Research Bibliography on the Natural Law

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Last update: January 27, 2018

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Articles on the Natural Law


Occasional allocution in which the Pope stressed that the natural law is “the only valid bulwark against the arbitrary power or the deception of ideological manipulation. The knowledge of this law inscribed on the heart of man increases with the progress of the moral conscience.”


Bonino was the General Secretary of the ITC that produced the document and his essay reads a bit like a publication endorsement. It also is in the classic "dibattito" genre-jabs at the opponent like shadow boxing, without ever actually letting the opponent into the ring.


Reviews the Roman Catholic position on the natural law, and the traditional Protestant objections to its use. However, in light of secularism, pluralism and the general breakdown of moral standards in the contemporary world Braaten argues that a reformulated natural law theory can be of crucial importance.

Braaten is Professor of Systematic Theology at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, and Director of the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology in Northfield, Minnesota.

Treats Rahner's approach to the natural law, and focuses on the nature of obligation in this approach.

At the time Bresnahan taught moral theology at the Jesuit School of Theology–Chicago


Referencing Robert Schreiter's notion of philosophical and theological "intercultural" communication, this paper engages the Catholic moral tradition's conception of *intrinsece malum in se* and proposes a taxonomy of views taken both from this tradition and how the term has been referenced by the Magisterium in documents such as *Veritatis splendor* and episcopal pronouncements connected with some hot button moral issues. At times the expression "intrinsically evil" functions as a shibboleth that only partially succeeds in demonstrating Schreiter's "competence criteria of effectiveness and appropriateness," and at other times the term functions more as a gauntlet thrown down to sharpen sides in political policy debates. Hopefully the notion of the taxonomy of conceptions and uses of "intrinsic evil" may aid in more dispassionate ethical analysis and overcoming some of the divisions that either the shibboleth or gauntlet usages effect.


Considers the position of two German Catholic moral theologians, Wilhelm Korff and Klaus Demmer, and contrasts this with Karl Barth.

A brief, but quite positive overall assessment of the ITC document, especially in its expressed methodological openness to other religious and philosophical traditions that Burrell argues constitute in itself a "new kind of universalism" which avoids relativism.

Burrell teaches at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana.


Cahill did her doctoral studies at the University of Chicago under the direction of James M. Gustafson. She teaches at Boston College.


Cahill first summarizes and provides an overall positive view of the ITC document's basic project. She does note, though, some key areas of unaddressed lack of agreement, as well as deficiencies and/or inconsistencies in the ITC depiction of natural law in certain key areas. She uses war and peace-building to underscore the need for a "ground-up discernment of common values [that] can be a meeting place for different religious traditions" (p. 240) and then turns to problems with the ITC version of the natural law which can come in areas such as gender ethics in which "partiality in the discernment process can result in bias, disagreement, and even oppression" (p. 240). Despite these critiques Cahill includes that both natural law theory and the ITC document make an
important contribution towards the necessary "process of common discernment and debate towards consensus" (p. 249).


Focuses on the treatment of the common good in the growing global political arena which Capizzi indicates the ITC document “mirror[s] the moves made by Pope Benedict XVI in Caritas in veritate” and the requirements of subsidiarity to help instantiate these goods (p. 256). Capizzi, though, raises cautions about the dangers of a theological and secular temptation to millennial hope which might exclude God and transcendence from the political horizon in which “only the power of man [sic] would remain” (p. 259, referencing the ITC document #97).

Capizzi teaches at Catholic University of America.

First part of an article reacting negatively to William McDonough's doctoral dissertation and subsequent article published in this same number of *Studia Moralia*.


Carney, a Protestant ethician, first presents eight philosophical and theological objections against the natural law in Christian ethics, and then draws an outline based on three conditions which may meet these objections and be plausibly affirmed in Christian ethics. These conditions are 1) the concept of law must take into account human historicity, yet without sacrificing the objective character of moral norms; 2) the concept of nature must take into account the full dimension of humanity, e.g. freedom, transcendence, anxiety and guilt, as well as the biological features of human beings; and 3) the relationship of human nature to moral law must be construed in such a way that the moral "ought" embodied in the law is already present in the facts of the human nature. This last condition means that natural law statements are "mixed," i.e., statements that are both descriptive and normative. These statements are not only "factual" but also point to the morally "valuable" aspects.

Carney is professor of Christian ethics at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University.


Caspar argues that natural law should better inform the bioethics debates. She gives a good description of natural law characteristics, though does not go into much depth on the bioethical ramifications.

Author provided Abstract: The Catholic Church claims that its ethical teaching, especially on sex, is based upon natural law. I first show that natural law theories prior to the Middle Ages provide no authority for the Church’s teaching on sex. I then examine Aquinas’s teaching on natural functions and natural law in the two *Summae*. I suggest that he partly anticipates Enlightenment thinking about law and morals. I compare his theory of natural law with that of Germain Grisez and John Finnis. Finally, I examine the notion of a principle of practical reasoning and indicate how such principles could be formulated to correspond to elements in human nature.


Gives historical, biblical, philosophical and theological treatment, though without any real speculative innovation, or attention to some of the ramifications of more recent approaches. Basic bibliography in Italian, French, and German is given for each major section of the article.


A short note responding to a point raised by Francis A. Sullivan's earlier article on "The Theologian's Ecclesial Vocation." Chirico argues that if we accept the Vatican II position that the fullness of revelation is contained in the humanity of Christ, this would then mean that we could not speak of any aspects of the natural law as not being contained in revelation.

