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Searching for an uneasy synthesis between Aristotelian political language and Christian political theology*

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1. If we deal with the problem of Aristotle's 'Christianisation' in light of the late-medieval commentaries to the *Politics*, then the question takes on a rather peculiar form: rather than wondering – as we have been asked to do by the organisers of this seminar – which hermeneutic strategies were used by medieval commentators to bring out and valorise the elements of Aristotelian thought that are most easily adaptable to Christian perspective, we should ask ourselves to what extent Pauline and Augustinian political theology influenced the kind of reading that the 13th- and 14th-century *magistri* made of the *Politics* (and the *Ethics*). It is mainly a question of reconstructing the way in which that tradition was grafted onto Aristotle's thought and used, deliberately so, with the aim of 'bending' and adapting certain Aristotelian statements, especially those relating to the positive nature of involving the mass in the government of the public good, thereby neutralising some potentially dangerous elements.

The most emblematic case is undoubtedly that of Peter of Auvergne. In his writings we encounter an ideological use of the Christian political doctrine that had dominated almost unopposed for nearly a millennium, up until the mid-13th century. It was a doctrine founded, as is well-known, upon radical Augustinian anthropological pessimism, from which stemmed the idea that the earthly rulers were the instruments of providence – a bitter yet salubrious

*. In the following pages I have tried to comply as closely as possible with the indications of those who have had the merit of promoting the study seminar at the heart of this volume, a seminar thought of as an initial reconnaissance with the purpose of ascertaining the possible existence of common research lines on the issue of the Christian rereadings of Aristotle, with special attention addressed to the commentaries; and in fact what I present here are simply a series of ideas that I hope to analyse more deeply in the future. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Prof. Luca Bianchi and Prof. Sylvia Notini.

medicine – to whom the divine scheme of things had given the task of countering the damage caused by the Fall and keeping forcibly¹ at bay a humanity seen as a mass of sinners (“*massa peccati*”) or, to borrow another of Augustine’s images, like a “school of fish” engaged in devouring one another².

Now, if we focus first and foremost on the ample portion of the commentary on the *Politics* authored by Peter (finished by 1295), we can say that he makes use of the Pauline-Augustinian tradition in order to endorse his own interpretation of the Aristotelian analysis of the constitutions, and to dispel any doubts over the undeniably pro-monarchical orientation that he attributes to Aristotle. In his discourse, the frequent implicit references to Augustine’s anthropological conception are functional to putting back in perspective the importance of the pages of the *Politics* where some aspects are examined according to which the majority government appears to be placed before the other constitutional forms (cf. *Pol.*, III, 11, 1281 a 40 - 1281 b 10). In order to understand what Aristotle really means when he states that “perhaps” the mass of citizens has a greater right to uphold the State than do the better, when he says that the many – taken collectively – may prove to be more suited to ruling than a limited number of particularly virtuous men, Peter of Auvergne considers to be unavoidable the distinction between two categories of *multitudo*, distinction which he draws from an instance given in a passage of the *Politics* (III, 11, 1281 b 20-22) where it is stated that some populaces do not seem to differ from beasts in any way, whereas, if it is referred to other masses of individuals, nothing prevents the thesis according to which it is the many who must be sovereign from being true³.

Apparet enim quod duplex est multitudo. Una quidem bestialis, in qua nullus habet rationem vel modicam, sed inclinatur ad bestiales actus; et manifestum est, quod istam non expediat dominari aliquo modo, quia

1. The sword that St. Paul reminds the Romans “is not wielded in vain”.
2. Cf. AURELIUS AUGUSTINUS, *De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum*, I, 11, 16, in CCL 44, A. MUTZENBECHER (ed.), Brepols, Turnhout, 1970, p. 42/469, and ID., *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, LXIV, 9, in CCL 39, E. DEKKERS, J. FRAIPONT (eds), Brepols, Turnhout, 1956, p. 832 / 16 - 27.
3. As concerns the importance of such a distinction in Peter of Auvergne’s thought, consider J. DUNBABIN, *The Reception and Interpretation of Aristotle’s Politics*, in N. KRETMANN, A. KENNY, J. PINBORG (eds), *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982, pp. 726 - 727 and 733, L. LANZA, *Aspetti della ricezione della “Politica” aristotelica nel XIII secolo: Pietro d’Alvernia*, in *Studi Medievali*, ser. III, 35 (1994), pp. 643 - 694 and C. FIOCCHI, *Dispotismo e libertà nel pensiero politico medievale. Riflessioni all’ombra di Aristotele (sec. XIII-XIV)*, Lubrina, Bergamo, 2007, pp. 61 - 75. More generally, on Peter’s commentary, see C. MARTIN, *Some Medieval Commentaries on Aristotle’s Politics*, in *History*, 36 (1951), pp. 38 - 40 and L.W. DALY, *Medieval and Renaissance Commentaries on the Politics of Aristotle*, in *Duquesne Review*, 13 (1968), pp. 42 - 44.

