this form of condemnation tyranny, with an accompanying exegetical analysis of several Old Testament passages. There is no question that the Lord's spiritual judgment often includes a shift in power and authority toward one who will torment His children. *Dabo tibi regem in furore meo, et auferam in indignatione mea.*[112] Under these circumstances, the people must *repent.* Recognizing the wickedness within their hearts, they must fall to their knees in prayer and thanksgiving. For surely, he is as merciful a God as he is jealous and will not allow tyranny to reign over His children forever. *Et scindite corda vestra, et non vestimenta vestra; et convertimini ad Dominum Deum vestrum, quia benignus et misericors est, patiens et multae misericordiae, et praestabilis super malitia.*[113] Tyrants dare not utilize God's judgement as an excuse for their debauchery. Even the Tyrant, established through the anger of God, is morally responsible for his conduct. He will assuredly experience the eternal damnation of his soul.[114] *Via vitae custodienti disciplinam; qui autem increpationes relinquit, errat.*[115]

Saint Thomas Aquinas offers a nuanced perspective upon the reality of political resistance toward immoral regimes. Though obedience ought to be all but the final recourse, extreme tyranny might, at times, necessitate civil disobedience. Aquinas urges nations to beware revolution. Claims to the moral obligation to resist must be made with grave hesitation and prudence. Citizens must understand the true weight of the common good and defend her first and foremost at all times. This argument shapes Aquinas' political thought at the most fundamental level. "The limited powers of office and the approach to tyranny can be taken to represent the basic features of Catholic political theory."[116] Assuredly, if action is taken too hastily, Tyrant will replace Tyrant and the girl who once prayed for her King's death will instead pray desperately for his longevity.

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[111] *Ibidem*, *Caput* X.

[112] *Biblia Sacra. Vulgatae Editionis, Liber Hosea*, *Caput* XIII, XI: "I will give thee a king in my wrath, and will take him away in my indignation".

[113] *Biblia Sacra. Vulgatae Editionis, Liber Joel*, *Caput* II, XIII: "And rend your hearts, and not your garments and turn to the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, patient and rich in mercy, and ready to repent of the evil".

[114] Aquinas, "The treatise *'De regimine principum'* or *'De regno'* ", *Caput* XI.

[115] *Biblia Sacra. Vulgatae Editionis, Liber Proverbia*, *Caput* X, VII: "The memory of the just is with praises: and the name of the wicked shall rot".

[116] Swartz, 3 and D'Entréves, XXIX, Discussing Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiæ of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 2–2, q. 105, a. 1 ad 2um.

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