Cloutier, David. “Seeing the Whole; How Protestants Help Us Read the Natural Law.” In *Searching for a University Ethic: Multidisciplinary, Ecumenical, and Interfaith*

Cloutier, who did his doctoral work at Duke and is part of the "New Wineskins" cadet of moral theologians, presents as his thesis that "the ITC's document does display a rapprochement with Hauerwas' work" (p. 211). The bulk of the article summarizes Hauerwas' theological approach and critiques of natural law theory, while approving that the ITC document has moved more in a Hauerwasian direction by providing a "richer, more contextualized, more theological account of natural law, insofar as we read the document's five chapters as a unified whole" (p. 221). Cloutier cautions that the search for common ethical values may rest on ground unsuited to building lasting edifices "if the development of such values requires a cosmology and a politics so at odds with dominant ideas"(p. 221). Cloutier concludes that "Hauerwas' gift to the Catholic world [is] to be a constant antidote to the Church's temptation to spend much time and energy trying to speak to 'all people of good will', while neglecting the task of forming and disciplining its own people" (p. 211).

Cloutier teaches Catholic moral theology at Mt. St Mary's University in Emmitsburg MD.


Examines the position of Ford, Grisez, Boyle, Finnis, and May on Humanae vitae (i.e., that contraception is evil because it is "contra-life"), and argues that the moral theory of the encyclical would be better served by considering its grounding in the objectivity of the Thomistic esse of the person.

Primarily traces the use of epikeia by medieval theologians and notes that a number of theologians, beginning in the late thirteenth century, "were willing to subscribe to the notion that moral norms, even when grounded in the nature of man, demand constant reevaluation and can tolerate exceptions. The theory of epikeia provided a rationale for dealing with these exceptions." (p. 101).


From the author’s introduction: “[S]cholastic ethics divides into two parts. The first part concerns aspects of a good life that it is necessary for everybody to obtain, irrespective of their particular preferences and desires: this is the part Aquinas calls the ‘public good’ [bonum publicum]. It consists of duties (a) of the state; and (b) of all citizens within a state. ... The second part concerns the identity of our supreme end, as well as the properly best way to attain it. In this essay I propose to examine the first of these parts of ethics, to show how the scholastics’ view is just as relevant to our own times. I will explain that the public good consists in something that every person values: the good of peace. ... I will explain that Aquinas and Grotius are not addressing separate subject-matters in their works on natural law, but considering the same subject-matter (Part I). Then, I will describe how natural law is concerned only with our natural (i.e. temporal) ends, namely the pursuit of virtuous goods in the present (Part II). Next, I will consider how peace is a universal end that everybody desires (Part III), and recount the virtuous goods that are required for peace (Part IV). Finally, I use these arguments to call for the recognition of a universal ethics for modern times.”


Discusses Thomas Aquinas' position on syndersis, the definitions of the natural law, and the natural law and its relation to the principles of morality.

Discusses Aquinas' notion of law, the eternal law, the natural law and its precepts (primary and secondary), and the variability of the natural law.


Discusses the beginnings of the natural law tradition in the Pre-Socratics, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.


Discusses Duns Scotus, the Nominalists, the Reformation, and late Scholasticism.


Discusses the natural law in St. Paul, the early Church Fathers, St. Augustine, and St Isidore of Seville.


Discusses Hugo Grotius, the Age of Reason, and Human Rights.
Discusses the early Scholastics, the Franciscan School and Albert the Great.


Discusses the natural law in Gratian, the Medieval Civilians, and the Decretists.


Discusses biological and evolutionary aspects of human nature, moral absolutes, and the possibility of a rehabilitated natural law.


Discusses the development of the natural law tradition in the Stoics, Cicero, the Roman jurisconsults and Ulpian.

Uses Lonergan's thought to delineate two aspects of nature in the created order: classical "laws" of causality and statistical "laws" of probability. From this discussion Crysdale then outlines some ramifications and conditions for a more nuanced understanding of the natural law.

Crysdale teaches at the Catholic University of America.


Compares and contrasts the ethical models, including the interpretation of the natural law, used in magisterial teaching on social and sexual ethics in the last century, with particular emphasis on the last half of the twentieth century.


Curran's contribution to a Festschrift with essays by Protestant and Roman Catholic authors meant both to criticize as well as embody the principles of Ramsey's ethics.


Daly, who at this writing, taught at St. Anselm’s College in Manchester NH, investigates “how secondary moral precepts, or moral norms, relate to acquired virtues. Three questions drive this study. First, what is the purpose of moral norms in the Summa theologiae? Second, how are moral norms generated in the Summa? Finally, how are moral norms applied in the Summa?” (P. 214).

From the author’s introduction: “Can natural law ethics be tenable today? I argue for an affirmative answer to this question by outlining the basics of a critical natural law theory as a proposal for debate. This approach attempts to reconcile the legitimate concerns of the Aristotelian-Thomist natural law tradition with (broadly) Kantian and especially contemporary philosophical insights.”


Argues that we now have moved from a “mechanistic” mind-set to a digital one of “information,” and if natural law theory is to be successfully” rehabilitated among the Christian faithful it will need to consider digital culture’s emerging cultural assumptions” (p. 4).

Delicata teaches at the University of Malta and more on her can be found at http://www.um.edu.mt/theology/moral/staff/dr_nadia_delicata


A very interesting essay that briefly develops his central critique of the ITC document vis-à-vis Islamic thought, namely that "the ITC's representation of natural law in Islam is not only incorrect, but also suffers from overprivileging theology over jurisprudence as the primary medium of religious argument in Islamic thought" (p. 128).
Emon teaches in the Faculty of Law at the University of Toronto.


Originally appeared American Journal of Jurisprudence in 1981; See McInerny's earlier article in the same periodical (1980), or the version published in the same volume of Readings.


One of several articles in this issue critiquing NNLT in light of Grisez’s contention that in the medical case of a craniotomy in which both the mother and the fetus would certainly die, the skull of the fetus could crushed to save the life of the mother.

Flannery is Ordinary Professor of Philosophy at the Pontifical Gregorian University.


Translation of "*Epideia* circa legem moralem naturalem?" *Periodica* 69 (1980).


