

understandably, bound to be controversial (on more than one side). The calls for a Church that identifies itself with the poor and otherwise victimized (Franco, Campbell-Johnston) are well taken. Still, again, these points have certainly been raised elsewhere and often. In the end, those scholars who are themselves working on the connections between CST and globalization will need to interact with these essays. Others will have to wait for something that offers significant new insights into the topic or perhaps even for a significant new summary of insights achieved and reported elsewhere.

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## Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics

**Stephen J. Grabill**

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Why would anyone, particularly Christians, wish to rediscover natural law in any theological tradition? One reason is to better ponder the staggering implications of United States Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy's famous mystery clause in defense of the right to abortion: "at the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life." (*Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833, at 851 [1992]). This summary of pop postmodernism, penned by a nominee from the Reagan era, asserts that Americans have a constitutional right to invent reality and truth. Contrarily, natural law resists the idea that we have rights to what we want and duties only to that which we give our consent. Natural law insists that human beings have an intrinsic value that demands recognition and just treatment. Natural law insists that we have a capacity to recognize in others what we owe them in justice—duties that give rise to rights that are, as George Parkin Grant was fond of saying, beyond all bargains.

In his remarkable book, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics*, Stephen J. Grabill offers an extensive historical and theological account of how the Reformers, starting with John Calvin, reiterated and developed the medieval doctrines concerning natural law. Some Protestants did abandon natural law in favor of a voluntaristic divine command theory, but many of the great Reformers and their disciples did not. With penetrating exegesis, Grabill analyzes the development of natural law in John Calvin, Peter Martyr Vermigli, Jerome Zanchi, Johannes Althusius, and Francis Turretin.

In theology, natural law serves at least two primary understandings: soteriological and political. In soteriology, natural law is the indispensable link reconciling human inability to do the good due to sin with our moral responsibility to obey God. In the Reformed tradition, human depravity does not eradicate God's image in humankind—fallibility does not imply that people act as wickedly as they can whenever possible. *Total*

depravity means that every human faculty is fallen. All people are held responsible to know God's sovereign governance of the creation, and the corresponding moral requirements for human flourishing in the world (Rom. 1:15ff.).

In politics, natural law is indispensable to the appropriate development of human law. The world is created according to wisdom (Ps. 104:24; Prov. 3:19; Jer. 10:12), from which we infer that a *law* governs our nature, just as laws govern the movement of planets. This law has been etched into our soul, and gives it shape, even though we cannot sensibly apprehend it. We know it by reason and conscience. It is affirmed and corrected by revelation. We can discern, or recognize, it because God is reasonable, and so are God's image bearers. We are not designed for unassisted flight, so if we jump off tall buildings, we fall and hurt ourselves. In the same manner, we have not been designed for adulterous relationships, and if we jump into one, we also hurt ourselves. Even moral voluntarists who believe that none of this can be seen in the natural world due to human sin, acknowledge that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

In its political use, natural law helps us understand the extent to which human beings are welcome to make sense of, or reason about God's laws. If divine law is arbitrary, we may not be invited by the author to seek reasonable justification for them in our nature or elsewhere. Natural law, as the Reformers conceived it, does invite us to reason about the ongoing relevance of divine law in the life of the Christian believer, both for personal as well as for social flourishing. Indeed, natural law advocates insist that just laws correspond to the truth about human nature. Calvin viewed God's law as revealed in Scripture to be open to historical development. The guide for such revision is natural law. We have few resources to reflect faithfully and critically about life in our technological society as Christians if we have only arbitrary commands for an ancient, agrarian society. Natural law gives Christians a base from which to reason about law and justice in a pluralistic society—and to speak accordingly as well.

The fact that natural law has been so resoundingly denounced by moderns, Christian and non-Christian alike, is not the subject of Grabill's study, except that he offers an astute account of why natural law was rejected by Karl Barth and his followers. Sadly, however, the implausibility of natural law to people today probably has little to do with Barth's critique or moral voluntarism. The besetting problem is not theological, but is rather psychological and sociological. Psychologically, a universally knowable law of human nature makes no sense in a world where an atomized self has replaced the soul. The plausibility of natural law is grounded in a moral psychology where the soul is understood to be equipped by God's communicable attributes such as prudence, justice, temperance, faith, hope, love, joy, peace, and so forth—attributes capable of being cultivated into mature dispositions and sentiments known as virtues. The implausibility of natural law is necessarily linked with the demise of this moral psychology.

Sociologically, modernization has contributed mightily to natural law's loss of plausibility. In a technological society, what is given in nature is generally thought to be the enemy—that is, the source of scarcity, disease, and want. Those who advocate attentive stewardship of the creation and all that dwells in it are still children of the Enlightenment,

and therefore cannot resist Hume's so-called *naturalistic fallacy*. In a technological society, it is difficult for most to imagine that nature really puts limits on human striving, especially in moral matters. The atomized self is infinitely malleable for the creation of what we eagerly call quality of life. The old moral psychology asserts that human nature reveals guidelines for limiting the projects of human making, especially the remaking of human beings.

Stephen Grabill's astonishing service to us in this book is to demonstrate the abundant resources in Reformed theology for Christian reflection on both salvation and how to live well in the world as God made it. Natural law known by common grace is the necessary link between the Reformed doctrines of human depravity and moral responsibility. Natural law is also the necessary link between Christian understanding of human nature and the laws that should govern that nature. Natural law is the most reasonable guide for developing the laws that govern human societies justly, as well as how to speak of them in a pluralistic society. All tyrants deny the existence of a knowable human nature.

As for new directions in natural law thinking in the Reformed tradition, one fruitful application is in securing a more certain relation between individual rights and the common good. In Christianity, God's trinitarian nature is both social—in *persons*—and individual—in *essence*. As creatures made in God's image and likeness, we find that we, too, are social beings as well as individuals, even though Enlightenment modernity and so-called hypermodernity greatly exaggerate the latter. The issue at stake in natural law theory is the extent to which there is a law of our being to which we can appeal both for the duty of self-governance as well as a guide for legislation concerning the common good. The covenantal nature of Reformed reasoning should guide us to be as concerned about rights to secure what belongs to us as we are about rights to secure full membership as citizens. There is much in Stephen Grabill's book to suggest future directions for such reasoning, and much more besides.

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