The Third Temple

Natural Law

New, Same as the Old

Jonathan Malone

Copyright © 2024 Jonathan Malone
All rights reserved.

www.jonathan-malone.com

the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

Romans 8: 7

evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

2 Timothy 3: 13

CONTENTS

Introduction

1.	Stating the Case	1
2.	"Religion" Thesis	12
3.	Religious Doctrine	20

Ancient History: Platonism

4.	Plato and Natural Law	31
5.	Roman Stoicism	47
6.	Stoic Platonism	58
7.	Neoplatonism	73
8.	Anti-Christian	85
9.	Syncretism	94
10.	Augustinianism	105

Modern Trend: Naturalistic

11.	Clarifying Terms	116
12.	Thomist Amalgam	126
13.	Naturalistic Merger	138
14.	Naturalistic Fallacy	150
15.	"New" Natural Law	161
16.	Moral Relativism	176
17.	Confused Jurists	186
18.	Right or Rights?	193
19.	Communist Conflation	205

20. Duplicitous Rights 214
21. Humanist Acid 224
22. Natural Canon 233
23. Eschatology of Law 249

International Law

24. International Father? 264
25. False Apostle 277
26. Catholic Sympathies 288
27. The Real Fathers 297
28. Spanish Scholastics 306
29. Catholic Proselytizer 318

Ressourcement: Platonic Revival

30. Thomist Realism 334
31. Mind of God 343
32. Servais Pinckaers 351
33. Relation to the Bible 359
34. Grappling Nihilism 368
35. Catholic Vacillation 379
36. Nihilism to Nihilism 389
37. "New Law," Old Lie 396

Biblical Arguments: Pro and Con

38. Abrahamic Faiths 408
39. Biblical Justification? 419
40. Political Correctness 432
41. Unreliable Conscience 440
42. Purging Conscience 450
43. Principles or Law? 464

44. Traditions of Men 470
45. Natural Law Heresy 480
46. Churchy Correctness 493
47. Lawlessness 502

Appendix

1. Heathenism 514

Preface

I am not a law professor. I am a Christian preacher; insofar as the law is concerned a layman. Doubtless, the very mention of the word "Christian" is enough to shoot myself in the foot, as it were; at least with academics who intimate, for some reason, that I am not Catholic. Catholicism suffers no marginalization in the halls of academia. Perhaps an Evangelical perspective can be instructive even to people with differing religious or juridical ideas, though. Can reason be appealed to is the question? Later I show that reason itself as well as moral valuations are based on a relative spiritual disposition. Even this must be predicated. Little wonder that there is a failure in communication. I do not want to unduly criticize jurists and judges because they serve a necessary function in society. They are involved in practical concerns, I understand. But the fuzziness of their thinking is unnerving. I draw attention to the philosophy of law, which gets lost in the hubbub of litigation and is compromised by avowed godlessness or false doctrine. From a Christian perspective, of course, the results seem irrational, but I prove that this is also the objective fact. Natural law is irrational. But positivism is too.

Are Christians forbidden from arguing philosophy? Titus 3: 9 does abjure us to avoid "strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain." But that references the Mosaic Law, does it not? Is it not with respect to Judaizers, whom Paul calls, in 1: 10, the "circumcision"? While it is probably not a good policy, I have a burden to set the record straight. However, I have no illusions of persuading anyone. "A reproof entereth more into

a wise man than a hundred stripes into a fool" (Proverbs 17: 10). I suppose I am whistling *Dixie*, natural law jurists being so invested in the world. Besides, it is not good to talk too much. "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin . . ." (Proverbs 10: 19), and I tend to blather, so I must restrain myself. "Of the making of many books there is no end," says Ecclesiastes 12: 12. But providing the truth is necessary, if for nothing else, to vindicate God. "Let God be true but every man a liar" (Romans 3: 4). In addition, to assaying the eternal destiny of souls, the final judgments will be a vindication of God, a revelation of His goodness, 1) before the saved at the Bema Seat and 2) before the lost at the Great White Throne. God defends us, should we not defend His good name? Tribulation saints in heaven do so: "Just and true are Thy ways, thou King of saints" (Revelation 15: 3).

This is a supplement to The Third Temple series of books, which deals broadly with eschatology. Sandwiched between *Rome* and *Dark Age*, its subject matter straddles the concepts to which each of those books is devoted respectively, occultism and politics. This may seem strange since natural law is a category of philosophy of law, a theory of a moral or spiritual justification for law; but natural law has reference to occultism and politics.

The handful of conclusions presented in this book will be regularly repeated in various ways like refrains. They are not complicated. These conclusions result from a simple dogmatism with regard to the Gospel understood literally. And also from the rational deduction that natural law theory can be exploited as propaganda for license, for licentiousness. Nowadays, natural law scarcely claims a rationale beyond subjectivism; but this is ennobled by the gospel of man's divinity. Although my main thesis is simple, and philosophers will instinctively anticipate the arguments, there are numerous facets of them. This accounts for the prolixity. Polemically I engage the thought of jurists to demonstrate the similarities in a range of juridical philosophies, which culminate in the synthesis of international law. I believe natural law concepts figure prominently in it. While a synoptic method of presenting the history and ideas of natural law might be more economical, polemics proves various points from the

words of authorities. It also allows opportunity for comment. This method itself tends toward prolixity. Nevertheless, I have tried to be economical and forensic. That said, I do not claim to have written a scientific treatise. That would require more time and energy that I can spare. But, given some latitude, the book more or less states the case rationally.

Doubtless, I will be accused of twisting the words of Catholic doctors. (In the course of this book the reader will understand why I invoke the subject of Catholicism at all: it is the repository of natural law.) I do not twist them but rather attempt to straighten out their byzantine sophistry, to make sense of the pretzel of their immense prevarication, to determine, in plain language, what they are really saying, to decode their cypher language and clarify their double talk.