The authors critique the ITC document for failing to address adequately the relation between faith and reason vis-a-vis the proper understanding of the natural law, which results in turn in a failure to “block common misunderstandings that can have adverse moral, theological and pastoral consequences” (p. 305). Happily the authors have a solution ready at hand, namely the “basic goods theory” of the New Natural Law Theory which would protect us from a mistaken divine command ethics that might call upon the
Church to “‘relax” its teachings on direct abortion, ... embryo-destructive research, contraception, ...non-marital sexual conduct, and divorce and remarriage—norms that it cannot alter any more than it can alter human nature to make life or marriage no longer basic human goods” (p. 309).

George teaches law at Princeton and Girgis is a PhD candidate at Princeton and a law candidate at Yale.


From the author’s abstract: The relative neglect of the New Natural Law Theory (NNLT) as a non-sectarian theory is unfortunate, for it contains theoretical resources under-appreciated and under-utilized by both the new natural lawyers and their critics, which, when recovered and deployed, can bring new insights into sexual ethics. Is there a harm uniquely intrinsic to rape? Our answer unfolds in four sections: (1) identification of three common logics of inquiry used to identify nature of rape's harm; (2) a reconstruction from NNLT a robust account of embodied (but not yet sexuate) selfhood as something self-constituted; (3) recovering a NNLT account of the sexuate self; (4) a demonstration of how the NNLT reveals rape's uniquely intrinsic harm as a particular wrong to selfhood.


Author supplied abstract: The article aims to articulate and defend St. Thomas Aquinas’s understanding of the transcendence of the political common good and argues against the new natural law theory’s view of the common good as limited, instrumental, and ordered toward the private good of families and individuals. After a summary of John Finnis’s explanation of the common good in Aquinas: Moral, Political, and Legal Theory, the article presents an analysis of the political common good in Aquinas’s Summa theologiae and De regno. This analysis shows, contrary to Finnis, that for Aquinas the political common good transcends the private good of individuals and families, that it consists in the virtuous life of the political multitude, and that the family is insufficient to lead men to virtue apart from the civitas.

One of several articles in this issue critiquing NNLT in light of Grisez’s contention that in the medical case of a craniotomy in which both the mother and the fetus would certainly die, the skull of the fetus could crushed to save the life of the mother.

Goyette has his PhD in philosophy from the Catholic University of America, and has taught philosophy at Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit and at his alma mater, Thomas Aquinas College in Santa Paula, California.


Grisez follows a manualistic format in organizing his material into "Questions" followed by point-by-point responses. This volume is the first of a projected three volume work.


Translations in many other languages as well.


Argues from a scientific stand-point that the Church's traditional teaching on marriage as derived from its interpretation of natural law is flawed, being based on both bad biology and poor reductionistic analysis.


Critiques the “new natural law theory” of Grisez, Finnis, Boyle, et. al. as being flawed in its presentation of free choice in reference to the commensurability issue of weighing options amongst the so-called basic goods. The theorists argue that no one may ever legitimately choose an action which would ever, regardless of any other consideration, be judged as “acting against” any of the basic goods. Herdt argues that this position seriously attacks the essential understanding of the inter-relation between freedom and
choice, since “free choice” means, among other things, being able to weigh options amongst goods and evils in the concrete and making one’s choice in conformity as to which is the greater realizable good (to choose), or the worse evil (which is to be avoided).

Writing from a Protestant perspective Herdt begins with a careful summary of the structure and main arguments of the ITC document before concluding that much (though not all) of what is presented could be readily accepted by classic Protestant thinkers and stands in the tradition of Luther and Calvin. Herdt does note some inconsistencies of style and argument though in the ITC document, such as over how the document moves from the universal in all societies while largely ignoring whether we can therefore conclude that the same level of universality applies to each and every individual. Thus while heterosexual unions exist universally in all societies can we "conclude which form of forms of human sexual orientation constitute a fundamental inclination, rather than a blind impulse of desire" (p. 209).

Herdt teaches in the Yale Divinity School.


Henry is an evangelical theologian, and provides a critique of all natural law traditions, including recent efforts of some theologians, such as the Lutheran Carl Braaten, to recover what might be a legitimate "Protestant" understanding of the natural law. For Henry all such efforts are wrong-headed as they divert the proper understanding of Christian ethics from its necessary dependence on biblical revelation.

Hittinger focuses on two aspects of the ITC paper which he finds to be "disappointing," namely the under-emphasis of clear "universal moral norms" which are "universally binding in a normative sense of the term" (p. 117-118), and too many strategic concessions to a dialogue with secular modernity which likely "will not relieve the misgivings of secular interlocutors" (p. 120) and therefore might contribute to the lack of sufficient stress on clear moral norms in a number of "disputed questions about sexual and biomedical ethics" such as contraception, abortion, sexual differentiation, and so on. In the author's view Veritatis splendor is by far the stronger magisterial document both in terms of extrinsic authority and internal argumentation, and echoes the calls made by Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI to an "intellectual, moral and spiritual conversion" on the part of secularists leading them to "re-attach" themselves to the natural law tradition they have abandoned.


Considers three examples of appeals to the natural law in just war theory: contemporary international lawyers Myres McDougal and Florentino Feliciano, American Protestant ethician Paul Ramsey, and 16th century Spanish theorist, Franciscus de Victoria.


A quite positive overall assessment of the ITC document seen especially from its rhetorical style which Kaveny believes illustrates historian John O'Malley's notion of "epideictic" language widely used in humanistic discourse in general and most of the documents of Vatican II in particular that aims at "persuasion, not coercion" (p. 231).

Lawyer-theologian Kaveny taught for many years at the University of Notre Dame and currently has a joint appointment in the Theology and Law faculties at Boston College.


Kelly was a member of the drafting sub-committee for the ITC document, and raises a number of issues that would aim to help in a "critical reading" of the text. A marked contrast to the Bonino piece, Kelly's essay is particularly helpful, as it indicates questions and approaches that no doubt had been raised in the discussions prior to settling on the final text, but views that were marginalized-if not mostly obliterated from the final document. It therefore might function as a "minority report" to the "majority report" that won in the final drafting process.


