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ULTIMATE NORMATIVE FOUNDATIONS THE CASE FOR AQUINAS'S PERSONALIST NATURAL LAW

BY ROSE MARY HAYDEN LEMMONS

"Here is an ambitious and compelling presentation of Thomistic natural law theory as 'personalist,' that is, centered on fulfilling the good of the human person, especially 'the intellect's thirst for truth and the will's thirst for goodness.' The fresh and forceful approach of Rose Mary Hayden Lemmons shows once again the capacious power of Thomistic philosophical ethics to address the most persistent questions in moral philosophy and the most difficult practical issues of jurisprudence and politics. Lemmons is not the first to argue that eudaimonism generally, and Thomistic natural law theory in particular, best account for indefeasible and universal obligations; but in her sensitive and fully contemporary engagement with theoretical and practical questions, she has advanced the philosophical conversation and the Catholic intellectual tradition."

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"Rose Mary Hayden Lemmons deserves gratitude for providing this comprehensive introduction to a Thomistic personalist account of moral normativity as well as its dominant alternatives and criticisms. She retrieves Thomistic natural law through the lens of the normative demands of love. Students and teachers of moral philosophy and theology will enjoy this vigorous defense of the relevance of Thomistic thought for contemporary political and moral issues. The wonderful assemblage of quotes from Aquinas and other authors across the tradition in itself makes reading the book a profitable experience."

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Ultimate Normative Foundations: The Case for Personalist Natural Law focuses on two features of morality and law that most normative paradigms ignore. The first of these is the indefeasibility of moral obligations that prevents moral agents from exempting themselves from culpability, and the second is that certain norms (such as the proscription of genocide) are universal. Rose Mary Hayden Lemmons explores the foundations of normativity and delves deep into metaethics, normative ethics, applied ethics, and jurisprudence, exposing the weaknesses inherent in key normative theories. She argues that today's popular normative paradigms cannot adequately explain or justify the universality and indefeasibility of any moral or juridical obligation; this explanation and justification is provided instead by the personalist natural law formulated by Thomas Aquinas in terms of a love of God and neighbor distinct from Christian charity. Personalist natural law establishes the parameters of interpersonal relationships that enable each of us to flourish while establishing indefeasible and universal obligations that hold across the globe. At the same time, it retains the ability to do the work of traditional natural law theory and justify, for instance, inalienable rights and Just War theory. These considerations will have strong implications for any academic concerned with philosophy, theology, or law.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rose Mary Hayden Lemmons is associate professor of philosophy at the University of St. Thomas in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

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