

BRIEF PLATONIC NOTES FOR A WORKING HYPOTHESIS ON THOMAS' *DE REGIMINE PRINCIPIUM*. TRACKS AND THEMES FOR COMPARISON.

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Abstract

Thomas Aquinas is rightly considered a thinker influenced by the Aristotelian philosophical approach widespread in the Middle Ages. However, at least as regards the political profile, it is possible to hypothesize that the reflections of the theologian's last phase were fascinated by elements oriented towards a certain mature Platonism. In particular, it is possible to find traces of Plato's *Laws* on *De Regimine Principium*, an unfinished pamphlet. A fascinating thematic hypothesis that deserves further investigation.

Keywords: Thomas of Aquinas, Plato, De Regimine, Laws, Aristotles.

Introduction

It seems almost obvious to state the Aristotelian influence on the political thought of Thomas Aquinas, as indeed on many thinkers of his time¹. Again in his last work, the *De Regimine principium ad regem Cypri et de regimine iudaeorum ad ducissam Brabantiae*, Aristotelian elements are evident in the suggestions that the Dominican philosopher dedicates to Hugh II of Lusignan, King of Cyprus until 1267, who in return had a chapel consecrated to the monk in Nicosia Cathedral². The *De Regno*

¹ On the reception of Aristotle's *Politics* in the Middle Ages, see G. Fioravanti, *La "Politica" aristotelica nel Medioevo: linee per una ricezione*, in "Rivista di filosofia", 52, 1997, pp. 17-29.

² Cfr. A. Cesaro, *La monarchia come ottima forma di governo nel De regno ad regem Cypri di Tommaso d'Aquino. Una nota sul tema de regimine principum nel pensiero politico del XIII secolo*, in «Heliopolis. Culture e Civiltà», XIV, 1, 2016, p. 65; T. Gilby, *The Political Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1963, p. 275; see H.F. Dondaine, *De Regno ad Regem Cypri by Thomas Aquinas*, cit. pp. 424-425.

has often enjoyed lesser consideration also due to doubts about its authenticity³. However, in addition to the influence of Aristotle and to some extent of Cicero and Augustine, a certain intellectual attraction operated by certain Platonic dialogues, in particular the *Republic* and the *Laws*, can at least be assumed in Thomas' last work.

While the *Doctor Angelicus* and all medieval scholars were not equipped to place the Greek philosophers with historical accuracy, as we know, they were also not in possession of all the authentic texts. Between the *Summa theologiae* and the *Contra Gentes*, there are many references to the *Timaeus*, the *Republic* and the *Laws*⁴. However, it was mainly Plato's indirect sources that were successful, among them Augustine, Dionysius the Areopagite, and the Greek Fathers⁵. However, knowledge also involved new Greek-Arabic translations⁶. On the political theme, however, little impetus can be discerned even in the 13th century, when in response to the Augustinian approach of Bonaventure and the Parisian Franciscans, Albertus Magnus and the members of the Cologne School felt the need to introduce a renewed interpretation of Aristotelian philosophy into Christian culture, without excluding Platonic (and Neo-Platonic) intersections⁷.

1. Medieval Aristotle interpreter of Plato

One of the most insightful sources of Thomas' indirect knowledge of the Platonic text was provided to him by the *Commentary on Aristotle's Politics*⁸. Chapters VI and VII of the *Commentary* were concerned with an examination of the *Laws*, against which the Stagirite is critical (*Pol.*, 1264b-

³ Cfr. M.F. Jordan, *De Regno and the place of Political Thinking in Thomas Aquinas*, in "Middle Ages", 18, 1992, pp. 151-168.

⁴ These works were only partially known during the Middle Ages through Latin translations, cfr. I. Caiazzo, *Le forme et les qualités des éléments: lectures médiévales su Timée*, in F.Celia, A.Ulacco (a cura di), *Il Timeo. Esegese greche, arabe, latine. Relazioni introduttive ai seminari della V "Settimana di Formazione" del Centro Interuniversitario "Incontri di culture. La trasmissione dei testi filosofici e scientifici dalla tarda antichità al medioevo islamico e cristiano"*. Pisa, Santa Croce in Fossabanda, 26-30 aprile 2010, Pisa University Press, Pisa, 2015, pp. 307-323.