sine ratione est et coniunctim et divisim. Alia est multitudo ubi omnes aliquid habent rationis et inclinantur ad prudentiam, et bene suasibiles sunt a ratione; et talem expedit magis dominari, quam paucos virtuosos. Quamvis enim quilibet non sit virtuosus, tamen quod fit ex omnibus cum conveniunt, est virtuosum. Et sic apparet solutio quaestionis⁴.

Peter of Auvergne therefore binds the validity of the Aristotelian stance in favour of the involvement of the populace in government to a careful evaluation of the moral level and the degree of rationality of the specific masses to which it is applied. He distinguishes between the cases in which trust can be put in a *multitudo* whose members all have as much rationality as to make them inclined to prudence – and to induce them to heeding whomever speaks according to reason – and those cases for whom we are instead in the presence of a set of individuals naturally inclined to animal-like behaviour, giving rise to a wholly irrational multitude, both considering those by which it is made up and taking them as a whole.

Having made this important distinction, Auvergne can quite serenely underwrite Aristotle's considerations as regards the superiority of a regime where many give their contribution, in such a way as to form a "near perfect" man⁵, both from the standpoint of his intellectual qualities and from that of his ethical virtues, just as there is no dinner more successful than the one where everyone brings something, nor is there a musical composition superior to the one made up of several people together.

Dicit quod si sint multi non virtuosus simpliciter, cum convenient in aliquod unum, facient unum aliquod studiosum [...] et sunt aliquid melius quam quilibet divisim acceptus. Et hoc declaravit per simile; et dicit, quod sicut illi qui faciunt coenam ad communes expensas et quilibet modicum apportat, quod autem collectum est ex omnibus apportatis magnae quantitatis est, sic est in proposito, si sint multi et quilibet aliquid habeat virtutis et prudentiae, cum convenerint in unum facient unum aliquod magnum et virtuosum. In quo enim unus deficit, contingit alterum abundare⁶.

4. PETER OF AUVERGNE, *In libros Politicorum expositio*, lib. III, lect. 9, in S. Thomae Aquinatis *Doctoris Angelici in octo Libros Politicorum Aristotelis expositio*, R.M. SPIAZZI (ed.), Marietti, Torino - Roma, 1966, 427, p. 151. Cf. also PETER OF AUVERGNE, *Questiones in libros Politicorum*, lib. III, q. 15, ms. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, latin 16089, f. 295^{va} and *ivi*, III, q. 17, f. 296^{ra}.
5. *In libros Politicorum expositio*, III, 8, 424, p. 148.
6. *Ibid.*: "Et – the text continues, a little further on – adducit aliud simile: dicens, quod propter hoc quod multi sunt aliquid melius iuncti, quam quilibet illorum, contingit quod opera musicalia, et opera poetarum melius facta sunt et ducta ad perfectionem per plures quam per

Peter reports these statements while in no way relinquishing his pro-monarchical bias, as in his opinion they merely outline an extreme hypothesis and, in essence, they lie on an abstract plane. Indeed, to his eyes the number of cases in which the *conditio sine qua non* to be able to give the many a form of dominion within the community, that is, cases in which there is human material actually available endowed with the qualities needed to govern, seems to be negligible percentage-wise⁷. Instead, the overwhelming majority of the political communities already existing seemed to him to fall fully within the list of what he calls “vile” or “bestial masses”⁸, in that on the inside they are without a core of wise and virtuous individuals capable of conferring to the rest of the multitude the ability to act according to right reason⁹: Peter thus considers them in the condition of a political minority wholly akin to what was ascribed to every *civitas* by early medieval political thought¹⁰.

Two aspects should thus be underlined concerning our author’s way of arguing. On the one hand, he places at the centre of his discourse, attributing it with a decisive role, a distinction that Aristotle had only briefly mentioned – the one between “*multitudo rationalis*” (orderly good) and “*multitudo bestialis*” (chaotic) – a distinction that, in his thought, in practice replaces the contrast between the Edenic condition and that triggered by the Fall. On the other hand, as has been said, he firmly emphasises the ease with which one comes up against irrational, degraded masses, whose members present conspicuous intellectual failings (“*parum rationis habent*”¹¹) and are distinguished by the interior disorder that the Augustinian tradition deemed to be the indelible hallmark of humankind: a disorder as a result of which reason is prey to appetites and passions, and thus, moving from the single individual to the kind of macro-human plane that is the political community, the populace appear to be wholly unsuited, in Peter’s eyes, to being able to fill any political role and are absolutely needful of an outside guide¹².

unum. Sic enim inventae fuerunt artes et scientiae; quia primo unus invenit aliquid et illud tradidit et forte inordinate: alius post hoc accepit illud et addidit et totum tradidit et magis ordinate, et sic consequenter donec perfecte artes et scientiae inventae sunt”.

