

# MEDIEVAL POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

## *CHALLENGING CHURCH AUTHORITY*

Dr. Stephanie Spoto  
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Monterey Peninsula College  
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# Medieval political philosophy

- No consensus as to when this period begins or ends
  - Conventional to claim that it begins with Augustine (354-430), and continues past Descartes (1596-1650)
- Attempted to influence public events → history of medieval political philosophy often references those events → understands the philosophy in context
- Tied to developments in medieval culture as well as institutions such as universities and codified legal systems.
- Strong relationship between religion and politics → political philosophy almost *had* to situate itself in relationship to the church.

# Church vs Universities

- Universities began to appear in major cities
- Rival clerical orders competed for influence within the universities
- Scholars and philosophers also worked for intellectual autonomy from the church



The University of Bologna in Italy, founded in 1088, is the oldest university, the word university (Latin: universitas) having been coined at its foundation.

# William of Ockham

c. 1287 – 1347



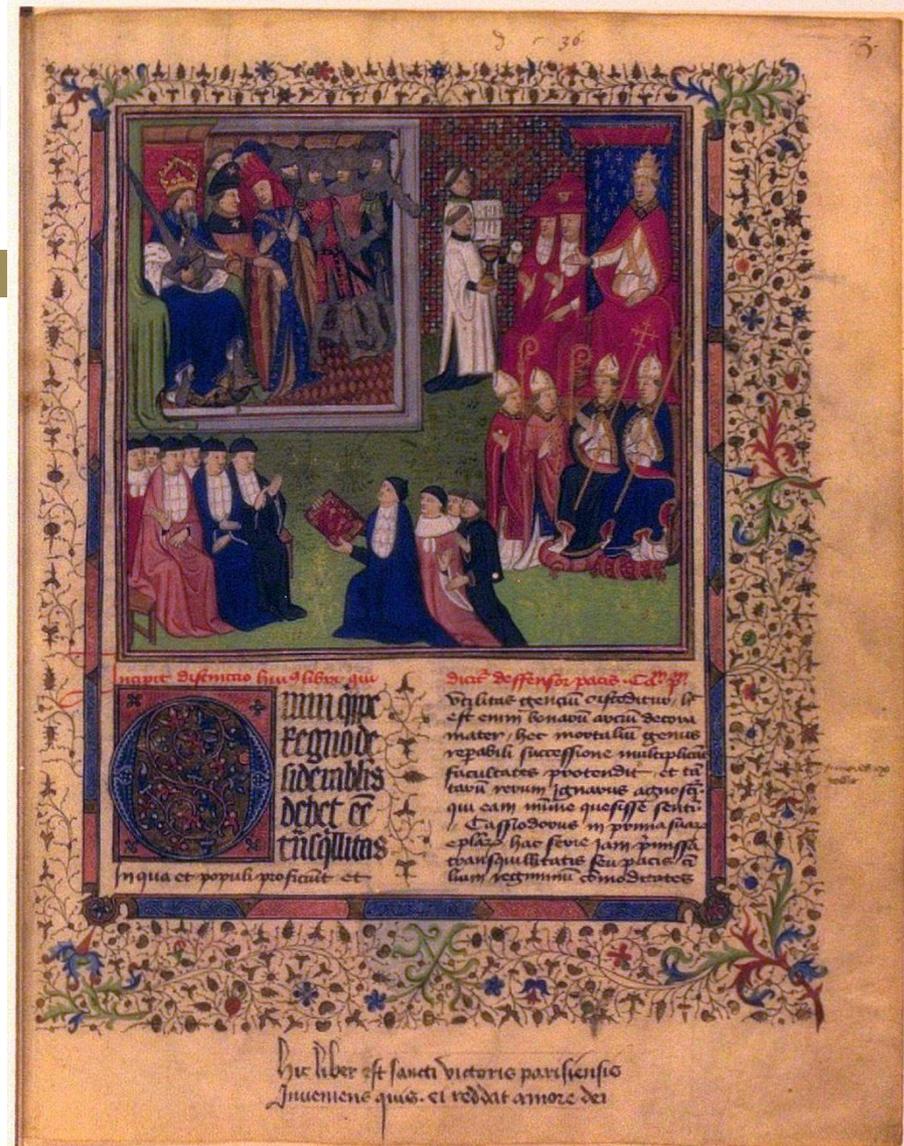
William of Ockham – Sketch labelled "frater Occham iste", from a manuscript of Ockham's *Summa Logicae*, 1341

- Challenged popular synthesis of faith and reason → excommunicated from the Catholic Church
- God is a matter of faith and not knowledge → rejected all alleged proofs of the existence of God.
- **Politics:** supported the separation of church from political rule and supported freedom of speech.

