
Preface

The natural law tradition in ethical, political and legal theory is often said to have undergone a revival since the 1980s, sparked by the work of authors such as Germain Grisez, John Finnis and Robert P. George. This revival has seen a resurgence of interest in natural law both within and outside the academy. It has also, however, produced a widespread perception of natural law theory as a distinctively Catholic and socially conservative perspective, due to the influence and public profile of the authors mentioned above. Our aim in this book, by contrast, is to highlight the breadth and diversity of the natural law outlook. We seek to provide a snapshot of current research on natural law in ethics, politics and law, while also showcasing the rigour, versatility and enduring relevance of the tradition.

The book begins with an introduction providing an overview of the chapters. The first part of the book features chapters on foundational figures in Western natural law thought, including Aristotle, the Stoics, Augustine, Aquinas and Calvin. The second part examines natural law ideas in religious and cultural traditions such as Judaism, Islam, Confucianism and Christianity, as well as perspectives from contemporary African American and feminist theory. The third part of the book turns to the normative foundations of natural law, covering issues such as the incommensurability of values, the nature of justice and the common good, and the connections between natural law, imagination and virtue. The final part then examines topics of practical relevance to law and governance, such as the role of the state, the principle of subsidiarity, and the role of natural law in constitutional reasoning.

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