7. Cf. *In libros Politicorum expositio*, III, 11, 459, p. 162: “Ubi possibile erit invenire talem multitudinem”.
8. See for example *Questiones in libros Politicorum*, III, 17, f. 296^{ra}.
9. *In libros Politicorum expositio*, III, 8, 426, p. 149: “Et in tali multitudine non est verum, quod ex illis hominibus possit fieri aliquid virtuosum, si convenient in unum”.
10. A tradition that – as has already been anticipated – considered the effects of original sin as irreconcilable with any solution that acknowledges the right to self-government to the different communities and, on the contrary, identified the only viable path as that of placing each of those communities under the protection of a leader chosen for them (unilaterally) by God, through the mediation of the high clergy.
11. *In libros Politicorum expositio*, III, 8, 426, p. 149.
12. That is to say, naturally servile: led by his nature to submit himself meekly to the govern-

Confirmation of this comes from some terminological differences that can be detected between the original Aristotelian text and Auvergne's *Commentary*, differences that the critical literature has already had the opportunity to dwell upon: in particular I am referring to the frequent recourse to expressions from which we get the distinct impression that, unlike Aristotle, our author considers it highly unlikely to be able to identify a *multitudo* capable of taking on government functions¹³.

Closely connected to this pessimism, which we could call politico-anthropological (of an Augustinian provenance), is another of the themes that constitute the significant feature of Peter's commentaries to the *Politics*, that is to say the idea according to which, when one can count on an outstanding candidate for the leadership of the State, it no longer has the slightest importance to verify what the nature of all the other members of the community is, there is no need to worry about studying the way it is made up; the possible presence of an individual who distinguishes himself from the rest of the *civitas* by virtue automatically makes it useless as well as harmful to attribute any government role to the multitude¹⁴. In Peter's opinion, this is the reason why Aristotle wanted to premise a dubitative formula to the lines where he justifies the decision to entrust the masses with the choice of the magistrates and the assessment of their work: "dicit «forsan», quia in politia, in qua est unus excellens in virtute, et alii nati sibi obedire, non expedit multitudinem attingere ad ista"¹⁵.

In similar cases, a situation thus arises in which an entire populace must

ment of a despot. Cf. *Questiones in libros Politicorum*, III, 17, f. 296^{rb}, where Peter spoke of "multitudo bestialis impersuasibilis de qua prius dixit Philosophus, quod nata est servire principatu despotico".

13. Where, for example, Aristotle introduces with the words "nihil prohibet" the infinitives in which the superiority of a government that involves the many is claimed (*Pol.*, III, 11, 1281b 21 and 13, 1283b 34-35), Peter paraphrases the passages in question allowing the same infinitives to be held both by a more prudent "contingit" (cf. *In libros Politicorum expositio*, III, 8, 426, p. 149) or, elsewhere, a "possibile est" (ivi, III, 11, 459, p. 161). In regard to this matter, we should bear in mind the considerations made in L. LANZA, *Aspetti della ricezione della "Politica"*, p. 679.
14. Even if one were to find oneself in the presence of a multitude "in qua omnes attingunt ad rationem": "Intelligendum est – Peter points out – quod quamvis multi convenient in virtute et disciplina, oportet tamen quandoque unum principari principatu regali. Est enim aliqua multitudo virtuosorum, et haec dignitatem habet, et dicitur multitudo politica; alia est quae deficit a ratione multum, et haec dicitur dominativa. Utramque expedit regi principatu regali: primam, in quantum est unus qui excedit omnes alios in virtute; aliam autem expedit regi uno, in quantum est aliquis qui excedit omnes alios in virtute" (*In libros Politicorum expositio*, III, 16, 525, pp. 184 - 185).
15. *In libros Politicorum expositio*, III, 9, 438, p. 153; cf. also *ivi*, 435, p. 152.

obey, “quasi dominativo principatu”¹⁶, the only element of the community that, in Peter of Auvergne’s description, seems to be immune to the effects of the Fall¹⁷: an “optimus vir” who, within the sort of identikit provided by our author, moves away from those over whom he is destined to reign for the fact of having preserved his own inner order and operating “according to the divine element” which is in man, actualising the intellectual component of his own being and making it his only directive rule *in agibilibus*¹⁸. This ability to keep the desires of the body under control, preventing them from subverting the judgment of reason¹⁹, this full self-domination – originally a characteristic of all human beings – means that now the subject in question is the only one to endow himself with laws that the other must instead receive from the outside, that is, from him. We thus find ourselves faced with an extraordinary human type, to whom Peter’s considerations can be applied in regard to whomever turns out to be endowed with virtue and political capacity so immeasurable, as compared with those of the rest of the civil community, as not to even be considered a member of the State per se, but rather a sort of “god between men” (cf. *Pol.*, III, 13, 1284a 11).