Introduction

Chapter 1
Stating the Case

Modern law is nihilistic in the extreme. One theory of law, which is the most ancient, seems to offer universal justice and certitude, qualities avowedly missing in other models. But, alas, it is a chimera, a pipe dream, or a lie altogether.

What is Natural Law?

The New Encyclopædia Britannica (15th edition, 1998) defines natural law as a philosophical

> system of right or justice held to be common to all humankind and derived from nature rather than from the rules of society, or positive law. Throughout the history of the concept, there have been disagreements over the meaning of natural law and over its relation to positive law.

There have certainly been disagreements, but the whole idea is pretty cogently delimited by some broad lineaments, which we will identify in this book. The whole thing is predicated by the idea that, in some sense, either in the psyche of man (genetic or spiritual repositories implied) or in the invisible fabric of the cosmos, laws exist and that man can apprehend them somehow, usually through a faculty called *Reason*, but this Reason, as it is applied in natural law, is suspiciously mystical. Positivism claims a social or historical justification for law, which is mere

sophistry for skirting the issue. Positivism provides no internal philosophic justification for law at all. By "internal" I mean the spiritual justification for morals or moral justification.* But at least positivists do not pretend, like the priests of old, to know the mysteries of the universe and are thus more honest.

When considering natural law, the authentic Christian, the Bible-believing, born-again Christian, is struck by two things: 1) what appears to be, at first glance, the utter incoherence and irrationality of the doctrine and 2) more confusion because the theory has been historically popular. Indeed, it has dominated the philosophy of law for thousands of years and continues to do so.** If a Christian has the mental fortitude to overcome the question of his own insanity, he comes to the conclusion that the issue hinges on his very Christian faith and the Bible. Only a little investigation leads to the realization that natural law is an ancient pagan doctrine, which upon entering Christianity through Neoplatonism, claimed primacy over biblical law. But, for 1500 years, this was done in the name of Christ. Protestants and Evangelicals still claim it. But Rome has been its custodian. How shocking. The doctrine utterly rejects the transcendence of God and has gestated completely within a hermetically sealed world of philosophical pantheism. The doctrine has always been plagued by naturalism, which virtually ignores any overtures to Platonic spirituality at all. This is because there is an essential incoherence and confusion in paganism itself, pantheism being a conflation between natural and supernatural. But metaphysics is natural law's only real claim to fame, the spiritual dimension of Platonism. But this too is pagan.

Notice that I identified natural law as being a pantheistic doctrine, but this requires a little explanation because there are certainly many who object to the assertion. For example, the *Secrets of the Dead* series on PBS (Public Broadcasting Service) television, an episode entitled "The Sunken Basilica" (2023), interviews Mark Fairchild, Professor of Bible and Religion at Huntington University, who says, "The pagans thought of God

* However, later I make a short case of Christian positivism.

** We substantiate this statement in the course of ensuing pages.

as being transcendent. He's out there, he is distant from us. The Christians promoted a God who is intimate, who invited to have communion." Fairchild may be correct about Christianity with regard to fellowship with God (concord, harmony, because God had blotted "out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross" [Colossians 2: 14]), but does the professor not fail to understand paganism? Paganism is withcraft, which is pantheistic, even Neoplatonism is. Other than their concept that the gods were aloof from humanity (which Fairchild seems to reference), pagans had no concept of transcendence at all. The remoteness of the gods in paganism had not to do with some fundamental distinction but simply their snootiness. That said, it was through the concept of "communion" that natural law would actually find traction in the church. (Aquinas expounds upon the Eucharist in this regard.) Mysticism would charade as fellowship. Increasingly it would do so without recourse to the Bible at all. This doctrine of divine fellowship outside the biblical apprehension of things became increasingly dominant. Enter the Dark Ages. Pantheism would become increasingly dominant.

Thus qualified, the doctrine of natural law claims that an invisible law, a law upon which the Law and Prophets are based, and even Jesus Christ Himself, is in some sense apprehendable by man. Therefore, the Law and Prophets, and even Jesus Christ Himself, are secondary. They are merely examples of some of the treasures of natural law, but the Bible, being merely a poetic production, is necessarily fallable. Even positive law (legislation and adjudication based on tradition but existential with regard to morals; practical and atheistic) is viewed as an unconscious example of the principles of natural law in practice. Postivism, which is usually subjective and relativistic, holds natural law legislation of the past as its moral compass. Thus we have, in a Christian context, the lowering of divine law and, in positivism, civil law elevated, birging on the prestige of holy predicates of doctrines like "equal rights." In fact, a merger is taking place internationally. Two dominant theories, the "new" natural law, which is godless Rationalism, positing capricious values (which

is positivism renamed), and Thomist anthropology are merging. The amalgam is swiftly becoming the legal philosophy of the New World Order.

It would seem that the modern trend is toward a synthesis which devolves to simple naturalism. Despite the lip service in Roman Catholicism, not to the Bible particularly (however much Servais Pinckaers makes pretense to the Bible) but to a more pure theistic natural law (Platonism), this is also the basis of Canon Law. The relative degree to which the doctrine adheres to positivism or Platonism, its essentially shiftiness, is the main source of confusion which assails the objective observer. But it would seem that Platonism is only a hypocritical pretense to divinity (and that in pagan terms) and that its reality is either simple naturalism or occult communication with demons.

Naturalisms

In The Third Temple books I have mentioned a few topics several times, sometimes perhaps conflating them, sometimes perhaps somewhat vague about the definitions involved. While I have tried to be clear, particularly when dealing expressly with each subject, the application may seem somewhat slipshod when I mentioned them incidentally in passing. One of these subjects is the topic of this book, natural law. The other subjects to which I allude are connected, as their names convey. I consider them, with mutating boundaries, bleeding this way and that, to be part of a whole single doctrine. Because they are usually ill-defined there is much confusion. These subjects are: natural philosophy, natural religion, and natural law.