⁵ B. Faes de Mottoni, *Il Platonismo Medievale*, Torino, Loescher Editore, 1979, pp. 10-16.

⁶ Ivi, pp. 69-78.

⁷ Ivi, pp. 159-162 and pp. 189-203. On the reception of the dialogue within Neoplatonism, see J. Dillon, *The Neoplatonic Reception of Plato's Laws*, in F.L. Lisi (eds.), *Plato's Laws and its Historical Significance. Selected Papers of the I International congress on Ancient Thought. Salamanca, 1998*, Akademie Verlag, Sankt Augustin, 2001, pp. 243-254.

⁸ The commentary on the *Politics* was continued by Pietro d'Alvernia (cfr. L. Lanza, *Aspetti della ricezione della «Politica» aristotelica nel XIII secolo: Pietro d'Alvernia*, in «Studi Medievali», 2, 1994, pp. 643-694).

1265b). In the first of the four parts into which Chapter VI is divided, Thomas refers back to the polemic Aristotle had addressed to the *Republic* and in particular to the Platonic plan of the communion of women, children and goods (*Pol.*, 1261b 17-1263a 42). But Aquinas' greatest interest lies in the philosophy of law and its realization in laws, which is also the founding paradigm of Plato's last political project. The Dominican thinker dwells on the division of the city into three parts, corresponding to the three social classes and the respective parts of the soul; but also on the education to be administered to the ruling groups (*In Pol.*, VI, 2-6) and the common features of the two projects presented in the *Republic* and the *Laws* (VI, 7), as well as the participation of women in the *polis* (VI, 9), which Aristotle opportunistically considers to be a democratic element (*Pol.*, 1265b 41-42). In the fourth part of Chapter VI, Aquinas discusses Aristotle's criticism of the feasibility of Plato's project of the *Laws* (*In Pol.*, VI 12-14): a city with great ambitions cannot be confined to an island, and Plato's energy for the administrative planning of the territory (*Pol.*, 1265a 21-22) must instead be directed at relations with neighbouring states, because enemies may lurk in them ready to attack the security of the nascent community⁹. The leaders of Magnesia, the city of platonic *Laws*, should therefore pay more attention to both the military and economic strengths of the neighbouring *poleis*, with which it is advisable to maintain solidary ties: Aristotle goes so far as to assess the usefulness of imitating the legislative system of neighbouring cities in order to maintain peaceful relations with them¹⁰.

2. Doctrinal innovations in the *De Regimine principum*

The argument of *De Regimine principum ad regem Cypri et de regimine iudaeorum ad ducissam Brabantiae* turns out to be that of delivering to future rulers an essay on constitutional theory, in which the historical origins of the monarchical form and the behaviour that every king should assume in the varied circumstances of his legislative activity are explained. It is a treatise on monarchical ideology in the tradition of the *specula* that in part recalls the introduction to Cicero's *De Oratore*¹¹.

⁹ See F. Pezzoli, *Commento*, in Aristotele. La Politica, II, , F. Pezzoli, M. Curnis (a cura di), L'Erma di Bretschneider, Roma, 2012, pp. 235-243.

¹⁰ E. Schütrumpf, *Aristoteles. Politik, II*, Berlin, 1991, p. 223.

¹¹ W. McCormick, *The Christian Structure of Politics: The De Regno of Thomas Aquinas*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C., 2022, pp. 24-25. On the general form of this genre, see D. Quagliani, *Il modello del*

Thomas also refers to taking inspiration from the Bible and ancient philosophers. The project of educating a Christian king for a Christian state represents a continuity with some passages from the *Commentary on Aristotle's Politics*.