Lex quae datur in civitate – our author wrote – est necessaria omnibus aequalibus potentia et genere: et hoc patet, quia lex est de conferentibus ad finem politiae. In his autem non omnes sunt sufficientes se dirigere ex se, et ideo indigent lege dirigente eos in agibilibus; unde datur lex eis qui sunt aequales genere et potentia isto modo: quia non sunt sufficientes dirigere se in actionibus, et isti dicuntur cives: sed talibus, qui sic excedunt alios in virtute, non datur lex; ipsi enim sunt sibi lex. Et hoc patet, quia lex est ordinatio quaedam secundum rationem de conferentibus ad finem politiae: isti enim ordinationem habent in seipsis, ideo sunt sibi leges. Deridendus igitur esset ille, qui vellet dare legem istis virtuosis, cum in eis non

16. *Ibid.*: “In regno enim si unus sit simpliciter prudens et alii regantur quasi dominativo principatu, ut inferiores obediunt superiori, non expedit multitudinem habere potestatem”.
17. The consequences of which continue to weigh inexorably upon all the others.
18. Cf. *In libros Politicorum expositio*, III, 15, 513, p. 180: “Contingit autem quod homo aliquando operatur secundum intellectum, ita quod non impeditur a sensu omnino, nec sensu utitur nisi quantum sibi necessarius est: et tunc dicitur homo simpliciter operari, quia operatur secundum id quod simplicius est in eo. Sed quia indiget sensu, contingit aliquando operationi intellectus coniungi appetitum sensitivum, et tunc dicitur homo compositus. Et cum homo operatur secundum intellectum, nec impeditur a sensu, tunc operatur maxime secundum intellectum et rationem, et secundum divinum aliquid existens. [...] Dicit igitur quod ille qui praecipit intellectui principari vel hominem secundum intellectum, ita quod non coniungatur appetitus sensitivus aliquo modo retrahens, praecipit velut Deum, hoc est hominem secundum aliquid divinum principari et legem: qui autem vult hominem principari eum comitante appetitu sensitivo, apponit bestiam [...]. Sed melius est principari aliquid divinum quam coniunctum bestiae”.
19. *Ibid.*: “Cum in appetitu sint passiones pervententes intellectum”.

sit causa, propter quam lex fertur. Igitur isti sic excellentes, cives non erunt²⁰.

The decidedly uncommon qualities make each one of the members of this select category of individuals the ideal candidate to act as monarch for a *multitudo* that finds in him – naturally²¹ – the rational guide it needs, the ‘legal tutor’ committed to being the guarantor of that collective interest that the mass is neither capable of correctly putting into focus, nor of pursuing effectively²². And it is precisely on the moral exceptionality of the kings that Peter of Auvergne bases his belief that the government by one alone would be, absolutely (“simpliciter”), the best and the “most divine” of the righteous constitutional forms taken into account by Aristotle²³: as has been seen, to support this belief, he recuperates, significantly, the argumentative methods typical of the early medieval *specula principum* and, more in general, the language of Augustinian political theology, submitting Aristotelian discourse to a manifest curvature²⁴.

2. That said, let’s now move on briefly to Walter Burley, to show how the two elements that we have identified in Peter of Auvergne, that is, the opposition between “*multitudo rationalis*” and “*multitudo vilis*” and the issue of the monarch as an extraordinary human type, are dealt with differently, in the context of a gradual attenuation of the influence exercised on the commentaries on the *Politics* by the Pauline-Augustinian tradition.

