

St. Aquinas and Natural Law

Maitreyee Mishra

In his *Summa Theologiae*, St. Thomas Aquinas describes natural or divine laws that govern everything from human morality to gravity. Natural law is critical to Aquinas' moral and likewise political philosophy. For him, everything in the material world is God-made and contains an essence- it possesses a true nature that thus defines it. St. Aquinas, stating that humans are conscious and rational being they are aware of what universal natural laws apply to them.

St. Aquinas, in agreement with Aristotle, says that human beings are social and political animals, arguing that the fellowship of society is natural to mankind and hence too, governments are essential. In binding theology with politics, St. Aquinas asserts that political society is not the only natural community; the family precedes political society. However, political society is something that humans aspire towards and that which is necessary for perfecting their existence, as it is politics that aims at a higher and nobler good than even the family. Good citizens therefore place common good above private good.

For St. Aquinas, the perfect regime is monarchy. He uses the analogy of bees ruled by a single Queen bee, as well as the universe itself governed by a single entity- God, as systems that should be emulated by human society. Since God himself is wise and just, human society is best governed by a wise and just monarch, who resembles God. However, St. Aquinas also does realise that such systems of government may lead to tyranny, which he sees as the worst regime. Indeed, he upholds those who stand up against a tyrannical leader. In response to what makes a best possible regime, St. Aquinas echoes Aristotle: monarchy, aristocracy and democracy.