Begins by noting that while the ITC document uses a hermeneutic of generosity in regards to non-Christian religions such as Hinduism the ITC dismisses tout court philosophers such as Hume and Moore in particular and the analytic philosophical tradition in general. Kerr goes on to probe more deeply the concepts of the naturalistic fallacy and the "is/ought" distinction and concludes that the positions attributed by the ITC document in this regard are insufficiently grounded in what the philosophers actually wrote, and even less in regards to what the philosophers were striving to deal with. In particular Kerr counters the view that a philosopher such as Hume would deny the existence of the natural law and "would have been astonished to hear that, according to some commentators, his 'no ought from an is' remark would exclude ever appealing to natural law" (p. 175). Kerr concludes by asserting that conversation with these philosophers regarding the natural law certainly would not be fruitless.
Kerr teaches in the School of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh


Uses the concept of paradigm shift of Thomas Kuhn to discuss the notion of moral progress in conception and application of moral norms and the natural law. Also refers considerably to the work of Klaus Demmer.

Kopfensteiner, who was a priest of the Archdiocese of St. Louis, taught at the time at Fordham University, and did his doctoral dissertation on paradigm shift theory in moral theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University under Klaus Demmer.


Asks the question whether natural law is “discerned by human reason as a normative order inscribed in nature” or whether it is “constituted by the judgments of practical reason, which transform and elevate (humanize) inclinations found in nature by reorienting these inclinations to the personal ends known by spiritual creatures” (p. 156).


Exames John Calvin's approach to some of the problems inherent in developing a "rehabilitated" Christian natural law theory.


While acknowledging the “orthodoxy” of Grisiz in opposition to artificial contraception, Long here argues that the NNLT (New Natural Law Theory) of Grisez et al. is guilty of a number of serious “strategic” errors which depart from traditional Thomistic natural law central to the Magisterium’s use of natural law, such as NNLT’s denial of the primacy of speculative truth over practical reason, its use of “incommensurability,” mistaken notions associated with teleology, negation of the natural law as a theonomic ethics and an over-emphasis on the role of intention in moral action. One of several articles in this issue critiquing NNLT in light of Grisez’s contention that in the medical case of a craniotomy in which both the mother and the fetus would certainly die, the skull of the fetus could crushed to save the life of the mother.

Long teaches at Ave Maria University in Florida.


________. “Reproductive Technologies and the Natural Law.” National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly (Summer 2002): 221-228.


Applauds the ITC document's "deep understanding of the history of metaphysical obscuration … engendering a false ethos of absolute autonomy of the human agent vis-à-vis divine providence: an apotheosis of arbitrary will criticized in Veritatis splendor." The two principal foci of the ITC document are its teaching that "vindicates the primacy of the speculative in relation to the practical" and which affirms "the strategic importance of a noncompetitive account of divine and human causality for the understanding of natural law as a mode of divine providence." (all from p. 261). For a contrary view see in the same volume Martin Rhonheimer's "Natural Law as a 'Work of Reason': Understanding the Metaphysics of Participated Theonomy."


Macquarrie, an Anglican theologian, argues for a reformulated natural law theory which could help solve the problems of linking of Christian and non-Christian morals, shaping of a contemporary Christian ethic, and describing the relation between faith and morals. Macquarrie considers the *proprium* of Christian ethics to be the distinctive Christian *context* in which the moral life is perceived. Also includes a brief historical overview of the concept of the natural law in the Western tradition.


Mahoney is Professor of Moral Theology at King's College, University of London.


Discussion various criticisms of the physicalist approach to the natural law.


French version of an article which appeared originally in English as "Natural Law and Moral Law" in *Moral Principles of Actions* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1951). The French manuscript is based on the first two of Maritain's "Neuf leçons sur la loi naturelle" given in 1950 at Soisy.

Traces the usages of the term “natural inclinations” as well as “orientation,” “dynamism,” and “tendency” throughout the ITC document to support his thesis that these terms, and especially “orientation” do “not replace the use of ‘inclination’ but complements it, perhaps ultimately in order to rehabilitate that traditional term to its fuller meaning” and thereby avoiding some of the problems associated with physicalism (p. 284). Puzzling though is Mattison’s absolute avoidance of any discussion of how the term “orientation” might figure in disputed natural law arguments such as the function of sexual orientation in what could constitute “natural” and “unnatural” expressions of that basic orientation.

Mattison teaches at the Catholic University of America.


Paper read at a congress supporting Humanae vitae sponsored by the John Paul II Pontifical Institute for the Study of Marriage and the Family (Lateran University) and two institutions of Opus Dei: Centro Accademico Romano della Santa Croce and the Università di Navarra. The same article is found also in Linacre Quarterly 56 (1989): 61-87.


Originally appeared in May's Principles of Catholic Moral Life. Chicago: Franciscan

Argues that McCabe's linguistic model provides invaluable insight into human communication and the moral life, showing the natural law to be more life scaffolding than a list of stipulations.


Written for a popular audience, McCormick notes that many people remain unconvinced by the Church’s natural law arguments in sexual ethics which seems to overlook or skew the bigger picture of human individuals, and suggests a different approach is called for that is more open to discussion and dialogic reasoning such as is often found in Catholic social teaching.

McCormick did his STD at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome and is professor of Christian ethics at Gonzaga University in Spokane.


Article derived from McDonough's Alphonsianum doctoral dissertation. See the negative reaction by Capone himself, "Pensieri leggendo lo studio del Prof. W. McDonough in questa rivista," published in the same number of Studia Moralia.


See reply by John Finnis and Germain Grisez.

Historical overview of natural law teaching in the early Protestant reformers such as Luther, Calvin, Melancthon, and Zwingli.


