

POLITICAL POWER ACCORDING TO THE LAWS OF MANU

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This essay presents a construction and description of the concept of political power developed in *The Laws of Manu* and it concludes with a reconstruction of the Hindu ethical concept of political power. This exposition deals exclusively with what is contained in the book, *The Laws of Manu* and does not undertake an examination of the problems of authorship and date. It is the book in its final expression which has engaged my research and have concerned myself only with the meanings possible within the statement internal to the book itself. What I have written here is an exposition of what I understand to be the thought expressed in the *Laws of Manu*. I will use the word *Manu* as an abbreviated designation of the book itself.

I. The Nature, Significance and Influence of Political power.

1.1 The nature of political power :

Manu, drawing upon the traditional teaching in the Vedas and the Brahmanas, discusses political power in its reference to the wide-ranging relations and problems of the human life. Manu understands political power to be a creation of the divinely given means for governing ethical, social and religious relations.

Following the tradition in the sacred texts (Sruti and Smṛti literature), Manu emphasizes the original and ultimate relation between the divine Creator and his created cosmos with all of its natural and human processes. Manu focusses on the Creator's plan for human society and laws necessary for the regulation of this society. He envisions human society in its entirety as an integral, intended part of divine creation. Everything in the universe—every institution, every human and non-human being has its origin and reality in the divine creation. "He who can be perceived by the internal organ (alone), who is subtle, indiscernible and eternal, who contains all created beings and is inconceivable, shone forth of his own will"*(I:7mxm)

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*Note mxm refers to Max Muler's translation of *The Laws of Manu*; I refer to Edward Hopkins' translation with the letters eh; otherwise the references indicate the location in the Sanskrit text.