Classical Political Thought
Lectures
Elizabeth Frazer

Lecture 8: **Polity to Sovereignty**

Dates

44 bce	Assassination of Julius Caesar; formation of triumvirate of Mark Anthony, Marcus Lepidus and Octavian
43	Execution of Cicero
42	Cassius and Brutus (JC's assassins) defeated at Phillipi
31	Octavian defeats Anthony and Cleopatra and becomes Emperor Augustus
23	Augustus suspends Consulships, makes himself 'imperium majus'

Polity to Monarchy Unconstrained

Hobbes on Tacitus:

The Emperor Augustus, neither supported nor restrained by divine order, uses his own skills, or policy, to transform chaotic liberty of the republic, by means of violence, to the ordered model of the participate ...

Augustine:

> 'The true felicity of christian emperors': rule with justice, not inflated with pride, put their power at service of God's majesty; fear God, love and worship him; slow to punish and ready to pardon; take vengeance on wrong to rporect the state and not to satisfy personal animosity; grant pardon in hope of amendment to wrong-doer; severity compensated with gentleness of mercy, generosity of benefits; restrain appetites the more bec they are free to indulge them; prefer to have command over lower desires than over subject peoples; do this not for glory but for love of eternal blessedness. 'It is Christian emperors of this kind whom we call happy; happy in hope, during this present life, and to be happy in reality hereafter, when what we wait for will have come to pass.' [*City of God* BkV ch24]

> people alienated from God must be wretched; ... as long as the two cities are intermingled we also make use of the peace of Babylon – although the people of God is by faith set free from Babylon, so that in the meantime they are only pilgrims in the midst of her. That is why the Apostle instructs the Church to pray for kings of that city and those in high positions, adding 'that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life ...' and when the prophet Jeremiah predicted to the ancient people of God the coming captivity he bade them ... to go obediently to Babylon, serving God even by their patient endurance... prayers should be offered for Babylon 'because in her peace is your peace' – meaning of course the temporal peace of the meantime which is shared by good and bad alike. [*City of God* Bk XIX ch26]

Aquinas:

> 'Let the king understand therefore that he has received the duty of being to his kingdom what the soul is to the body and what God is to the world. If he reflects diligently on this he will on the one hand be fired with zeal for justice when he considers that he has been appointed to exercise judgement in his kingdom in the palce of god, and will acquire kindness and clemency for he will look upon all those subject to his government as though they were his own members ... govt of king like divine govt, can be compared to steeering a ship; [De Regimine Principum Ch XIII] ... king should govern subjects in such a way that they live according to virtue...[Ch XVI]

> in cases where it belongs by right to a community to provide a ruler for itself, that community can without injustice depose or restrain a king whom it has appointed, if he should abuse royal power tyrannically. ... Nor should such a community be thought disloyal if it acts to depose a tyrant even if the community has already pledged itself to him in perpetuity... if the right to provide a community with a king belongs to some superior then a remedy against the wickedness of a tyrant must be sought from him... If however there can be no human aid at all against a tyrant, recourse must be had to God, the King of all who is a refuge in time of trouble. For it is within his power to turn the heart of a cruel tyrant towards gentleness.... [Ch VII]

James I

> 'I am the Husband, and all the whole Isle is my lawful Wife; I am the Head, and it is my Body: I am the Shepherd, and it is my Flocke: I hope therefore no man will be so unreasonable as to thinke that I that am a Christian king under the Gospel, should be a Polygamist and huband to two wives; that I being the Head, should have a divided and monstrous

Body; or that being the shepherd to so fair a flock (whose fold hath no wall to headge it but the four seas) should have my flock parted in two.' [Speech to the Lords, March 1603]

'Learn to know and love God, to whom ye have a double obligation; first for that he made you a man; next, for that he made a little God to sit on His Throne, and rule over other men' [Letter to his son; McIlwain p12]

Social Conflict

Aristotle: social and conflictual basis of all social life:

	rich	poor
few	*oligarchy*	
many	*plutocracy*	*democracy*

Machiavelli
- tolerance for violence
- tolerance for disorder – vivere libere

Hobbes
- absolutism as response to breakdown of sovereignty
- the 'popular sovereignty moment'

Locke

the people having reserved to themselves the choice of their representatives, as the fence to their properties, could do it for no other end but that they might always be freely chosen, and so chosen, freely act and advice, as the necessity of commonwealth, and the public good should upon examination and mature debate be judged to require.   This, those who give their votes before they hear the debate, and have weighed the reasons on all sides, are not capable of doing. To prepare an assembly such as this... is certainly as great a breach of trust, and as perfect a declaration of a design to subvert the government as is possible to be met with....[2nd Treatise: S222]

References

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