Before the people, the ruler must appear as a captain capable of steering the vessel to safe harbours even when the sea is stormy (I,1). The simile with the helmsman and the ship appears in numerous places in the Thomist text (I,2; I,9; I,14)¹². Numerous thinkers in Greek Antiquity used this *topos*, as witnessed as early as Homer (*Od.*, III 283), or Theognid (667-682). But it is Plato himself who uses this reference to delineate an internal contrast within the democracy of Athens rather than to define two rival factions. In the *Republic*, in fact, Socrates refers to a *naukleros*, the ship-owner who, together with the Athenian *demos*, took possession of the ship, albeit lacking adequate nautical aptitude, but in the presence of a crew of quarrelsome sailor-demagogues (*Resp.*, 488a-b; *Gorg.*, 466b-c). The principle that governs the Platonic construct is competence, whereby true rulers in possession of philosophy are compelled to rule, despite their reluctance¹³.

For *Doctor Angelicus*, man is an 'agent by intellect' and therefore acts for a specific purpose¹⁴. To 'govern by intellect', however, the monarch has only a general awareness of the benefits that nature holds, and to acquire more specific knowledge in the various disciplines with which physical phenomena can be explained, human beings need others. According to Aquinas, citizens need 'leaders' capable of making community life harmonious, since no one is equal to removing obstacles in solitude: men are political and social animals in possession of reason and the ruler has the task of governing the multitude (*De Reg.*, I,1). The 'natural' reference to Aristotle (*Pol.*, 1253a 3-4) is evident¹⁵. Where there is no governor there is no people. Every individual, however, possesses a soul

principe cristiano. Gli specula principum fra Medioevo e Prima Età Moderna, in V.I. Comparato (eds.), *Modelli nella storia del pensiero politico*, I, Olschki, Firenze, 1987, pp. 103-122.

¹² Cf. A. Cesaro, *La monarchia come ottima forma di governo nel De regno ad regem Cyprici di Tommaso d'Aquino. Una nota sul tema de regimine principum nel pensiero politico del XIII secolo*, cit., p. 64.

¹³ Cf. G. Cambiano, *Come nave in tempesta. Il governo della città in Plato e Aristotele*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2016, pp. 14-41.

¹⁴ W. McCormick, *The Christian Structure of Politics: The De Regno of Thomas Aquinas*, cit. p. 28.

¹⁵ Cf. G. Angelini, *L'uomo come ζῷον πολιτικόν. An interpretative hypothesis of a fundamental lemma of Aristotelian thought*, in *Scienza&Politica*, XXX, 58, 2018, pp. 131-154.

divided into three parts, well arranged by divine Providence¹⁶: the rational part in the brain governs the irascible and the unbridled (*De Reg.*, I,1). Extending and deepening a theme already elaborated in the *Commentary on the Politics*, Plato's contribution to Thomas' political thought is undeniable here. For the Athenian philosopher, every soul comprised within itself the thinking *logistikón*, the *thymoeides* fuelled by courage and aggression, and the *epithymetikon* moved by desire and the drives of pleasures. The constitution of this psychic entity took place through a series of splits between the nobler part of the intellect close to the divine and those closer to corporeity (Plat., *Resp.*, IV, 439d); and in the latter, a further division was consummated between the component desiring material goods, from food to riches, located below the diaphragm and that closer to the heart, which although irascible, if well-educated could be a strength for the community (439e-441c). Plato indissolubly links the structure of the political community with the psychological structure of the individual citizen: an ontological phenomenology useful both to illustrate the potential daily conflicts inherent in the one, understood as an individual, and to organize the many, perceived as the civic body, among whom, however, only in a few emerges the reason capable of resolving the psychological and political oppositions within the city. Thus, the preponderance of the part of the individual's soul would also define his belonging to one of the three social classes: the risk of civil decay would be generated by a psychic alteration that would lead the best government towards a decline, transfiguring first into an oligarchy, then into a democratic regime and thus ending in the depths of tyranny (561c-573b)¹⁷. In order for the king not to become a tyrant, a wise and temperamental man must be elected. This preventive action seems to have both an Aristotelian and an Augustinian tone¹⁸. Sometimes, however, if tyranny does not degenerate excessively, citizens must indulge and metabolize these non-extreme forms of tyranny, lest they run the risk of creating worse evils (*De Reg.*, I,6)¹⁹. In this sense,

¹⁶ Cf. J. Finnis, *Aquinas. Moral, Political and Legal Theory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York, 1998, pp. 304-312.

