Samuel Pufendorf (c. 1690)

Abstract

The jurist and historiographer Samuel Pufendorf (1632-94) ranks among the most significant writers on political philosophy in the seventeenth century. He contributed substantially to the evolution of absolutism in Germany by taking up and further developing Thomas Hobbes' (1588-1679) notion of the social contract. In one major work, *De jure naturae et gentium libri octo* (1672) [*Eight Books on Natural and International Law*], Pufendorf introduced a systematic approach to natural and international law; he dissociated legal theory from theological dogmatism and put forth generally binding principles of law that were practicable in social interaction. Governments, Pufendorf argued, had a contractual obligation to promote the welfare of the people. Nonetheless, he did not encourage the thought that subjects might rebel if government proved abusive.

De statu imperii Germanici [The Constitution of the German Empire], Pufendorf's critical assessment of the constitution of the Holy Roman Empire, was another momentous contribution to political philosophy. It was published in Latin under the pseudonym Severinus de Monzambano Veronensis in 1667. Although imperial censors immediately banned the book, Pufendorf's arguments were supported and circulated by many. It served subsequent "absolutists" as a blueprint for attempts to reform the ailing empire.

Source

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