Philosophers quibble about the differences, but I succinctly show the connections. *Natural philosophy* is usually, nowadays at least, considered a synonym for *naturalism*. However, this has not always been the case. In the 17th century, it was much discussed and became the cornerstone of the Royal Society of London and in the 18th, the Scottish Royal Society. The issue there, at that time, was certainly not wholly naturalism. It was

connected to Scholastic thought, which was Platonic. In other words, although terms were redefined through modernist revision, most of the main ideas did not change. Everything, even a possible spiritual component of reality, was *natural*. This is the very definition of *pantheism*. Interestingly, with minor variation in verbiage, this is also Realist philosophy. In varying degrees, from materalistic vitalism to full-blown Neoplatonism, reality was conceived as allowing for invisible forces. By any objective assessment, this is nothing other than a spiritual component or realm, variously qualified. Natural philosophy was either outright Neoplatonism or Neoplatonism qualified with modernist revision.

Natural philosophy was connected to natural religion, but not for the reasons one might suspect. Natural religion was even more atheistical than natural philosophy. But it allowed for a transcendent God, which is separate from Creation or reality; whatever cosmological paradigm. Basically, natural religion is deism. David Hume showed how Neoplatonic ideas were incompatable with natural religion as he propounded it, and he was correct. But that did not stop thousands of others from disingenuously claiming natural religion (Hume disingenuously claimed it too*) and cobbling in Neoplatonic ideas. Why were men constantly cobbling in Neoplatonism? Because Neoplatonism is completely logical. It is *Rational*, given a pantheistic pretext; at the very least, allowing the possibility of invisible forces, which is an eminently practical and Rational idea. But pantheism is a recourse of apostates, those who reject the Bible. In any event, most natural religion, even the deistic variety, simply redefined spiritual phenomena in psychological or anthropological terms. This was what natural philosophy had done. Later, a broader biological pretext would also be adopted, with scientific data,

* How was Hume disingenuous? He, like many others, among whom was Immanuel Kant, appropriated biblical ideas but rejected the Bible. In point of fact, Neoplatonists and the revisionist modernist Neoplatonists were more rational. One cannot posit a transcendent God to the exclusion of spiritual phenomena, of which reality is replete, on the basis of Reason. Revelation alone is the source of such knowledge, and Hume rejected revelation.

employing, for example, Kirilian photography with respect to the bioelectric aura of living things. But this too would be connected to Eastern mysticism, which had been speaking of these things for millennia.

Are we seeing any common denominators? Natural law would be the most openly Neoplatonic of all, although it too would go through Enlightenment revision. Although positivist jurists attempted to boil law down to societal tradition, this ultimately satisfied no one, not even themselves; consequently, as Neoplatonism had done in natural religion, it percolated, distilling unconsciously through their naturalistic ideas. Legal ideas began to coalesce back toward the main Western tradition (positivism aquiesced because its own justification of law was tradition), which was Roman Catholic Scholasticism. Realists held the orthodox position in medieval Catholicism, and natural law, as conceived by them, was pure Neoplatonism, Plato's Forms and the pantheistic mysticism of Aristotle. But this must needs go through modernist revision too.

Natural Law and End-Times Prophecy

Why speak of natural law at all in the context of eschatology, specifically with regard to the subject of the Third Temple of Revelation 11? For one things, it demonstrates the pantheistic tendency of world culture—we substantiate the pantheism of natural law later—but it does so with reference to monotheism. It often does so with reference to the Bible expressly. Insofar as these ideas lead to the supplanting of God's Law or even His word generally, the Bible (since God's word is law), it is heretical and represents a significant aspect of the prophesied apostasy of the end days. More than this, the Western, and indeed international, legal system, seems to have reference to some degree to natural law. The universality of international law seems to prove natural law to positivists. And this is run by Mystery Babylon. We show how religion predicates law. The Jews themselves have been heavily involved with natural law. If Mystery Babylon is

the liason of the world in Temple Mount sacrifices, natural law is a connection of participating parties. On its deepest level the connection is in religious thought. This religious philosophy is called *panentheism*, pantheism pretending to be monotheistic; which amounts to Satanism. It is Neoplatonism.

Positivism and legal realism (atheistic, naturalistic theories of law that do not entail a premise of universal morality and do not suggest that morality even defines law) overwhelmingly dominate the contemporary philosophy of law. But I show how 1) Roman Catholics are working assiduously to promote natural law and 2) how the avowed superficiality of positivism falls short of the expectations of virtually everyone, positivists included. In the face of this nagging dissatisfaction, natural law arguments are enchanting and irrestistible, no matter how flawed they may be. They do purport to offer answers about the origin of law, and it also seems to give meaning to the process. If one takes issue with my assumption that natural law is formidable (I fail to see how it cannot be the central juridical power now, in light of the piteous weakness of all positivist arguments), I beg the reader's indulgence. I believe that these things will become clearer with time. It is part of biblical prophecy, I believe. What do I mean? According to Revelation 17, Mystery Babylon is prophesied to be a global religion that rides the Beast of the Revived Roman Empire. Religion predicates law; it always has. And natural law clearly has religious roots and connection. Naturalism, from the Enlightenment until modern times, has seem to overturn this, but it only seems to. In point of fact, much nomenclature went through a revision, a re-definition of terms, but many of the essential ideas remained the same. Roman Catholicism was the custodian of natural law. Besides, Rome has also re-defined terms in positivist language to meet the world halfway. All that remains for natural law to become the preeminent philosophy is for Rome to assert spiritual authority in undeniable terms. Demonstrable miracles would conclusively prove the claim to natural law, as far as the world is concerned. Far from resisting the notion of natural law, trenchant modernists would gleefully embrace it, so disenchanted are they. The Antichrist and the

False Prophet will both work miracles. The Bible suggests that a global shadow government already exists when the Tribulation Period comes. Pandemonium, with bat-winged spires and flying butresses, rises to the occasion. Jurisprudence is a major part of governance. And while one may say that positivism seems to provide more latitude for the lawlessness of Antichrist, it cannot do so with biblical justification, which is what Mystery Babylon and perhaps, early on, the Antichrist offer. After the destruction of Mystery Babylon, the Antichrist may return to positivism, usurping even the pretense to God with pure tyranny, no longer with propaganda of the Republic, or the City of God, but more along the lines of the Roman Empire, in capricious autocrasy. And while this may have been the practical reality of Mystery Babylon all along, the mask comes off.