# Marsilius of Padua

c. 1275 – c. 1342

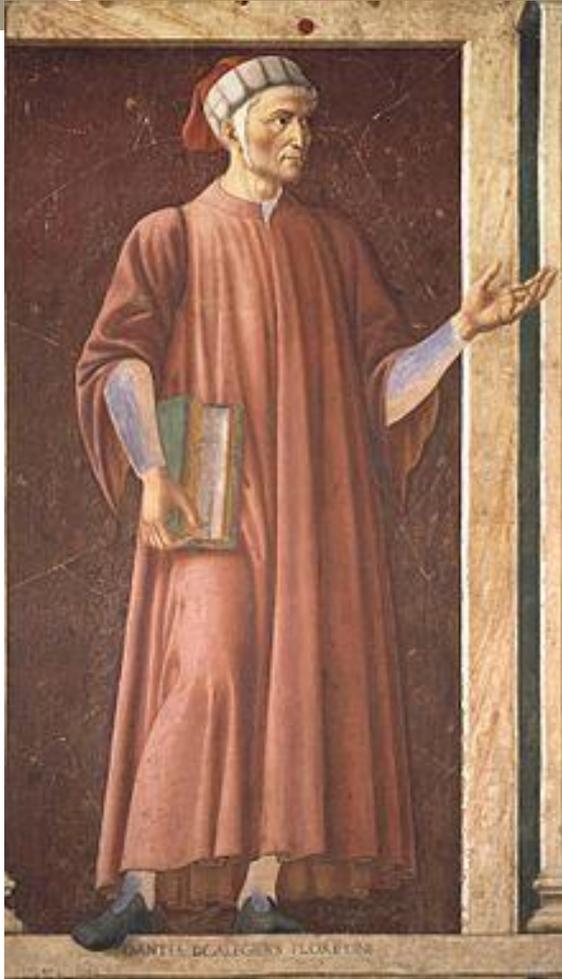
- *Defensor Pacis* (Defender of the Peace) → very critical of papal politics.
- There needed to be limitation to the church authority
- Secular state's responsibility to maintain of law and order.
- When the treatise became known, Marsilius of Padua had to flee from Italy for his safety and was considered a heretic.
- Excommunicated in 1327



Miniature on the first page of a luxury manuscript of the *Defensor pacis* (15th century). Marsilius is shown presenting a copy to the Emperor