Well-known conservative Protestant ethician Gilbert Meilaender begins by noting he can "find relatively little that is new in the overall presentation" of the ITC document, and suggests that what seems to be that its "animating spirit" is grounded in "a belief and hope that getting clear on the structure of the natural law will help us all to get along. This is the admirable, though touchingly naïve starting point of the document" (p. 222). Meilaender outlines three major deficiencies in the ITC document: 1) it "has simultaneously too much theory and too little anthropology"; 2) fails to "sufficiently recognize the need for virtue if one is to discern the natural law" and 3) it does not "think through to the end the implications of its assertion that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the natural law" (p. 222). The remainder of his articles fleshes out these points in support of his summary conclusion that the ITC document "is careful, thorough and instructive. What it is not, however, is the path toward helping us all just get along" (p. 227).

Meilaender is emeritus professor of theology and Christian ethics at Valparaiso University and long-time teacher at Oberlin College (1978-1996).


Keynote address given by Bishop Mejía at the 5th Seminar on the Gospel and Society at
the Institute Catholique in Paris.


The article makes only occasional and rather superficial reference to the ITC document itself, but does outline Melina’s notion of the natural law as involving both a “grammar” of structure, evidenced in divine creation, and a “pragmatics” of action illustrated by Jesus. Thus, Revelation is crucial for seeing the natural law reality “not only as a fact (datum), but also as a gift that is the result of an ongoing divine action” which orients “man” [sic] to “the call to live in friendship with God, who first loved us” (p. 300).

Melina teaches with the John Paul II Institute for Marriage and the Family in Rome.


Holds that Grisez and O'Connell are using different concepts of the natural law, and so the claims made about the relationship of Revelation and natural law will necessarily be different claims.


Argues that it is impossible to discover any essential definition of human nature, and therefore a natural law. Man does not have "some essential nature, some function that he was cut out or made to achieve." p. 132. Thus, Nielsen avers that natural law theories make "unverifiable statements" about ultimate human ends, and that despite the possible theological persuasiveness of theological assertions about human destiny, there would be
no logical way to move from these descriptive statements to prescriptive judgments.


Northcott begins by asserting that we are in such a grave ecological crisis that without rapid, serious reparative measures "will see the end of most presently living species" (p. 179). He then considers the ITC document's recognition of "sins against nature" and its case "for an ecological repristination of natural law," especially in its intersection with key ecologists.

Northcott teaches at New College, University of Edinburgh


Novak writes out of the Jewish tradition and is sympathetic to natural law theory, but raises a number of practical considerations for the usage of natural law by the Magisterium in general, as well as some philosophical and theological critiques of the ITC document in particular.

Novak teaches at the University of Toronto.

Pavlischek, Keith J. “Questioning the New Natural Law Theory: The Case of Religious Liberty


Discusses a Confucian approach to natural law, based on the *Huang-Lao Boshu.*


*Korean Translation of Volume I is also available.*


Porter is professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.


Considers the possibility of support for the legalization of same-sex unions based on the natural law theories developed by scholastic theologians and jurists in the 12th and 13th
centuries, and concludes that while these theorists never would have conceived of the possibility of same-sex marital unions the trajectory they developed might give support to the legal recognition of such unions.


While contemporary moral theologians tend to look at biblical and natural law ethics as distinct approaches, for medieval theologians the natural law was seen as a scriptural doctrine since Scripture attested to the existence of a natural law. Aims also to explore the implications for the interpretation of Scripture itself.


Porter begins by recognizing a "refreshing departure from the tendency to identify the natural law with a specific set of fixed norms," and "the ITC's readiness to acknowledge the value of personal and communal autonomy, and to commend a robust doctrine of natural or human rights" (p. 147). The bulk of the article, though, expands upon her basic critique of the ITC document's treatment of legal positivism which she believes is too sharply drawn and fails to pay sufficient attention to the actual state of discourse among contemporary secular jurists. Porter believes that there are definitely grounds for a fruitful dialogue and points out the tradition among Medieval legal philosophers as suggesting ways in which contemporary natural law theory might contribute to this discussion.


Disputes Scarlett's reading of Thomas Aquinas in the article the latter wrote about the use of the natural law argumentation in *Veritatis Splendor*.


Paper read at a congress supporting *Humanae vitae* sponsored by the John Paul II Pontifical Institute for the Study of Marriage and the Family (Lateran University) and two institutions of Opus Dei: Centro Accademico Romano della Santa Croce and the Università di Navarra.

Rhonheimer teaches at the Opus Dei Santa Croce (Holy Cross) University in Rome.


Discusses how for a full and correct understanding of Thomas Aquinas’ teaching on the natural law one must study his Commentary on Romans 1 since Thomas’ treatment of the natural law refers to a Pauline context. This Commentary fleshes out Thomas’ understanding of the relation of the New Law to the natural law, and how reason is influenced by God’s grace.


Rowland, Tracey. “The Role of Natural Law and Natural Right in the Search for a Universal Ethic.” In *Searching for a University Ethic: Multidisciplinary, Ecumenical, and*...
Rowland begins by considering Joseph Ratzinger's lament that "The idea of the natural law presupposed a concept of 'nature' in which nature and reason interlock, nature itself is rational. The victory of the theory of evolution has meant the end of this view of nature" (p. 156). While applauding developments in the ITC document in terms of recognition of the roles prudence and emotional intelligence play in appropriating the natural law, Rowland observes that the ITC fails to "address the 'elephant in the room', that is, the value of the natural law and natural right idioms when dealing with contemporary liberal and postmodern interlocutors who reject the whole notion of creation and a stable and intelligent order within it" (p. 165). Rowland calls for a "strategic plan" that would supplement theological reflection "with the insights of intellectual and social historians as well as political and linguistic philosophers" (p. 165).

Rowland teaches at the John Paul II Institute for Marriage and the Family at the University of Notre Dame, Australia. She has since been named to the International Theological Commission itself by Pope Francis in September 2014.