¹⁷ See G. Giorgini, *Il tiranno*, in M. Vegetti (ed.), *La Repubblica. Traduzione e Commento*, Bibliopolis, Napoli, 2005, pp. 423-470.

¹⁸ See M.M. Keys, *Aquinas, Aristotle and the promise of Common Good*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 164-165.

¹⁹ Cfr. also W. McCormick, *The Christian Structure of Politics: The De Regno of Thomas Aquinas*, cit., pp. 83-84).

democracy can be even more dangerous and history itself proves this (I,5)²⁰. Internal division within the multitude can reserve savage conflicts that create new and more heinous tyrants, as happened in Syracuse in the time of Dionysius (I,5). The Syracusan affair of the 4th century is inexorably linked to the figure of Plato: we do not know whether Thomas read the famous *Letter VII*, but already the indirect accounts transmitted both in Antiquity and in the Middle Ages made known the disappointing political relationship between the tyrant of Syracuse and the Athenian philosopher²¹.

A certain suggestion in Thomas must have come from late Neo-Platonic readings, according to which the sovereign retains a rational soul linked to the body used as an instrument of action²². This argument, therefore, must not have escaped the *magister*. Exactly as for the philosopher of the *Republic*, the ruler of *De Regno* nurtured the innate prevalence of the rational soul, and for this reason invested by God to govern men. The Thomist philosophical architecture accepts the Aristotelian view that human nature is directed to the Good and the Socratic view that no one does evil voluntarily, but only through ignorance or error or some temporary suspension of judgement (*Resp.*, II, 382a; III, 413a; IX, 589c; *Tim.*, 86e; *Leg.*, V, 731c; IX 860d)²³. Although Aquinas's metaphysics also revolves around this idea, he nonetheless feels obliged to recognize the Christian framework of original sin, according to which human beings are so imperfect that they are incapable of being inclined to evil (*De Reg.*, I, 1): a perspective, this one, still fully Augustinian and in contrast to Aristotelian postulates²⁴.

3. Ancient laws in Thomist constitutional reflection

Aquinas' discussions on the constitution almost always intersect with questions of ethics. The theologian feels the need to explain the reasons for human deviations within a broad cosmological

²⁰ See M. Merlo, *La sintassi del "Regimen Bene Commixtum" e del "Regimen Politicum" fra Tommaso d'Aquino e Tolomeo da Lucca*, in "Filosofia Politica. La Costituzione mista", 1, 2005, p. 39.

²¹ For a commentary on the events of Dionysius recounted in *Lettera VII* (344d-352a), see M. Isnardi Parente, *Commentary*, in M. Isnardi Parente (ed.), *Platone. Lettere*, Arnoldo Mondadori, Milano, 2002, pp. 251-256.

²² D.J. O'Meara, *Platonopolis. Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, pp. 88-91.

²³ On the Socratic conception of the Good as opposed to the evil of ignorance, see, among others, R. Ferber, *Πάντα Πράττειν. Socrates and the Good in the Republic*, in "Méthexis", 23, 2010, pp. 91-102.

