

Optimus vir, optima lex

A Medieval Debate on the Soul of a City¹

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Mens et animus et consilium et sententia
civitatis posita est in legibus.

Cicero, *Pro Cluentio*, 146.

Lex, id est, imperator qui est lex animata in
terris.

Accursius, *Glossa ordinaria*,
dist. 1. 3. 22. v. *cum lex*.

Abstract: This paper studies a series of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century scholastic discussions on Aristotle's "vexed question" of whether the best law or the best man should govern. The paper examines arguments in favour of law by Thomas Aquinas and Godfrey of Fontaines, and the more absolutist arguments from Peter of Auvergne and Giles of Rome, before turning to the theological solutions from the Franciscans Gerald Odonis and Francis of Meyronnes. The paper offers fresh insight into the scholarly debate through a prism of medieval moral psychology and situates the political question within a broader theological framework. A critical edition of Odonis's Ethics commentary question is presented in the appendix.

Keywords: Politics, Ethics, Law, Common Good, Virtue, Political theology, Franciscan.

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