Natural Law is Theistic, *Supposedly*

While we will eventually focus on the relationship of natural law to the church, I want to establish the pre-church and early church history of natural law. We must go back to the beginning. This section will be discursive, but it is necessary to illuminate the fundamental ideas involved in natural law.

Doubtless, I will be accused of arguing semantics. While conceding a moral compass in man I seem to contradict myself by inveighing against natural law. Moral knowledge is natural law, after all, some say. However, I do not think that this is the doctrine of natural law. Certainly, many scholars think so, but I intend to conclusively demonstrate that the doctrine is deeper than that. Or more duplicitous. A moral sensibility has no need of law, and the Bible proves that this is true. No matter what various scholars may say, natural law is a metaphysical concept. There is an element or angle of the natural law argument which maintains that 1) natural law is encoded either genetically or in the spirit of man or both, viewed as facets of one another. There is also 2) the theory that it is immanent in the cosmos, so to speak. That is, outside man, perhaps working in tandem with or

in counter-position to the genetic-spiritual encoding.

I maintain that there is an essential contradiction between the naturalistic and/or mystical pagan (Platonic) idea of natural law and the transcendent God of the Bible, who, in any event, has already given His statement on law. In the course of this book, the reader may question whether I myself violate certain biblical injunctions; injuctions, for example, against haggling about philosophy, on one hand, or acrimony, on the other. In dealing with subtle issues that impinge upon the church many judicious expositors of scripture obviate the problems altogether to avoid being critical or judgmental. Because I hold a negative assessment of natural law, any expose of the doctrine necessarily involves the thought of her exponents. It necessarily references certain people. Will anyone believe me if I say, "Nothing in the polemics is personal"?

One Lawgiver

The Epistle of James deals with law. He does so in a way which, on one hand, might seem to rebuke me for inveighing against natural law adherents; on the other, it could establish my case up front. We must understand the language. James 4: 8-12:

> Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.
>
> Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.
>
> Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.
>
> Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.
>
> There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?

"Double minded" refers to hypocrisy. It is professing one thing but doing the opposite. "Speak not evil" of the brethren refers to malicious intent, as ET Winkler tells us in *An American Commentary on the New Testament*:*

> *Speak not evil one of another*—better, *Speak not against one another*. (So the Syriac.) This admonition is connected with the preceding by the principle that humility before God carries with it lowliness toward his children. The frequent returns of the w iter to this subject show that he is dealing with "the ever-besetting sin of his time and people." The sin condemned is calumny, which magnifies the faults and depreciates the virtues and character of others. The unnaturalness of the sin is already indicated by the relationship that Christians bear to each other. They are *brethren*, the children of the same Father, and should take no part in Satan's work of backbiting. (Rev. 12: 10.) *He that speaketh evil of his brother* (the passage must be rendered, *speaketh against his brother*), *and* (*or*) *judgeth his brother, speaketh against the law, and judgeth the law.* Speaking and judging are nearly synonymous; but the speaking presupposes the judgment. Calumny against a brother is evil in its source before it flows out into speech. Calumny is a violation of the law of love, which it condemns as of no authority, or as not founded uponright. It is more particularly an express violation of the law of Christ, who forbids the unkind judgments that prevail in common life. (Matt. 7: 1.) *But if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge*. The calumniator thus leaves the position which becomes him, as a subject of law. The law is promulgated, not that he may judge it, but that it may judge him. He is required todo it. But instead of rendering it a loyal obedience, he makes himself a judge, and promulgates a law by which his neighbor is condemned or absolved—a criminal presumption, as James now proceeds to show. Perhaps it may even be found that the law of God permits what the censorious professor condemns, in which case his condemnation of a brother condemns the law which absolves him, and directly impugns the wisdom and holiness of the Heavenly Lawgiver.

* Edwin Theodore Winkler, *Commentary on the Epistle of James* (posthumusly, 1883), *An American Commentary on the New Testament* (ed. Alvah Hovey), 1888.

"Speaking evil" is calumny, which is *slander*. Specifically, it refers to "false statements intended to injure the reputation of another." Synonyms include *defamation*, *libel*, and *vilification*.

The "brethren" referred to are fellow Christians. Regardless of the problems with orthodoxy posed by natural law, I do not make conclusions about the salvation of others, however much I lambaste them.

But, mainly, we see here that James is not speaking of the Mosaic Law at all. The law to which he alludes is the Gospel faith. Winkler calls it the "law of love." Indeed, Jesus seems to say as much in Matthew 22: 37-40, Mark 12: 12: 29-31, and Luke 10: 27-28: Love God, and your neighbor as yourself.

Suffice to say, the Lord Jesus Christ did not consider this a contradiction of Mosaic Law. In fact, He said that this perfectly fulfills the Law and the Prophets.