Nel contesto attuale caratterizzato dalla ricerca di nuove vie nell'attività libera e responsabile dell'uomo, lo studio si propone di esaminare la coscienza umana, essendo essa il principio dal quale l'attività propriamente umana procede. La coscienza si rivela come un'intenzionalità che si svolge in quattro fasi distinte: quella del senso, quella dell'intelligenza, quella della ragione, quella dell'imperativo morale, ciascuna operante secondo norme proprie. Lo studio si ferma particolarmente sulla fase morale. Questa è connessa con la vita psichica come un movimento di autotrascendenza. Il bene umano o valore viene quindi definito in rapporto a questa fase dell'intenzionalità. Alla fine lo studio esamina come la coscienza morale, nel suo esercizio per determinare e attuare veri valori, trovi indicazioni normative dell'imperativo morale a queste indicazioni è la legge naturale; su di essa va configurata ogni cultura perché sia portatrice di veri valori.


A rather historical overview of positions on the natural law of various ethicians from the time of Kant onwards.

Schneewind is at Johns Hopkins University.


Schrey is a Protestant.


Treats the work of Gutiérrez and Ellacuría in reference to the natural law tradition.
Schubeck maintains that the criticisms raised by these two against the neo-Thomistic perspectives of the natural law are essentially the same views held by Karl Rahner and Josef Fuchs.


Originally appeared in Theologie und Philosophie, Herder & Herder, apparently around 1967 or 1968.


Author supplied abstract: Recent decades have seen a shift away from the traditional view that Aquinas's theory of the natural law is meant to supply us with normative guidance grounded in a substantive theory of human nature. In the present essay, I argue that this is a mistake. Expanding on the suggestions of Jean Porter and Ralph McInerny, I defend a derivationist reading of ST I-II, Q. 94, A. 2 according to which Aquinas takes our knowledge of the genuine goods of human life and their proper ordering to one another to be self-evident only to the wise who are able to discern the truth about our God-given human nature. I then show that this reading provides a better account of Aquinas's view than two recent alternatives: John Finnis's brand of inclinationism and
Daniel Mark Nelson's virtue-based interpretation.

At this writing Seipel is a philosophy doctoral student at Fordham University.


Very negative review of Frank Mobbs’ *Beyond Its Authority: The Magisterium and Matters of Natural Law* (Sydney: E.J. Dwyer, 1997), and concludes with a thoughtful exposition of Selling’s own positions in this area. Mobb’s basic thesis is that inasmuch as the natural law is not part of revelation the authority of the Magisterium does not extend to authoritative pronouncements on the natural law. Selling’s views are much more nuanced.


Argues that both while Divine Command theorists and atheists have insights into the grounding of moral values, both positions also have fundamental flaws. Thomas Aquinas’ views on participation metaphysics understanding of human nature are outlined as offering a better approach to the grounding of moral values which in turn may bridge
both of the other positions which otherwise might well remain at a fundamental impasse.


Begins with a brief historical overview of traditional Anglican moral theology with reference to the Thomistic natural law tradition. Smith then summarizes statements from the Lambeth Conferences of 1930, 1958, and 1968 to show the development of Anglican thinking on contraception. Finally the positions of 5 representative theologians are summarized: R.C. Mortimer, Kenneth Kirk, Joseph Fletcher, John Macquarrie, and Herbert Waddams.

Smith is professor of moral theology and community health science at Duke University.


Sullivan, Francis A., S.J. "The Authority of the Magisterium on Questions of Natural Moral Law." Readings in Moral Theology, No. 6: Dissent in the Church, 42-57. Edited by


Theron, Stephen. “Beyond Natural Law.” *New Blackfriars* (September 2016)  
(accessed December 13, 2016)


Paper read at a congress supporting *Humanae vitae* sponsored by the John Paul II Pontifical Institute for the Study of Marriage and the Family (Lateran University) and two institutions of Opus Dei: Centro Accademico Romano della Santa Croce and the Università di Navarra.


Deals with Syyid Qutb, the contemporary Egyptian Islamic fundamentalist associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, investigating whether his views would be compatible with liberal values. He compares Qutb’s political philosophy with Aquinas and the natural law tradition to suggest the possibility of discerning an overlapping consensus on the legitimacy of liberal Western values.

Thorpe is at Bogazici University, Istanbul

Taking up the ethical dilemma which faced Susanna in the Old Testament (Dn 13) which had been used by Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* to illustrate the notion of moral absolutes Traina critiques this a strong “absolutist” strain of natural law interpretation in the thought of Pope John Paul II, as well as moral philosophers such as Germain Grisez and John Finnis. Traina offers alternative solutions to the problem of relativism and consequentialism which so troubles moral absolutists by considering insights from the tradition of cooperation with evil and the epistemological nature of moral norms.


Discusses Christ’s role in confirming the particular quality of the natural law and opens it to perspectives which would have been otherwise impossible to discover alone.

Tremblay teaches at the Alphonasianum in Rome.


Vacek argues that Divine-command ethics is humanistically inadequate and the natural law ethics is religiously inadequate. Instead, Vacek argues for a “mutual love” ethics which he believes overcomes the deficiencies of the other two systems.

Vacek taught at the Weston Jesuit School of Theology (later the Boston College School of Theology & Ministry) until 2012 when he moved to Loyola University, New Orleans.
Investigates the possibility of integrating Genesis 8:20-9:17 with a Reformed covenant theology to produce a conception of the natural law as a universal God-given standard mediated through a fallen world that could be in conversation with biblical exegetes as well as the Protestant and Catholic natural law traditions.

VanDrunen is the Robert B. Strimple Professor of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics at Westminister Seminary California.

Argues that the Book of Proverbs supports an understanding of the concept of a natural law in certain key areas: a natural moral order grounded in God’s creation, a “realist” epistemology, and the implicit acknowledgment of moral wisdom and insights across cultures.


Gives an overview of three ways in which the term “nature” is used in contemporary discourse and then considers six approaches to the natural law, lifting up for extended consideration the work of Italian moralist Enrico Chiavacci. The article contains a good deal of helpful bibliographical material on recent work in the natural law in English, French and Italian.
Vicini is a pediatrician and holds a PhD and STD in theological ethics and teaches at the Boston College School of Theology & Ministry.