# Dante Alighieri

c. 1265 – 1321



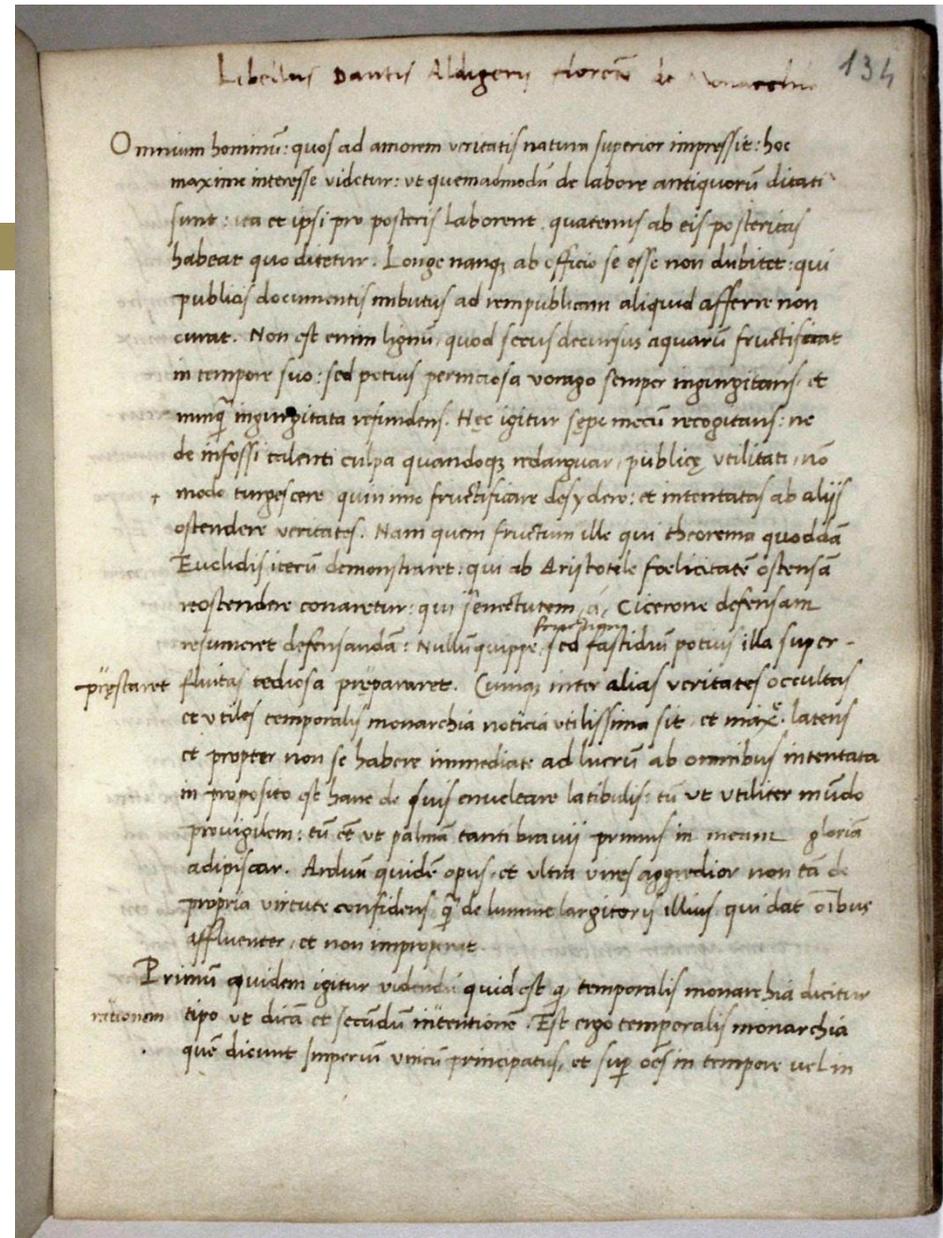
Mural of Dante in the Uffizi Gallery, by Andrea del Castagno, c. 1450

- Exiled from his home in Florence
- Longed for peace and to return
- Politically, could not rely on pope
- Little faith in citizen democracy
  - Portrayed as a pillaging evil that has infected Florence
- Put hopes on Emperor Henry VII (1310-1313 CE)

# De Monarchia

c. 1312-1313

- Written within this political and personal context
- Co-operation between cities, developing peace, returning exiles → so people can develop as individuals
- Competing claims to universality
  - ▣ Pope Boniface VIII (Papal Bull *Unam Sanctam* 1302)
  - ▣ Emperor Henry VII (universal world domination)



The Trivulziano Codex 642, early 1500s possibly in Milan for personal reading

# The Universal Monarchy

- Material purpose of laying foundations for peace, freedom, and justice.
- To serve individual happiness → not communities deprived of individuals
- Freedom of volition is the greatest gift that God has given human nature
- Individual freedom is cognitive, intellectual → threatened by politics
  - When people act politically, individual freedom is threatened by desires of political actors
- But a universal monarch would have no desires → therefore only he can be purest subject of justice
- Pope assigned to humankind's eternal life (soul), but the monarchy assigned to humankind's earthly life

# The Individual over the State



Dante Alighieri, attributed to Giotto, Bargello Palace (Florence). This oldest picture of Dante was painted just prior to his exile and has since been heavily restored.

- Individual human happiness foregrounded
- Move towards individual liberty → citizens do not exist for the sake of government/consuls → people do not exist for the sake of the king
- Consuls are subject to the will of the citizens → King subject to will of the people
- Monarch becomes a *servant* to the people

*‘So, the human species comes off best under the rule of the monarch. It follows that the monarchy is necessary for the good of the world’ (Book I, Chapter I)*

# The Three Books of the *Monarchia*

## *Three Arguments for the Universal Monarchy*

- Book I: Purpose of Peace → Protection of individual and individual happiness
- Book II: reaches back to the first principle of unity, the *principium unitatis*, as the basis of the moral order (universal empire).
  - Secular monarchy → Christian emperor whose authority comes directly from God
- Book III: Defends papal power and imperial power separately.
  - Man has two aspects: physical and immortal aspect → needs two separate powers to influence each sphere