But how ironic it is that despite the Thomist identification of natural law as the Golden Rule, it is discarded when friction arises with fundamentalists who object to their circumvention of some injunctions, which they deem "inhumane," in scripture; not references to capital punishment particularly but even the more inocuous offenses, which, in some cases, nevertheless, may also require capital punishment, such as promiscuity in the families of priests (Leviticus 21: 9). You see, the professed qualm has to do with capital punishment, but the real qualm was considering promiscuity a sin at all. Therefore, far from lessening punishment, modern jurism condones things prohibited in the Bible. We elaborate upon this disingenuity as we go. It is more ironic because, from the beginning, the *natural*, universalist crowd have insisted upon calling the invisible morality "law," an issue we touch upon in ensuing pages. This itself suggests ulterior motive. Certainly, they consider their airy fabrications to be social obligations. Romans 4: 15 says, "law worketh wrath.

Frankly, rather than a criticism of natural law violating the word according to James, it would seem that the opposite is the case. Winkler even calls their stance a "criminal presumption."

Chapter 2
"Religion" Thesis

I am not unaware that I oppose some of the greatest legal theorists in the history of the world, men to whom virtually all jurists defer to some degree or other. But I do not attempt to make a name for myself through controversy like heretics. Is it misplaced *espièglerie*, the grandiosity of an intrepid fool for lost causes, to say that I am in a gigantic minority, a defender of the Alamo, a lone voice perhaps? Is it not a fact? I am keenly aware of it. Be that as it may, I do not have visions of grandeur. Nor am I fighting phantasms like Don Quixote.

Allow me to state my conclusions up front. These brazen statements may sound hyperbolic, but I prove them.

Natural law is based on assumptions, and assumptions are the proof of weak-minded men.* Ultimately, it is a figment of their imagination. Natural law is an assumption of sophists. What's more, it is designed to overthrow God's Law. A riotous mob of Lilliputians under a mass delusion, these Canaanites and Communists, assailing the Temple, dragging out the Law, and ripping up the oracles. As we shall see, the impulse to do so is religious; therefore, the chimera of natural law is idolatrous.

Every justification for this, which is produced by Mystery

* Clearly, Christianity can be viewed as an assumption. But Christian conclusions about law are at least consistent with their premise. Natural law is incoherent with itself: naturalism claiming supernatural metaphysics, on some level; theistic with a pantheistic modus, pantheism claiming a theistic postulation of universal law; nonetheless, apprehended subjectively.

Babylon, with reference to Jesus Christ is a lie. Not once did Jesus Christ contradict the Law and Prophets.

Incoherence

At the risk of some redundancy, as we enter an exposé of the doctrine of natural law, I again frame the discourse by stating some conclusion that I have mentioned and introducing some others. I repeat them clearly to ensconce them in the reader's mind. Besides, it is virtually impossible to familiarize the reader with numerous technical terms in the lexicon of the philosophy of law any other way. A handbook, manual, or dictionary would not only be tedious and boring it would not convey the moral implications of the insights I offer. Attempting to cogently and comprehensively provide an overview, again, we begin.

The Bible allows latitude for arbitration and even legislation. This is the purview of positive law. Positive law, or positivism, usually involves case law. Its philosophic basis is social custom and tradition. Moral statements are often deferred or denied altogether. In any event, it cannot answer the question of the origin or the moral/spiritual justification of law. But natural law does answer these question. However, I do not believe that it answers them correctly. Biblically, it does seem that God placed a certain moral sensibility in man for which he has been held accountable on occasion. Natural law proponents, even ancient Greeks, noted the presence of conscience in man reacting to something, and they noted the general similitude of the civil laws in different societies, coming to the conclusion that this amounts to a law, corresponding, in a sense, to physical law. Thus the name "natural *law*."* It was deemed "natural" because the verity of an immanent law could be rationally adduced, so they supposed. However, I hope to show that moral conscience does not have to be a law and that calling it a law is convenient for ulterior motive. Because there really is no natural law. There

* Later we question the nomenclature "law" as used in *natural law*.

seems to be a kind of moral sensibility and conscience, but the conscience itself is prone to be swayed by influences other than the highest good. The conscience can be corrupted. In any event, the Platonic type of natural law is certainly speaking of more than conscience. It infers an immanent connection with Plato's spiritual Forms/Ideas. But no ascertainment of an immanent immutable spiritual reality is actually taking place. Therefore, positive law, which is most often atheistic, and natural law, which is theistic (although many have attempted to propound a naturalistic natural law, which is a contradiction in terms), are both ultimately relativistic. Natural law is incoherent. It claims universality and sometimes even divinity, but it too is subjective and relativistic. While proponents, such as Thomas Aquinas, say that natural law cannot contradict divine law,* an expression or codification of invisible natural law, they assume natural law to be primary. Also, in a humanistic, Rationalist sense, they view the Bible as a poetic production. In higher-critical fashion, they despatch scripture, saying it is not divinely inspired, only loosely apprehended, and natural law is primary. The dangers of this are obvious.**

The conundrum of jurists, the dilemma in which they find themselves, is framed by two ideas, certainty and uncertainty, biblical law and manmade law. In the modern world they seem

* Augustinianism maintained that divine law encompassed not only patristics and Canon Law but also the Bible.

** Positivism seems to accede a moral sensibility and conscience, and in this respect it parallels natural law. But it does not pretend to intuitively know them beforehand. Moral sensibility and conscience *recognize* good and evil when they are encountered. Thus my use of the term "sensibility." Legislation is a reaction. It is actually more like the Biblical method: "Law was added because of transgressions," despite the strained optimism of postitivists. It is more truthful than natural law. The more nihilistic positivists maintain that practical morality is actually created by the presence of law to begin with, and they may be correct. (There is some question, though, if arbitrary and tyrannical coercion ever really becomes a morality. Insofar as it does, it does so because of the weakness of conscience.) More than anything the corruption of the justice system contributes to the decadence of society. (Isaiah 1: 23; 59: 4, 9, 14-15; Ezekiel 45: 9; Hosea 5: 11; 10: 4; Amos 5: 7; 6: 12; Micah 3: 9; Habakkuk 1: 4; Zechariah 9-12 ; Romans 13: 3-4; and 1 Peter 2: 14).

to have chosen sides long ago, having rejected God. Biblical law is accepted on a faith, which cannot be proven, but positive law and natural law alike (regardless of the differences), though in reality relativistic, are also based on a kind of faith. (Natural law is not particularly a biblical faith.) They are based on unproved assumptions. The *assumption* of positivism (the origin and moral justification of law being constantly deferred) is that someone at some time, somewhere, knew what they were doing. If they make no such assumptions they are simply the clerks of tyrants. The assumption of natural law adherents is that they perceive a law beyond biblical law.