²⁴ See S.B. Drury, *Aquinas and Modernity. The Lost Promise of Natural Law*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham, Maryland (U.S.A.), 2008, pp. 25-26.

and historical account of the entire movement of creatures, from their origin to their fulfilment (I, q.1, 3ad 2). Within the deliberations of conscience, one must understand what reason requires, and from there what actions are consistent with the pursuit of the Good. The concern for true justice concerns the manner in which one treats one's neighbour, only then to be determined according to law²⁵. No one can depart from justice unless driven by the desire for personal gain. From this perspective, the king's good behaviour serves as an example and excludes, at least in theory, yielding to tyranny. A friendly relationship cannot exist between the tyrant and his subjects: he plunders his citizens in the knowledge that no restitution will ever be due to them. The worst fate of a people happens when they hate the sovereign and in the case of the despot this is a constant: when the individual rises up, the multitude often follows (*De Reg.*, I,10). But the good conduct of just and wise rulers also leads to greater and more honest riches (I,11). Monarchy is the constitutional form closest to nature and to God and is the only one that contains within itself the unifying principle of multiplicity (I,12)²⁶. Just as God divides things according to an ineluctable order, so the king divides citizens according to their souls (I,13). The importance of the office of government cannot be fully understood if one ignores the profound reason for its institution, namely the idea that man rules over the earth and animals by divine will.

The king must lay down laws for his subjects to achieve virtue, for without them it is impossible to lead a virtuous life (I,15). Such laws must defuse the impediments that may occur on the way to the *telos within the* individual conscience. And only the priests who know the authentic interpretation of the divine law can intervene on it. Sticking to the rational intellect, the essence of the law, as stated in the *Summa theologiae*, determines the formal, final, efficient and material cause (*S.Th.*, q. 90)²⁷. The rule is the measure of action by virtue of practical reason, and it is precisely by virtue of this

²⁵ J. Finnis, *Aquinas. Moral, Political and Legal Theory*, cit., pp. 187-188.

²⁶ A. Cesaro, *La monarchia come ottima forma di governo nel De regno ad regem Cypri di Tommaso d'Aquino. Una nota sul tema de regimine principum nel pensiero politico del XIII secolo*, cit., p. 75.

²⁷ Cfr. A. Vendemiati, *Analogia della legge. Uno studio su S. Tommaso d'Aquino*, in "Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica", 86/3, 1994, pp. 480-486.

faculty that it proposes the ultimate purpose, which is the Common Good, i.e. individual bliss subordinated to collective bliss, acting as the general collector of all particular ends²⁸.

The close connection between the substantial and the formal runs through all of Thomas' philosophy, in particular his psychological theory, whereby man is to be understood as a single consistency composed of body and soul. The same conviction emerged from Thomist social doctrine, which in some cases also recognized force as a virtuous element: although it did not have to be the only form of persuasion, it could sometimes be an inescapable exercise, the brutality of which, however, was ennobled by law. The *Naturalis ratio*, motive reason, ductile and manifold, was fixed in the flow of events²⁹. The eternal law in the mind of God was the prime example of every type of rule and government (*S.Th.*, I-II, q. 93)³⁰. Transcending all legal categories, the divine engine descended into human minds and there partially expressed itself in two ways: directly, through the orders of natural and benevolent reason indicating the rightness of earthly actions; following an indirect mechanism, through an act of the human will that determined some additional rules. The former sanctioned the procedure towards natural law, the latter defined positive law³¹. For Thomas, the identification of nature with *ratio* made the latter an actress and not a spectator in community life, since it represented a shaping purpose and not just a logical essence. With the concept of nature, Aristotle also understood unconscious and feral drives: the existence and essence of a thing can only be known through an act of judgement charged with sensitive perception. Thus, the law is defined as an institution of reason tending to the Common Good promulgated by the community's curator. But the king must still aspire to the divine law, for which he is instructed by the priests in three stages: through the creation of the earthly norm within the multiplicity of conditions for a righteous life; through the preservation of this direction; through the promotion and perfection of *it in itinere*. The realization of this political situation is aided by peace, the only stable ground for virtue, which can, however, be challenged from within the community if the multitude changing its attitude towards the king no longer recognizes his

²⁸ See M. Bastit, *Naissance de la loi moderne*, P.U.F., Paris, 1990, pp. 61-62, or more recently T. Tsonchev, *The political Theology of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and Reinold Niehebur. Essays in political theology and Christian Realism*, Independently Published, Montreal, 2018, p. 64.