Discusses John McDowell's "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society (1978): 13-29, as well as other philosophers (e.g. Philippa Foot). Weithman holds McDowell's claim that "the motivational force of requirements of virtue can be adequately accounted for without appeal to inclinations of the virtuous person" is untrue for at least one claim of imperatives of virtue, i.e., imperatives which "express requirements of virtue arrived at through deliberation." p. 178.


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Books on the Natural Law


Bagnulo, Roberto. Il concetto di diritto naturale in San Tommaso d'Aquino. Milano: A. Giuffre,
1983.


Using St. Thomas, Battaglia argues for a reformulation of the natural law theory which focuses on the communal nature of moral consensus, and which accommodates an understanding of the historical development of morality.

Battaglia teaches in the Department of Religious Studies at California State University at Long Beach.


Series of twenty essays reflecting on and/or taking up various themes connected with the 2009 International Theological Commission’s “In Search of a Universal Ethic: A New Look at the Natural Law” which are introduced in a twenty-first essay by the editors. The book also contains the official English translation of the Vatican document.


Looks at Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, John Locke, as well as contemporary philosophy, theology, and political science.

Budziszewski is associate professor in the departments of government and philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin.


Presents a history of the occidental concept of the natural law, beginning with the Pre-Socratic philosophers and concluding with a tentative twentieth century profile of the natural law. Contains a particularly good analysis of St. Thomas' treatment of the natural law, plus a good bibliography. All the individual chapters are found listed under the "Articles on the Natural Law" section.


Anthology of tradition and recent literature on the topic. The 4 articles (Fuchs, Hughes, Hauerwas, and Schüller) in Part One treat revelation and natural law; Part Two contains Thomas' Question 94 of the *Summa Theologicae* and articles by Maritain, Terence Kennedy, Ralph McInerny, plus a response to the latter by Finnis and Grisez; Part Three deals with contemporary reflections on the natural law, and includes articles by Curran and McCormick, plus John Courtney Murray, John Macquarrie, Michael Crowe, William E. May, Richard Gula, Franz Böckle and John Mahoney.

Volume of previously published essays, many of which treat of Curran's critique of the classical Catholic natural law tradition.


Collection of several articles on various aspects of natural law and legal theory, though mostly within the Grisez-Finnis school of thought.


Focus on philosophy, political science and legal theory.


Contributions by John Finnis, Robert George, Stephen Macedo, Patrick Neal, Jeffrey Reiman, Paul Weithman, and Christopher Wolfe.


12 original essays by leading natural law theorists and their critics, including Hadley Arkes, Joseph M. Boyle, Jr., John Finnis, Robert P. George, Russell Hittinger, Neil MacCormick, Michael Moore, Jeffrey Stout, Joseph Raz, Jeremy Waldron, Lloyd Weinreb, and Ernest Weinreb.


*From the promotional advertisement:* Bioethics and the Human Goods offers a clear, short, and expert introduction to bioethics from a “natural law” perspective, a philosophical tradition which traces its origins to classical antiquity and is currently enjoying an exciting renaissance. With its emphasis on human goods—such as life, health, friendship, and knowledge—and the wrongness of intentionally turning against them, the book provides a valuable approach to controversial bioethical questions at the beginning and end of life. Its approach contrasts with that of the dominant bioethical theories of utilitarianism and principlism. The book includes as appendices personal statements by Alfonso Gómez-Lobo on the status of the human embryo and on the definition and determination of death.

Introductory text which links morality to the protection of basic human goods: life, family, friendship, work and play, the experience of beauty, knowledge, and integrity. Discussion conducted in reference to an overview of Western philosophy from Plato onwards and makes an application to a discussion of abortion and euthanasia.

The author was Ryan Professor of Metaphysics and Moral Philosophy at Georgetown University. He died in 2011.


Grisez's thesis is that "For one who engages in sexual intercourse directly to will any positive deed by which conception is thought to be prevented, or even rendered less probable, is intrinsically and seriously immoral" (p. 12).


*From the promotional blurb:* Likely written as part of Hale’s personal devotions, this treatise engages the concept of law in general, expounds the origin and discovery of the natural law, and relates the natural law to both biblical and human law. Sytsma’s Introduction places Hale and his treatise in historical context and in relation to other intellectual giants of Hale’s day, including John Selden, Francisco Suárez, and Hugo Grotius. This critical edition meticulously establishes the authoritative text through comparison of extant manuscript copies, and it includes explanatory notes that illumine Hale’s terminology and sources.

Sir Matthew Hale (1609–1676) was one of the jurists of the British common law tradition. His legal treatises, including the posthumously published Historia placitum coronae and History of the Common Law of England, influenced two centuries of legal scholarship, and several religious treatises treat scholastic theology. In 1671 Hale was appointed Chief Justice of the King’s Bench.


The author claims that natural law is known narratively, meaning that natural law is
discovered, "progressively over time and through a process of reasoning engaged by the material of experience." Thus, we learn the natural law not by deduction, but narratively as we search for what the good is for us, both individually and communally.


This is essentially an undergraduate textbook on fundamental moral theology. Chapter 8, pp. 166-189, deals with the natural law, both in the context of Scripture and philosophy. Hanigan includes both study questions and supplementary annotated bibliography at the end of each chapter.


Mit Beiträgen von Ludger Honnefelder, Bernhard Irrgang, Werner Kroh, Karl-Wilhelm Merks und Guido Vagedes.


Critique of the natural law theories of Germain Grisez and John Finnis.


Argues that Thomism allows one to side-step the naturalistic fallacy and in fact move

Jensen is associate professor of philosophy at the University of St. Thomas in Houston.