20. *Ivi*, III, 12, 464, p. 165. In essence, in Peter’s hands the well-known Aristotelian dilemma (expressed further on: *Pol.*, III, 15, 1286a 7ss.) on the preferability of the government of the best man or of that of the best laws ends up being partially overcome, to the extent to which the two horns of the dilemma overlap when we find ourselves having to deal with an individual so outstanding as to embody the law in himself. Cf. *Questiones in libros Politicorum*, III, 25, f. 298^{rb-va}.
21. Consider also *In libros Politicorum expositio*, III, 16, 525, p. 184: “Si virtus alicuius excedat virtutem aliorum, naturale est quod iste sit rex et dominus. [...] Iterum non expedit istum principari secundum partem, sed omnibus; quia pars non est nata excedere suum totum, sed iste in virtute excedit omnes alios: ergo alii sunt pars respectu istius”.
22. Peter emphasises how a political set-up that consists in entrusting the leadership of the community to whomever stands out for virtue among all the others is preferable, as it represents the solution that comes closest to what happens in living organisms and the cosmos (“illum oportet magis principari qui accedit magis ad principatum naturalem, et ad principatum universi”): cf. *In libros Politicorum expositio*, III, 12, 473, p. 167.
23. The idea of the superiority of the *regnum* is the load-bearing axis of Peter’s political analysis: a *regnum* which, however, in the remote hypothesis – as we know – of being able to count on a “non-bestial multitude”, is configured as a *regimen commixtum* in which the predominant element is, indeed, the monarchic one. As regards this aspect, I wish to refer to S. SIMONETTA, *Rimescolare le carte. Il tema del governo misto in Tommaso d’Aquino e nella riflessione politica tardomedievale*, in “Montesquieu.it” (<http://www.montesquieu.it/main.htm>), 1 (2009), pp. 10 - 16.
24. Cf. L. LANZA, *Aspetti della ricezione della “Politica”*, p. 685.

Written between 1339 and 1342, Burley's commentary – as is well-known – owes a strong debt to the one started by Thomas and completed by Peter, to the extent that it is often possible to detect a literal dependency between the two texts. Nevertheless, as regards the issues we are interested in here, we can observe a significant difference between Burley and his source. It is true that, when called upon to come to terms with the cautious arguments in favour of the preference for a government of the many contained in the third book of the *Politics*, Walter Burley puts forward the hermeneutic solution already adopted in Peter's commentaries, whose keystone is represented by the distinction between the two classes of multitude, as clearly illustrated in the following lines:

solvit questionem intendens quod multitudo bestialis nullo modo debet principari sed multitudo hominum qui habent virtutem quamvis imperfecte et inclinacionem ad actus virtuosos debet principari²⁵.

At the same time, however, Burley seems to be definitely more optimistic, more confident than Peter, as concerns the possibility of finding a mass that has the essential requisites for participating responsibly in government. And, in this regard, he cites a concrete example – something that Peter carefully avoided doing – taken from the institutional life of the England of his day and age.

Quod – he wrote – magis conveniens et magis dignum est quod multitudo comprehendens in se consiliarios et iudices, concionatores et alios prudentes principetur, quam unus vel pauci virtuosus probatur sic: totum est dignius et magis potens quam aliqua eius pars, sed consiliarii iudices, et sic de aliis sapientibus, sunt partes multitudinis constitute ex hiis... Intelligendum quod in rectis principatibus aliis a regno principatur multitudo, hoc est plures; et adhuc in regno multitudo, constituta ex rege et proceribus et sapientibus regni, quodammodo principatur, ita quod tantum vel magis potest et scit huiusmodi multitudo quam rex solus. Et propter hoc rex convocat parliamentum pro arduis negociis expediendis²⁶.

Burley, thus, does not just theorise the possible involvement of the mass in any form of government (*regnum* included), but refers to nascent English parliamentary practice to show how a *multitudo* at the height of the role can indeed take part in the leadership of the political community.

25. WALTER BURLEY, *Commentarius in VIII Libros Politicorum Aristotelis*, lib. III, tract. 2, cap. 3, ms. London, British Museum, Royal 10. C. XI, f. 19^{va}. In relation to the same subject, also consider *ivi*, f. 18^{rb}.

26. *Commentarius*, 3, 2, 3, R., f. 19^{vb}.

Even the words with which he praises his sovereign, Edward III, celebrated as the perfect embodiment of that special type of “almost divine” men so superior to the rest of the population, in terms of virtue, as to induce all the others to lend their obedience willingly, with no one needing to feel domineered or humiliated, even these words of praise, while echoing Peter’s theme of the king-“optimus vir”, do so in a far less dark perspective: where Peter of Auvergne – in the wake of Augustinian political theology – presented the monarch as the *pharmakon* capable of defusing the effects of the Fall and saving the rest of the community from itself, heaving it upon his shoulders, Burley projects the image of the king endowed with outstanding qualities against the backdrop of a conception of government in England seen as the result of a combined action of the sovereign and his subjects, who, far from having a merely passive role, “cum-regnant cum rege”²⁷.

