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Natural Law In Judaism



Synopsis

Natural law is the idea that our basic moral principles apply to every human being, and are accessible to human reason. Most people have assumed that since Judaism seems to consist of a specific historical revelation and a specific tradition, that an idea such as natural law is foreign to it. This book shows that natural law is part of Judaism, and that it is consistent with its specific revelation and tradition. In this book, not only is the history of an idea shown with great accuracy, but the idea of natural law is presented as a way of conveying some of Judaism's meaning for life today.

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Customer Reviews

"David Novak's own new book, *Natural Law and Judaism*...is a large contribution to the dialogue at the 'moral border' between Judaism and Christianity." *Washington Post Book World*"...elegant..." *The Weekly Standard*"It will set the tone for future discussion about natural law in Judaism, as well as about the nature Jewish ethics. Appropriate for upper-level undergraduate and graduate courses." *Religious Studies Review*"While it is clear to me that Judaism and Natural Law, with all its erudition, insight and wisdom, deserves an honoured place in any library of ethics or legal philosophy, the last word has still not been said on the topic, and hopefully we can look forward to yet further cultivation of these topics in Novak's future endeavours." *Studies in Religion*"...a rich and thoughtful book that creatively addresses challenges in Jewish thought, religious ethics, and philosophy...*Natural Law in Judaism* is an important work that will stimulate and reward those who engage its argument." *Religious Studies Review*

Most people have assumed that since Judaism seems to consist of a specific historical revelation and a specific tradition, that an idea like natural law is foreign to it. This book shows that natural law is part of Judaism, and that it is consistent with its specific revelation and tradition.

Morality is part of every human life and society. Many scholars hold the assumption that Judaism has no natural law. This is simply wrong. It is interesting that Congress recently recognized the Seven Noahided Laws as the bedrock of society. "These ethical values and principals have been the bedrock of society from the dawn of civilization when they were known as the Seven Noahide Laws" (H.J Res. 104 - One hundred second Congress - 3/20/1991) Natural Law in Judaism included a discusses the Noahide Laws. The Torah is particular as well as universal. God revealed six commandments(categories of law) through Adam. After the flood a seventh was added. These commandments to Noah are repeated in Torah. The "oral law" using reason (natural law) expands and explains the details. Maimonides is the recognized Jewish authority. There is extensive discussion of Maimonides in Novak's book. Aquinas influenced by Maimonides, developed what became known as natural law theory, the assumption being that the teachings of the holy books, combined with the reflections of a wise person would discover God's law. Natural law became the basis or part of the argument for individual rights and limited government. Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) natural law theory is the basis for international law. A Christian he said natural law would exist and bind us even based on pure reason. Grotius opened the gates for later liberal natural rights theories. Argument was often framed as law binding on Noah. The U.S. declaration of independence incorporates John Lock's natural law theory. Congress has recognized Noahide Law (H.J Res. 104 - One hundred second Congress) Jews today live as citizens within secular societies. This text presents a case for utilizing natural law theory in order to deal with current theological and philosophical questions in Judaism's ongoing reflection on its own meaning and its meaning and its meaning in the modern world. It also contributes to the secular vs religious debate going on in the United States today. It is well written and very pertinent not only for Jews but for Gentiles who desire to understand their own heritage. For this reason I give it five stars.

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