*From the promotional blurb:* According to natural law theory, there exists an objective law of morality based in the nature of human society or human nature. Thus, natural law is inherently true, not a product of a mutable or subjective viewpoint. This book probes the history and implications of natural law and surveys the ideas of thinkers such as Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and Immanuel Kant. The author analyzes the development of natural law from ancient times to the present. In addition, he discusses pressing moral issues (abortion, homosexuality, assisted suicide, and more) in light of natural law theory.

At the time of publication Kainz was a professor of philosophy at Marquette University.


Kelly traces the physicalist interpretation of the natural law through Catholic medical ethics in North America.


*Adapted from Burke’s review:* Section One traces the historical development of the natural law tradition though texts from Heraclitus to Hugo Grotius, from Plato to Pinckaers. Section Two gives a survey of contemporary Natural Law including Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, and Alasdair MacIntyre. The New Natural Law Theory is rather briefly presented though critics such as Russell Hittinger and Henry Veatch are referenced but whose works themselves are not included, and so all that remains is a critique of their critiques by Robert George. Martin Luther King Jr’s famous ‘Letter from the Birmingham City Jail’ does make the cut. Section Three turns to an application of the natural law in the fields of the family, medical ethics, new biotechnologies, and human rights.


Dissertation done under Francis Sullivan, S.J.

Levada went on to become on 22 September 1986, as archbishop of Portland, OR, and archbishop of San Francisco in 1996, and then in 2005 was appointed Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith by Pope Benedict XVI where he served until his retirement.


Critical of modernist conceptions of the natural law the author tries to establish an approach to moral theology which brings together a conversation in which both Scripture and the natural law can enrich one another. The author discusses Thomas Aquinas as
well as contemporary moral theologians such as Martin Rhonheimer, Servais Pinckaers and Graham McAleer.


The author discusses the Aristotelian elements of Aquinas's natural law theory and reinterprets contemporary legal issues which hark back to Aquinas.


15 essays on the knowability of the natural law, the natural law in Greece, Rome, Aquinas, Locke, modern writers, natural law and dignity, positive law, natural rights, sexual ethics, and natural law and civil and criminal law.


Mobbs’s basic thesis is that inasmuch as the natural law is not part of revelation the authority of the Magisterium does not extend to authoritative pronouncements on the natural law.


Argues that Thomas holds that prudence and the virtues have priority over natural law in moral understanding and decision-making. This is a revision of Nelson's doctoral dissertation done under Jeffrey Stout at Princeton.

Nelson is dean of upperclass students at Dartmouth College.

Argues that the natural law is part of Judaism and consistent with both its tradition and the biblical revelation of the Torah, and continues to be valuable today for conveying Judaism’s meaning for life.


This is a revised version of O'Connell's 1976 work of the same name. Overall it is a quite successful attempt to offer a textbook in moral theology for seminarians which could replace the old moral manuals, without falling into the legalistic approach which characterized that genre. See especially Chapters 12-18.


Quite a good collection of articles by Protestant and Roman Catholic ethicists covering a number of topics related to the notion of moral norms, and including an entire section devoted to a re-assessment of the natural law tradition.


Is conceived as a text for education of Catholic youth written from a quite conservative “traditionalist” perspective common before Vatican II, but “updated” by treating newer moral problems and “sins” such as sex outside of marriage, contraception, same-sex orientation, drugs, etc.

Piderit’s academic credentials are in economics, and he served as president of Loyola University in Chicago. Currently he is moderator of the curia and vicar for clergy in the Archdiocese of San Francisco. More on Piderit can be found at http://www.sfarchdiocese.org/home/archdiocese/vicarforadministration/FrPideritSJ (accessed April 18, 2015).


Porter did her doctoral studies at Yale and currently is professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.


Considers a Thomistic theory of moral action and treats this in the light of virtue theory.


Sets out a theological account of the natural law, with starting points from medieval natural law theorists (especially Thomas Aquinas), and developing this in light of contemporary concerns and perspectives.


Mainz: 1996.


Collection of several essays, many previously published elsewhere in German and/or English.


Elaborates a theological foundation of the natural law on the "imago Dei" concept as employed by Thomas.


New edition of Simon's 1965 study on natural law, which in turn were originally presented as a series of lectures at the University of Chicago given in 1958.


Looks primarily at the relationship between law and rights in Hobbes and Locke, though in the context of the larger tradition of natural law in Western philosophy.


Centers on an important task for Roman Catholic natural law ethics: to affirm a universal community of moral discourse, while recognizing moral pluralism and the historicity of belief and practice.


Tierney is the Bowmar Professor in Humanistic Studies, Emeritus, at Cornell University.


VanDrunen is the Robert B. Strimple Professor of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics at Westminster Seminary, California.


From Dell’s review: “Van Drunen calls for ‘a theological-ethical exploration of natural law that is grounded in the thorough exegesis of Scripture, set in the context of the larger biblical story of creation, fall, preservation, redemption and consummation, and developed upon a distinctively Protestant theological foundation’ (p. 9), In good Reformed tradition he sees the biblical covenants as the main organizational principle for biblical theology. Unlike the Reformers, however, he places a particular focus on the covenant with Noah. He does not see that as a ‘covenant of grace’ (as those with Adam, Jesus, other Old Testament figures, and the New Testament church) but rather as a ‘covenant of works’, alongside other reflections on nature/creation/life in the biblical tradition. The Noachic covenant as a universal covenant links up with the natural order and human society. Therefore the contrast is not between covenantal and not, rather it is between different types of covenant. Whilst the original covenant was of creation, with Adam, after the Fall natural law was refracted through the covenant with Noah. The original goal of a ‘new creation’ was postponed into an ever more eschatological future, but the plan of salvation was enacted through Jesus Christ. VanDrunen explores how the natural law involves ethical obligations and their consequences—it is law not in the sense of rules but through general principles, nature, and the moral order. It is divinely revealed through the medium of wisdom. He adopts a canonical approach in that interpreting individual parts of Scripture needs to be done in the context of the whole.”