Questions of law devolve around ontology and cosmology, the question of being and the nature of the universe. This is largely the purview of the religion. Inevitably, one way or the other, the philosophy of law is connected with religious thought. But both positivism and natural law are humanistic. Therefore, they are a reflection of humanist religion, and some positivist literature is clear about this. Certainly, natural law has religious connotations. While positivism eschews religion on principle, natural law embraces it. (The "new natural law" of Grisez and Finnis rejects religion but strains the tenets of natural law with Rationalism so thin that it is no longer natural law at all.) But what does this say about natural law religion?

During the course of The Third Temple series, I have referred often to natural law and its deleterious effects. I have conflated it with Neoplatonism. Although philosophers may understand this, whether they agree or not, my simplified and seamless conceptualization of the state of affairs requires an explanation, nonetheless. I have also conflated Neoplatonism and Gnosticism to a degree, and this begs explanation. As we shall see, there is a seamless connection between these ideas. The confusion about natural law in the modern world results from the cacophonous din of confused lawyers, each straining at minutia. Through the dialectical squabbling, a vast merger of positivism and natural law is taking place. Nowadays even Idealists attempt to establish natural law upon cultural, historical, or anthrological grounds. But how can they not see that natural law is a religious claim,

nothing other than a religious claim? Therefore, inevitably, the whole locus of jurism and legislation swings toward religion.

The moral justification of natural law establishes its being and character. What is this being or character? It is religious, a religious claim or inference. But, whatever its claim, its reality is wholly humanistic. Natural law is an outgrowth of humanistic religion.

Thus we see the effects of the control of Mystery Babylon. But, behold, how strange the influence of this religion. This merger, resulting in the character of international law, is a democratic—shall we say Communistic?—process. It is the lowest common denominator, the law of the mob, mob rule. It is the legal code of the Beast, lawlessness codified.

"They prophesy unto you a false vision and divination and a thing of nought and the deceit of their heart," Jeremiah 14: 14 says. Jeremiah was dealing with the Babylonian Captivity, but it is applicable in this context, I believe, because natural law is a kind of prophesying.

I hope to establish that natural law is subjective divination, however contradictory that language may seem. Later we will see how words like "intuition" are used. The supposed "source" of divination for these diviners of natural law, among the other venues of nature proposed by them, is their "self." This is the pretext of anthropological natural law, Thomist Canon. But "the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Romans 8: 7). Natural law is heathenism.

Virtually all law has reference to either heathen religion or biblical faith. The Jews have been involved with natural law for a long time. Platonism informed Judaism prior to Church-Age corruptions. (Platonism is a significant source of natural law.) It has also been deeply entrenched in Orthodox and Roman Churches. Natural law in the Eastern and Western Churches is also Neoplatonic. Neoplatonism is paganism itself, and one of its features is Rationalism.

Is Natural Law Relevant?

Natural law is relevant because of the ascendancy of Thomist philosophy in society at large, as propounded by philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre* and jurist Robert George. Natural law is not only being taught, but Roman Catholicism also seems to be on the ascendancy, not as a religion *per se*, since it is decreasing, but its influence among the elite, specifically in its lawmaking and governing capacity. But, in point of fact, there never was any other kind of natural law. It is something ancient that only flies under a Christian flag. Some positivists and legal realists realize the implications of this philosophy of law, that it is really Neoplatonic, whether they wholly conflate it with Christianity or not. Nevertheless natural law has an aura of authority that positivism does not possess. As Nigel Lo says in his paper "Divine Natural Law Theory" (2013) published by International Magis Society Publications:

> In legal theory . . . the interpretation of positive law** requires some reference to natural law.

Nigel Lo is saying two things: 1) the burden of proof lies with positivists*** to discount natural law, which they cannot do because natural law claims a justification beyond natural proof. In this respect, *natural* law is a misnomer in much the same way that *Realism* (Scholastic Platonism of the Middle Ages, what nowadays is called *Idealism*) is a misnomer. While one could quibble, it does not have to do with natural things at all but with respect to supernatural things. And 2) by referencing precedent, positivists cannot fail to have reference to natural law because

* MacIntyre advocates Catholic dominion because of the cohesion it offers a pluralistic society (what Lloyd Weinreb calls "communitarianism") and the security it offers against soul-gnawing nihilism, regardless of the possibility that it could be a nostrum. What's worse, a poison. MacIntyre is practical, without any regard for truth.

** Modern humanistic, atheistic approach, which results in relativistic law. Nigel Lo is a Rosicrucian, and Rosicrucianism is Neoplatonic.

*** Atheists, naturalists.

natural law is Western tradition.

In an attempt to obviate the uncomfortable subject, most do not engage natural law discussions at all. But some do, such as Berkeley lawyer Max Radin, at least to place it in historical context. I intend to show that natural law redounds to Roman Catholicism.

I may apologize a few times in the course of these pages. Honestly, I do not know if natural law has, on some level, any legitimacy or not: that is, the idea that a person can, either, intuit what the law should be, either it or a moral predicate *existing independently* in some sense, or that humans instinctively know right and wrong, the idea that it is inherent in humanity, perhaps on a genetic level. Certainly, when Job said, "I have made a covenant with my eyes, that I will not look upon a maid," he seems to have been reacting to something, be it law, conscience, or something else; perhaps the holiness of God. But lest others claim such holiness and start adjudicating offhand, everyone should know that the concept opens a Pandora's box.

