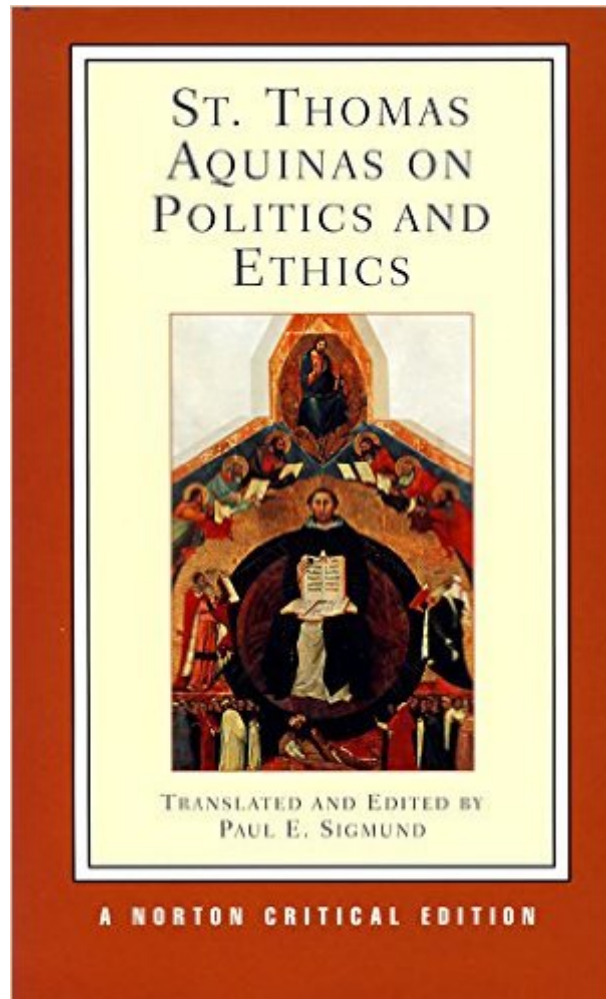


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# St. Thomas Aquinas On Politics And Ethics (Norton Critical Editions)



## Synopsis

St. Thomas Aquinas on Politics and Ethics contains translations of carefully chosen and central selections from The Summa Against the Gentiles, On Kingship or The Governance of Rulers, and The Summa of Theology. The selections not only include St. Thomas Aquinas's views on government, law, war, property, and sexual ethics, but also provide the theological, epistemological, and psychological background for his political and ethical thought, including the Five Proofs on the existence of God and Aquinas's theories of knowledge, the soul, the purpose of man, and the order of the universe. Throughout the book, footnotes explain technical terms and historical, biblical, and classical references. "Backgrounds and Sources" follows the text, with selections from the writings of Aristotle, St. Augustine, and Dionysius the Areopagite. "Interpretations" traces Aquinas's influence on medieval thought, on Roman Catholicism during the Renaissance, on early modern political thought (Richard Hooker and Francisco Suarez), on nineteenth- and twentieth-century papal social thought, and on contemporary Christian Democratic political parties in Europe and Latin America. The volume concludes with "Contemporary Problems in Thomistic Ethics", which contains eight analyses of the influence of Aquinas's thought on modern debates on war, contraception, and abortion. A Selected Bibliography is included.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a truly excellent selection of Thomistic writing, both by the Angelic Doctor and his critics and

modern-day followers. It is not only comprehensive on the subject of Aquinas's politics and ethics but it is a good introduction to Thomism and natural law theory in general. Mortimer Adler's spanking of Bill Moyers on the subject of objective ethics is worth the price of the book just by itself.

This book is "The Thinner Aquinas," a targeted text specifically focusing on Aquinas's political and ethical writings. Included are obvious selections from *Summa Contra Gentiles* and *Summa Theologica* (Five Ways of God's Existence and Essay on Law), but also included are excerpts from "De Regimine Principum." There are hidden treasures in the back, excerpts from background sources and essays that influenced and were influenced by Thomistic thought. This book is geared towards a political scientist and political philosopher. For the theologian or the philosopher, however, I would recommend Penguin Classics "Selected Writings." PS--Nice picture on the cover!

This short compendium of St Thomas's teachings on politics and ethics is an excellent introduction to the saint's thought. St Thomas can be forbidding to the beginner - his most famous work, the *Summa*, runs to several thousand pages and many volumes, which seem to be purely theological in nature - the *Summa* begins with God and also ends with God. To a certain degree it is true St Thomas was purely a theologian and pre-occupied with theological questions, many of which are not relevant to most people today. But this is only a half-truth, and this book admirably shows. St Thomas never wrote a systematic treatise on politics, unlike other medieval thinkers such as William of Ockham. Yet treatment of political, ethical and legal questions occurs through much of his work. Most important are his theory of natural law (used mainly in the *Summa*), his remarks on virtue ethics (which are surprisingly detailed and comprehensive), and also an important treatise he wrote on rulers and their obligations. St Thomas also wrote systematically about the virtue of justice, and wrote commentaries on Aristotle's 'Ethics' and 'Politics' that contain important insights into his political views. Aquinas's importance today lies not so much in his ideas but in their application, particularly in the moral and social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, and also by scholars who follow his thought like John Finnis. Aquinas is also highly influential in philosophical circles with the revival of virtue ethics as an alternative to Kantian and Utilitarian rule-based ethics. An understanding of Aquinas is therefore necessary for any student of ethics and political science, even if you don't share any of his views. This short introduction offers a valuable resource for students of Aquinas in this area.

The Book contains excerpts from St. Thomas Aquinas' writings, edited by Paul E. Sigmund, plus

many interpretations at the end written by various luminaries, including Popes and modern thinkers. I have to admit I only read little bits of the interpretations. St. Thomas Aquinas, who lived from 1225 to 1274, writes on a wide range of topics. The topics include how to know truth, true happiness and what is it, does God exist, the theological virtues, the cause of sin, the essence of the soul, much about politics, and more. The writings sometimes follow the pattern: question, answer, objections, and answers to objections. A few of Aquinas' ideas seem wrong today; thus, he has 'different' notions about politics, about usury and money, considers slavery "natural" and he says a woman is "an imperfect man." Aquinas admits to influence by the non-Christian Aristotle. It's obvious Aquinas writes in an earlier age, but even so, I call it a five star book. Non-Christians might rate it less, but non-Christians will understand Christians better if they read it, and might even become Christian, so I presume to rate it at five stars for them as well.

This book would be a great text for an undergraduate class on ethical philosophy or medieval intellectual history, with a professor on hand to unpack the arguments and put them in context. The sections on natural law are especially interesting. However, the book would be of less value to an ordinary reader taking it up for study on his own. The editorial apparatus is just too thin (for example, there's no glossary) to explain many of the often-obscure concepts and arguments used by Aquinas. Many of the readings in the second half of the book update Aquinas and apply his ethical thinking to current issues, but that isn't a substitute for exegesis of the original text.

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