²⁹ T. Gilby, *The Political Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, cit., p. 113.

³⁰ See the commentary in R.J. Regan, *Thomas Aquinas. On Law, Morality, and Politics*, cit., pp. 30-39.

³¹ See M.D. Guerra., *Beyond natural law talk: Politics and Prudence in St. Thomas Aquinas's On Kingship*, in *Perspectives on politics*, 31/1, 2002, pp. 9-14.

public authority. But pitfalls can also come from outside the city, due to violent attacks by enemies. In such cases, the king must know how to modify the institutional architecture, because time wears and corrupts, as well as renew and know how to arrange laws that reward virtuous behaviour (*De Reg.*, I,15).

With such premises, it is appropriate that those who govern should be subject to the authority of the law³². In the Aquinas philosopher's reflections, there is a fundamental question for understanding the perspective and results of his political thought, which is intertwined with another division, namely that between the 'kingly and political regime', which originated in the fierce introduction of the *Politics* (1252a 14-17). However, the comparison between king and *politikos*, the basis of the definition of political science according to Aristotle, undergoes a forcing in William of Moerbeke's translation that influences the reception of late medieval Aristotelian thought and involves Thomas himself. In the remarks of several 13th-century commentators, the distinction developed in the first pages of the *Politics* establishes, instead, a comparison between two different political regimes, the 'royal' one in which the sovereign has full powers and the 'political' one in which the exercise of power by the ruler instead has well-defined limits, set by the law of the state³³.

Based on these convictions, according to the *magister*, the king is the reference for the social cohesion of the state, which in the absence of his rational action would be destined to dissolve. The Common Good points to an ultimate horizon that requires not only a close relationship between the most efficient form of government in the administration of the public space and the social groups that comprise it, but also the internal harmony of the social body itself in a conception of the community as a political plurality, which cannot appear merely as an aggregation of individuals (*De Reg.*, I,2). In this view, the law consolidates authority and promises a result that no other legal and political institution can guarantee and, therefore, being of divine derivation, the monarch must contaminate the state with its constituent principles. For Thomas, this represents the only way to curb the authoritarian and absolutist instincts of the man alone in command and avoid the deformation of monarchy into tyranny, thus fixing the limits to royal power. The law assumes a politically superior

³² Cfr. J.M. Blythe, *Ideal Government and Mixed Constitution in the Middle Age*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1992, pp. 43-44.

³³ S. Simonetta, *Rimescolare le carte. Il tema del governo misto in Tommaso d'Aquino e nella riflessione politica tardomedievale*, in *Governo Misto. Ricostruzione di un'idea*, D. Felice (a cura di), Napoli, 2011, p. 170.

value to humanly understood governmental regimes, even compared to the excellent constitutional model. However, while the moral and legitimising choice of the ruler by the people remains opportune, as advanced, for example, in the *Summa theologiae* (I-II, q. 95 a.4; q.105, a.1), this proposition does not find perspicuous confirmation in the *De Regimine*, given the continuous observations on the risks of ethical and psychological change in the multitude (*De Reg.*, I,5). On the contrary, it appears in the text that only a few well-selected members of the community can be entrusted with the election of the king (I,6). In this treatise, we also glimpse a kind of ranking of phenomena that lead to tyrannical degradation in which a prominent position is occupied precisely by the vagaries of the masses. The best form of city life is the royal rule of law, a protraction of the rule of God: in this sense, the mixed regime takes on the connotations of a divine paradigm on earth. The fundamental element of the fundamental presence of law in the most efficient governmental formulation seems to bring Thomas's proposal closer to Plato's *Laws*, the proto-ideator of the political project of the mixed constitution. In his last dialogue, the Athenian philosopher profoundly renews the constitutional theory found in Book VIII of the *Republic*, although a more earthly approach is already evident in the *Political* (300e-303c). Of the six constitutional schemes with laws proposed there, three of which stand out as rational and as many as bad, in Book III of the *Laws*, they are reduced to two, the monarchy whose rational example is represented by ancient Persia and the democracy practiced in early Athens (*Leg.*, 693d). Within this new constitution that corresponds to a mixture of the positive institutes of the two 'mother' forms lies the regulatory framework that governs the life of the *polis*. However, the real mixture concerns the principles of authority and freedom that monarchy and democracy respectively express. The royal paradigm, in addition to its Persian roots, has in the course of time also incorporated and preserved the traditional *patrioi nomoi*, indispensable for the preservation of any community (680a)³⁴. Written laws, therefore, must be flanked by the oral transmission of just customs, which act as a permanent sting to their eventual immobility, which, on the other hand, can be a limitation. If the State of the *Republic* does not need laws because it is the wisdom of the philosopher-king that guarantees the right course of human affairs, in the colony of the *Laws*, the *nomos* represents the fundamental pillar for the entire institutional architecture.