The supposed ascertainment of a universal objective law, which is inherent in the nature of things, as distinct from law codifed in the Bible, is merely a pretext for claiming authority. The avowed method of divining natural law is Reason, the exact method used by positivists and legal realists (atheists). Both are humanistic, and the results of both are relativistic. Proverbs 12: 5 says it: "the counsels of the wicked are deceit." Why? Because the objective is not truth but something else.

If natural law were widely understood and embraced, who really would be authorized to be law makers and judges? What's more, who would appoint them? Certainly, no one but God has the right, given such a pretext, if in fact law makers and judges are to be viewed as revealers and guardians of the truth. It is *divine-right of adjudication*. Ultimately, one would see that none other than the pope appoints. This is natural law.

Natural law is capricious. But so is positive law.

James Rachels, in his *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (2007), says that natural law theory plays virtually no role in contemporary secular moral discourse. If this is so—and I in-

tend to show that it is not—it is because there is scarcely any secular moral discourse. Secular moral discourse is dominated in the philosophy of law by a movement called *postivism* and *legal realism*, among other terms. This amounts to a relativistic cultural determination of law. Nevertheless, some of these types also claim natural law, at least that variety of natural law heavy on naturalism and atheism, which is not really natural law at all. (During the Enlightenment, natural law was renamed by modernist upstarts, who were claiming all sorts of Church and papal prerogatives.) In other words, in modern ethics the possibility that law is epigenetically encoded or discernible with reference to a supernatural dimension (Platonism) is disparaged, and positivists and legal realists believe that through reason, in a naturalistic way (historically), the preponderance of people, adhering to this or that law, proves the moral judgments, but this process is admittedly relative, based on a sliding scale of cultural and anthrolological assumptions. The naturalistic system is morally bankrupt. It provides no ultimate reason for law, and more often than not a series of assumptions are made which prove that the naturalists instinctively fall back on the concept of natural law as a humanistic (genetic) or eternal verity and disguise the fact with much sophistry. Natural law is a seductive force.

Chapter 3
Religious Doctrine

Certainly most Christians do not know about natural law. It is not the sort of thing most people would ever consider. But it is fundamental to Western culture in a philosophic sense. It touches virtually everything: government, jurisprudence, education, and the humanities. What's more surprising to the general reader is that, despite the immense cloud of confusion surrounding it, natural law is a religious doctrine and always has been. But it was not incidentally religious. It had not stumbled onto religion, as it were; but the doctrine began in religious thought. And priests would always exercise utmost dominance in the field of jurisprudence, if not as lawgivers then as lawyers. Here we see very simply a symbiosis of religion and politics, a very real connection in the nature of things, at least according to this world.* This connection is very powerful and profound. Is the murkiness of modern scholasticism an intentional smokescreen? Overwhelmingly, the perception is fostered that natural law should be qualified as wholly secular, if not outright atheist (naturalist). More likely, some of the naturalists are probably just stupid or disingenuous for aligning themselves with natural law.

The *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* website mentions the two forms of natural law, but only one has reference to morality.

> The term "natural law" is ambiguous. It refers to a type of mor-

> al theory, as well as to a type of legal theory,
>
> it is important to distinguish two kinds of theory that go by the name of natural law. The first is a theory of morality . . .
>
> The second thesis constituting the core of natural law moral theory is the claim that standards of morality are in some sense derived from, or entailed by, the nature of the world and the nature of human beings.

This is the metaphysical basis of natural law.

Entertaining the arguments of different types of natural law is necessary to get at the root of the doctrine. A few technical terms must be engaged; but, for the most part, I think that we can boil the argument down to two categories, the modernist variety, the atheistic, naturalist, and anthropological mode of natural law (but these positivist leanings go back to Aquinas), and what I call the *Neoplatonic* method, which itself may be a misnomer, but at least it suggests monotheism. It implies what, for lack of better terms, we can call *mystical divination*. (Not that the anthropological mode is not Neoplatonic. It is.)

The distinction between the two prompts the question, How can they be reconciled. "How can one claim natural law and propose laws apart from morality?" One cannot. An atheistic attempt to claim natural law is incoherent and thus disqualified. However, since Aquinas, and particularly the Enlightenment, the concept has appropriated a more naturalistic and postivistic character, even in Canon Law. This amalgamation seems to be part of a program, perhaps even a Hegelian dialectic.

Investopedia hosts a 2023 article entitled "Natural Law in Ethics" in which the author, Jessica Olah, provides a definition of natural law, which supports our more exclusive definition of the Neoplatonic type.

> Natural law is an ethical theory that claims that humans are born with a certain moral compass that guides behaviors. These inherited rules essentially distinguish the "rights" and "wrongs" in life. Under natural law, everyone is afforded the

> same rights, such as the right to live and the right to happiness. Natural law is evident in and shapes many of our laws, business policies, and human rights agendas. However, unlike these systems, its rules do not change and are inherently assigned to everyone.

"Rules do not change": they are immutable. At least they are purported to be in some sense although the actual method is relativistic. In addition to attempt to classify morality among empirical science, it can be viewed also as a religious statement. The next phrase, "are inherently assigned to everyone," is also an unfortunate use of words by the author. While nature can "assign" genetic traits, it does not well suit an atheistic paradigm. It sounds like God is inferred. But what god, and who to intercede?

Incoherence of this sort is found all over the academia. But the doctrine of natural law is incoherent.

Even Positivists Recognize Origin

In *Law as logic and experience* (1971), Max Radin represents the connection of religion to law in his introduction. He begins with Oliver Wendell Holmes against natural law.