Intelligendum est – he wrote, referring to the case where within a particular *civitas* there could be someone who surpasses all the other citizens in political virtue – quod talis, scilicet excellens seu superexcedens in virtute iuste debet principari; tum quia magis excedit ad principem naturalem, cuiusmodi est cor inter membra corporis animalis... , tum quia magis excedit ad principem mundi qui est deus gloriosus... . Secundum notabile est quod superexcellentem in virtute debere principari quia hoc intelligitur quando in multitudine non invenitur unus talis superexcedens alios in virtute vel si talis inveniatur et principatur non propter hoc alii sunt inhonorati. In optima enim policia quilibet propter talem principem superexcellens²⁸ alios in bono virtutis reputat se multum honoratum et quilibet diligit gradum suum et contentus est²⁹, et quilibet vult singulariter honorem regis et videtur sibi quod in rege et cum rege quasi regnat, et, propter intimam dileccionem civium ad regem, est intima concordia inter cives et est regnum fortissimum, sicut hodie patet de rege anglorum, propter cuius excedentem virtutem est maxima concordia in populo anglicano, quia quilibet est contentus de gradu suo sub rege³⁰.

3. Before finishing, as further testimony to the difficulties encountered by those

27. Cf. *Commentarius*, 3, 2, 3, ms. Oxford, Balliol Coll. 95, f. 184^{ra}. To this regard, see C.J. NEDERMAN, *Kings, Peers, and Parliament: Virtue and Corulership in Walter Burley’s “Commentarius in VIII Libros Politicorum Aristotelis”*, in *Albion*, 24 (1992), pp. 391 - 407 and S. SIMONETTA, *La lunga strada verso la sovranità condivisa in Inghilterra*, in Id. (ed.), *Potere sovrano: simboli, limiti, abusi*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2003, pp. 118 - 122.

28. As in the text.

29. Cf. PETER OF AUVERGNE, *In libros Politicorum expositio*, III, 12, 473, p. 166: “Cum talis sit optimus, dignum et iustum est quod omnes sibi laetanter obediant”.

30. *Commentarius*, 3, 2, 4, R., ff. 21^{vb} - 22^{ra}.

who made an effort to conciliate the traditional Christian conception of the State – seen as a necessary ill, the side-effect of the Fall – and the value attributed to the political dimension by Aristotle, I would like to cite two examples drawn from texts that may be assimilated to the genre of commentaries to the *Politics*, while not strictly falling within it: I am referring to the part of *De regno* written by Ptolemy of Lucca (the earliest 14th century) and the first *dictio* of *Defensor pacis* by Marsilius of Padua (finished in 1324).

As regards Ptolemy, I will just point out how his attempt to achieve a synthesis between the two traditions, whose interweaving has been the subject of my paper³¹, leads to a distinct curvature in the Pauline-Augustinian-inspired political theology. Inclined to stress the positive contribution that “the many” are capable of offering to the government of the political community and convinced that the best constitutional system is a *regimen commixtum*³², the Dominican indeed steps in heavy-handedly in regard to Augustine’s doctrine, using the faults of the individual populaces – and no longer just, generically, the original sin – to explain the need that some regions should be subject to the domination of a monarch whose precious repressive function and absolute power are translated into a despotic rule; and in this substantial identification between regal government and despotism (that owes much to I Sam. 8³³) it is instead the Christian political conception that has the better over the Aristotelian one.

As confirmation of what I have just said, it is enough to bring together two passages from *De regno* in which Ptolemy combines Aristotle, St. Paul and Augustine’s *auctoritates* to argue, respectively: 1. that the merit of regal rule is to be found in the efficacy with which it holds back the antisocial instincts largely prevalent among men, and 2. that, as a matter of fact, the presence of this *dominium* is reduced to those cases in which it necessarily takes on a

31. An attempt in regard to which scholars have formulated highly divergent judgements, dividing between those who criticised Ptolemy for not having grasped in their real bearing the irreconcilable elements contained in Aristotle’s vision and in the Augustinian one and those who, instead, appreciated the commitment with which he had supposedly tried to “rationalise” such tension and find a compromise; cf. especially, R.A. MARKUS, *Two Conceptions of Political Authority: Augustine, ‘De Civitate Dei’, 19.14 - 15 and Some Thirteenth Century Interpretations*, in *Journal of Theological Studies*, 16 (1965), pp. 96 - 97, and J.M. BLYTHE, *Ideal Government and the Mixed Constitution in the Middle Ages*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1992, pp. 94 - 99 and 106 - 109.
32. Inside which each element mitigates the others.
33. As regards this aspect, see S. SIMONETTA, *Rimescolare le carte*, pp. 18 - 19. For the idea that the “testimony of the Holy Scriptures” authorises the assimilation of regal dominion and despotic government (that exerted over a mass of servants), treating them on a par with an only form of government, see PTOLEMY OF LUCCA, *De regimine principum*, lib. II, chap. 9 in *Divi Thomae Aquinatis Politica opuscula duo*, G. MATHEIS (ed.), Marietti, Torino-Roma, 1948², pp. 28b - 29a, *ivi*, III, 9, p. 48b and IV, 8, p. 76a.

despotic form, in the geographical areas inhabited by populations that result to be worthy of such treatment³⁴.