³⁴ F.L. Lisi, *Repubblica VIII e Leggi III*, in M.Vegetti (ed.), *La Repubblica. Translation and Commentary*, Bibliopolis, Napoli, 2005, p. 637.

Regulatory harmony is ensured by the virtuous relationship between justice and happiness. The Lawgiver has the ability to make the city effective and, therefore, happy only with the help of the law understood as intelligence established by the divine mind (714a). The Platonic approach to law as a disposition of the intellect is also mentioned by Proclus (*In Remp.*, I, p. 238, 22-25), inferring that the science of law was a kind of determination of reason derived from a transcendent divine Intellect. An observation that must not have escaped Thomas. For Plato, the welfare of the city, the governor's overriding interest, is achieved by obedience to the sovereign law of which he himself is the 'servant' (*Leg.*, 715c). The *nomos* is the natural reason and principle of authority that obeys the divinities, the living result of theoretical reflection on law and the practical formulation of norms resulting from it³⁵. The *nomoi*, at the basis of which is the perfect *paideia*, are ordered and rational structures capable of directing human actions with discipline in the individual spheres of city life. The *nous* with the filter of nature creates the practical rules to be actually applied in the second best constitutional model. For Plato, the law expresses a grid of behaviour to which the 5040 new settlers must adhere. The citizens are healthy conductors of the legislative essence: they are persuaded by the legislator to obey the law and, in turn, take on the role of disseminators because they are convinced of its correctness. This contamination constitutes the necessary vehicle for the stabilization of the normative order, which becomes an active antibody against tyranny (710e). In the *Laws*, we witness a personification of the *nomos* that has desires and wills of its own, and thus becomes the 'golden' categorical imperative (645a)³⁶. It is its divine rationality that imposes obedience to it. Thus, as for Thomas, centuries earlier for Plato, the law is the indispensable element for any constitutional mixing.

Conclusions

Thomas argues that the principles of good governance are immutable and constant and that all political action must be directed by them, despite the limitations of will, power and the human condition. Aquinas is not concerned with the description of good rule, but with the explanation of the actual sources of good governance. From this perspective, his political writings are not an

³⁵ Cfr. B. Centrone, *La seconda polis. Introduzione alle Leggi di Platone*, Carocci, Roma, 2021, pp. 249-250.

³⁶ L. Prauscello, *Performing Citizenship in Plato's Laws*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 227-230. See also A. Laks, *Legislation and Demiurgy: on relationship between Plato's Republic and Laws*, in *Classical Antiquity*, 9/2, 1990, pp. 218-219.

endorsement of a particular constitutional form: although he never hides his sympathies for the monarchical model, what interests the Thomist investigation most is the affirmation of the founding values that must then be pursued in order to achieve the goals of peace, unity and community well-being.