Sed – we read in the first passage – *quia perversi difficile corriguntur, et stultorum infinitus est numerus*, ut dicitur in Eccle. cap. 1, 15, in natura corrupta regimen regale est fructuosius; quia oportet ipsam naturam humanam, sic dispositam quasi ad suum fluxum, limitibus refraenare. Hoc autem facit regale fastigium. Unde scriptum est in Prov. XX, 8: *Rex, qui sedet in solio iudicii, dissipat omne malum intuitu suo*. Virga ergo disciplinae, quam quilibet timet, et rigor iustitiae sunt necessaria in gubernatione mundi, quia per ea populus et indocta multitudo melius regitur. Unde Apostolus ad Rom. XIII, 4, dicit, loquens de rectoribus mundi, quod *non sine causa gladium portat... vindex in iram ei qui malum agit*. Et Aristoteles dicit in *Ethic.*, quod “poenae in legibus institutae sunt medicinae quaedam”. Ergo quantum ad hoc excellit regale dominium³⁵.

Principatus despoticus – Ptolemy wrote further on – ad regale reducit[ur] [...] praecipue ratione delicti propter quod servitus est introducta, ut Augustinus dicit lib. XVIII *De Civit. Dei*. Licet enim etiam primo statu fuisset dominium, non tamen nisi officio consulendi et dirigendi, non libidine dominandi vel intentione subiciendi serviliter. Leges vero traditae de regali dominio Israelitico populo per Samuelem prophetam, hac consideratione sunt datae: quia dictus populus propter suam ingratitude[m], et quia durae cervicis erat, merebatur tales audire. Interdum enim dum populus non cognoscit beneficium boni regiminis, expedit exercere tyrannides, quia etiam hae sunt instrumentum divinae iustitiae: unde et quaedam insulae et provinciae semper habent tyrannos propter malitiam populi, quia aliter, nisi in virga ferrea, regi non possunt. In talibus ergo regionibus sic dyscolis necessarius est regibus principatus despoticus, non quidem iuxta naturam regalis domini, sed secundum merita et pertinacias subditorum. Et ista est ratio Augustini in praedicto iam libro. Philosophus etiam – our author points out, in whose discourse tyranny and despotism constitute a single category – in III *Polit.* ubi distinguit genera regni, ostendit apud quasdam barbaras nationes regale dominium esse omnino despoticum, quia aliter regi non possent³⁶.

34. While in the lands most inclined to freedom, in the zones inhabited by men “of virile nature, who have a brave heart and trust in the strength of their intellect”, the natural solution consists in the adoption of a “principatus politicus,” in which whoever rules is bound to abiding by the laws that the community has given itself and hold an elective, temporary and temperate power; cf. especially, *De reg. principum*, IV, 8, pp. 75b - 76a.

35. *De reg. principum*, II, 9, p. 29a.

36. *Ivi*, III, 11, p. 52b.

Lastly, as concerns Marsilius, the entire first section of his most celebrated writing is addressed to transforming Aristotelian political philosophy into an ideological instrument, by using Aristotle's thesis in an anti-hierocratic way, i.e. having as its main objective the confutation of the idea that the origin of every legitimate secular authority lies amid the ecclesiastic leaders³⁷. At the same time, however, the use of Aristotle to go beyond Aristotle, to integrate the investigation into the possible causes of the civil discord elaborated in the fifth book of the *Politics* taking into consideration a disintegrating factor that only emerged in the subsequent era, that is, the absolutist claims of the papacy that like a cancer erode the various political communities³⁸, fits within a theory of the State that conceives of its genesis in a far more Augustinian than Aristotelian manner³⁹, as emerges from these lines:

Adam fuit creatus in statu innocencie seu iusticie originalis... In quo siquidem permansisset, nec sibi aut sue posteritati necessaria fuisset officiorum civilium institutio⁴⁰.