Doctor Angelicus is convinced that society cannot exist without being organized and directed by a governmental centre, just as the human mind controls the body; its function is to take charge of the health of the social whole. Following Aristotle, in *De Regno*, the author reiterates once again that the best and most natural form of political government is monarchy, warning that this can easily become *dominium super servus*, i.e. a tyrannical regime aiming at the private good. Therefore, as an 'ideal type', monarchy is the best exercise, but since there are no perfect rulers, this model must be organised as a mixed system³⁷: the element that best compliments the king's leadership is the law, because only it can stem tyrannical degeneration of all degrees. After a long absence in Western political thought, with Thomas the idea of the mixed system takes shape again, marking a milestone in the subsequent late medieval debate³⁸.

In *De Regimine principum*, *Magister Thomas* resumes the median political path in which Aristotelian and Augustinian philosophical elements largely interact, sometimes influenced by Ciceronian mediation³⁹. Rather than disconnected sections on the worst possible government, i.e. tyranny, in the interrupted treatise one can discern a shrewd dialogical structure that once again demonstrates the Thomist orientation towards kingship, which here enjoys the theoretical intersection with Latin Christianity and Greek philosophy⁴⁰.

However, it is possible to assume here no secondary Platonic reverberations. The considerations concerning the psychology of the Thomist ruler who must be pervaded by the presence of the rational soul, for instance, finds correspondence in the classical Platonic tripartite approach, according to which the reason present in the soul must direct the philosopher-king's conduct. But the more

³⁷ T. Tsonchev, *The Political Theology of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and Reinold Niehebur. Essays in political theology and Christian Realism*, cit., pp. 62-63.

³⁸ Cfr. S. Simonetta, *Rimescolare le carte. Il tema del governo misto in Tommaso d'Aquino e nella riflessione politica tardomedievale*, cit., pp. 173-193.

³⁹ See C.J. Nederman, *Nature, Sin and the Origins of Society: The Ciceronian Tradition in Medieval Thought*, in *Journal of History of Ideas*, 49/1, 1988, pp. 4-6.

⁴⁰ Cf. W. McCormick, *The Christian Structure of Politics: The De Regno of Thomas Aquinas*, cit. pp. 255-260.

comprehensive idea of the law as a divine reflection and an indispensable element of mixture within the process of constitutional construction also relates to such Platonic echoes. Thomas, in fact, takes up its most innovative doctrinal point, namely the consideration of law as an antibody against deviations, regardless of the authentic constitutional form to be practiced.

But for such a refined analysis, Neoplatonic traces in the *magister's* reflection cannot be excluded. Late Neo-Platonism distinguished three levels of political reform: the first concerns the individual soul and corresponds to the need for a renewal of the moral nature of the individual man through the practice of political virtues; the second level examines the authentic constitutional order aimed at the modification of existing laws and customs, which the Neo-Platonists traced precisely to the design of the *Laws*; finally, the third level concerned the ideal political theory elaborated in the *Republic*⁴¹. The constitutional idea conceived for the second-best city proposed in the *Nomoi* (739b-e) remains a divine configuration that, however, takes human conditions into account and therefore adheres to the concept of geometric proportion (756e-757c), both in the destruction of inhabitants, offices and property⁴². It is possible to detect in the Neo-Platonic currents the circulation of theories of mixed constitution that were in line with the theoretical approach present in Plato's *Laws* and that stimulated other later Christian and Islamic intellectuals⁴³. And this approach, which held much fascination in medieval thought, probably influenced the last phase of the elaboration of Thomas' political doctrine, and it is conceivable that in addition to the Aristotelian commentary, Aquinas made use of the Neo-Platonic commentaries in order to have a reliable account of the constitutional architecture advanced in the *Laws*. But Thomas evidently promoted an autonomously his own and original interpretative design of Platonic political doctrine. This is a hypothesis, therefore, that could give the debate a new light and perspective: indications, however, that would certainly need further study and verification, but which for the moment mark a point of reflection that is neither trivial nor evanescent.

⁴¹D.J. O'Meara, *Platonopolis. Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, cit., pp. 91-92.

⁴²J. Dillon, *The Neoplatonic Reception of Plato's Laws*, cit., p. 249.

⁴³D.J. O'Meara, *Platonopolis. Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, cit., pp. 101-105 and pp. 145-197.

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