Moreover, in his work Marsilius greatly stresses the extreme conflict that distinguished human relations, deeply marked by the innate desire that each individual has for self-affirmation, assuring himself a "life worth living"⁴¹. And, in

37. See the observations made in G. PIAIA, 'Antiqui, moderni e via moderna' in *Marsilio da Padova*, in *Miscellanea Mediaevalia*, 9 (1974), p. 331 and pp. 342 - 343: Piaia singles out what is truly new about the way in which Marsilius approaches the problem of relations between State and Church in the adoption of this method, that is in the application in the ecclesiological field of the analytical instruments drawn up by the Greek philosopher.
38. Cf. MARSILIUS OF PADUA, *Defensor pacis*, I, 1, 3-7, R. SCHOLZ (ed.), 2 vols., Hahnsche Buchhandlung, Hanover, 1932-1933, vol. I, pp. 4 - 9.
39. Likewise the recourse to Augustine, on the other hand, in no way presupposes a passive acceptance of his political theology (nor of any other element of his system of thinking); on this aspect, see C. CONDREN, *On Interpreting Marsilius' Use of St. Augustine*, in *Augustiniana*, 25 (1975), pp. 220 - 222, and also bear in mind J. SCOTT VECCHIARELLI, *Influence or Manipulation? The Role of Augustinianism in the "Defensor Pacis" of Marsilius of Padua*, in *Augustinian Studies*, 9 (1978), pp. 59 - 79. As regards the idea that the reconstruction of the origin of the political communities implemented by Marsilius is greatly indebted to the Ciceronian doctrine according to which all men are distinguished by an inclination to congregate of which, however, they must become aware by way of the rational argumentations and persuasive capacities of the wisest amongst them, see C.J. NEDERMAN, *Nature, Sin and the Origins of Society: the Ciceronian Tradition in Medieval Political Thought*, in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 49 (1988), pp. 19 - 26.
40. *Defensor Pacis*, I, VI, 1, p. 28/9 - 14.
41. Consider, for example, *Defensor Pacis*, I, v, 11, vol. I, p. 27/12 - 13 e II, VIII, 9, vol. I, p. 229/19 - 21 ("est enim quilibet pronus ad commodum proprium prosequendum et incommodum fugiendum"). Marsilius underlines how the only instruments capable of adequately neutralising the conflict that the desire that each one has of "living and living well" can lead to, preventing each member of the community to solely pursue his own personal advantage, are

the rereading of Marsilius, the “natural tendency to associate oneself” which was spoken about in the first few pages of the *Politics* is transformed into the gradual awareness of the fact that the only way to assure oneself a “vita mundana sufficiens” – more precisely, to make the achievement of that objective “less difficult”⁴² – consists in becoming part of a community:

Ex supposito nobis in prioribus, quasi omnium in hoc libro demonstrandorum principio, videlicet: *Omnes homines appetere sufficientiam vite et oppositum declinare*, per demonstrationem conclusimus ipsorum communicationem civilem, quoniam per ipsam sufficientiam hanc adipisci possunt, et preter eam minime. Propter quod etiam Aristoteles 1^o Politice, capitulo 1^o inquit: *Natura quidem igitur in omnibus impetus est ad talem communitatem*, civilem scilicet⁴³.

a legislative body and a “guardian” empowered to enforce it: cf. *ivi*, I, IV, 4, p. 18/16 - 21 (“quia inter homines congregatos eveniunt contenciones et rixe, que per normam iusticie non regulate causarent pugnas et hominum separacionem et sic demum civitatis corrupcionem, oportuit in hac communicacione statuere iustorum regulam et custodem sive factorem”), I, xv, 6, p. 89/14 - 22 (“Sine principatus inexistencia civilis communitas manere aut diu manere non potest, quoniam *necesse est ut scandala veniant*, ut dicitur in Mattheo. Hee autem sunt contenciones atque iniurie hominum invicem, que non vindicate aut mensurate per iustorum regulam, legem videlicet, et per principantem, contingeret inde congregatorum hominum pugna et separacio, et demum corruptio civitatis et privacio sufficientis vite”) e I, XIX, 12, p. 135/132 - 15. The tendency to prevaricate over one’s neighbour, moreover, is to be traced back to original sin, from which the human race has emerged weakened and sickly in the soul and the body: cf. *Defensor Pacis*, I, VI, 2, pp. 29/24 - 30/5.

42. Cf. *ivi*, I, v, 11, p. 27.

43. *Defensor pacis*, I, XIII, 2, p. 70/14 - 22. Another theme in relation to which we witness – starting from the late-13th century – the difficult search for a synthesis between the language of political Aristotelianism and Pauline-Augustinian political theology is that of the legitimacy of tyrannicide, a theme I have had the chance to deal with in a recent contribution: cf. S. SIMONETTA, *Verso un punto di vista laico sulla questione del tirannicidio fra XII e XIII secolo*, in *Doctor Virtualis*, 9 (2009), especially pp. 74 - 77.