> When Holmes said that the life of the law was experience and not logic, he was, as he knew, in opposition to an idea about law which was of respectable but not immeasurable antiquity. The Stoic Chryssipus in the third century B.C. had defined law as right reason proceeding from supreme Zeus, commanding what should be done and forbidding what should not be done. This definition, filtered through Cicero, the Renaissance, and Coke, was stated with unessential modifications by Blackstone and thus came to determine the attitude toward law on the part of judges and lawyers . . .

Max Radin was a prolific law professor at the University of California, Berkeley in the early decades of the 20th century. *Wikipedia* adds, regarding him:

> Of Radin's work, Justice William O. Douglas said: "His is part of the tradition of Holmes and Cardozo in his influence on the Law."

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Roscoe Pound, Benjamin Cardozo, and Max Radin (Cardozo and Radin were Jews) were all Legal Realists. Evidently, they chose the term *Realist* to intentionally contrast themselves from Catholic Realism which has reference to Platonism and is essentially Neoplatonic. Legal Realists are atheistic and emphasize a materialistic approach. It is embroiled in case law, lawyers haggling without any definitive statements of truth whatsoever; maybe some vague historical statements, but that is all. Witness their meaningless sophistry:

> "Reason," said Sir Edward Coke, "is the life of the law." The issue seems to be joined sharply enough between experience and reason, which is, of course, logic.

Why is this a miserable inanity? Because saying that reason is used in law is the most ridiculous platitude ever uttered. But they cannot answer the question, "Where does law originate, and what consitutes it?"

But maybe there is a point, after all. Benjamin Cardozo, a Supreme Court Justice, advocated that judges should also be law makers, thus anulling the Constitutional separation of powers.

Legal Realism is a uniquely American contribution to law. It contributes to swift destruction. Not to suggest that the natural law of traditional Realists is better. Traditional Realists, being Neoplatonists, may purport to snatch their philosophy from the grab bag of invisible Forms, but they essentially use the same processes. Neoplatonists add religious weight to their *Rational* justifications and pronouncements, which Legal Realists cannot claim. Legal Realists may have a reputation for greater honesty, but it is doubtful that anyone else will be convinced. Not only is legal realism also based on an airy nothing, people appreciate the certainty and comfort of divine interposition, no matter how fabricated.

Radin is a radical naturalist. He does not promote natural law but references it in his history of law. Modern man is too enlightened for all of the mumbo-jumbo of natural law. Radin traces its orgin to ancient religion.

But there is a similarity between Idealists (Platonic Realists) and Legal Realists (Nominalists or atheists), philosophers of law representing, for the most part, opposite philosophies. Both justify their pronouncements on humanist grounds, but Platonic Realists, though more disingenuous, have the grander claim. Apparently so, at any rate.

"The Natural Law Tradition in Ethics," a 2019 entry in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* online by Mark Murphy of Georgetown University is unusually frank:

> On the side of metaphysics, it is clear that the natural law view is incompatible with atheism:
>
> It is also clear that the paradigmatic natural law view rules out a deism on which there is a divine being but that divine being has no interest in human matters. Nor can one be an agnostic while affirming the paradigmatic natural law view: for agnosticism is the refusal to commit either to God's existence or nonexistence, whereas the paradigmatic natural law view involves a commitment to God's existence.

Religious adherents of natural law would seem to have thus despatched deism. But the truth is, rather, that deism, because of the weakness and incoherence of its premise,* is often qualified to accommodate natural law. In this way, deism is amalgamated with natural law, under the aegis of Rome.

Atheism and deism thus despatched, the

* Deism suggests, based on Creative Design, that a single Creator-God exists. But this in itself is not sufficient to meet the practical needs of the individual or society. Technically, like atheism, it is not a religion. But all law has religious underpinnings, and deists know this. In their desire to facilitate universalism, which deists almost always support, they inevitably ascribe to various religious tenets which are impossible to prove rationally. In other words, they support the function of religion as a stabilizer of society.

> natural law view is incompatible with a nihilism about value, that is, the rejection of the existence of values.

But the Devil to harry positivists is in the details.

> It is also incompatible with relativist and conventionalist views, on which the status of value is entirely relative to one's community or determined entirely by convention.

We can represent the weakness of any positivist claim to natural law as a syllogism. Many anthopocentric natural law adherents from the postivist and legal realist camp believe in nothing but cultural context. However, natural law requires a kind of universalism (it actually allows greater cosmopolitanism), which is either 1) a universally agreed-upon religion, a universal religious conception, or 2) a universally compulsory religion.

Paradigmatic Natural Law

The *Stanford Encyclopedia* provides the modern name to the religious impulse which seems to undergird natural law

> Aquinas was not the only historically important paradigmatic natural law theorist. Thomas Hobbes, for example, was also a paradigmatic natural law theorist. He held that the laws of nature are divine law (*Leviathan*, xv, ¶41), that all humans are bound by them (*Leviathan,* xv, ¶¶36), and that it is easy to know at least the basics of the natural law (*Leviathan*, xv, ¶35).

Paradigmatic natural law is the concept that natural law is predicated by a kind of biblical cosmology. *Paradigmatic* is based on the word *paradigm* which means "pattern." The reference is to a cosmological concept: specifically, theism. It is another way of speaking of *theistic* natural law. Presumably, the terminology was invented to obviate the offense it might cause atheists. The term *non-paradigmatic* is a disingenuous attempt to frame the

discussion in a way to allow atheists in on the game.

> There is of course no clear answer to the question of when a view ceases to be a natural law theory, though a nonparadigmatic one, and becomes no natural law theory at all.

The suggestion here is not really "When does a form of non-paradigmatic natural law cease to be natural law at all." Rather it emphasizes the problematic assertion that non-paradigmatic forms are natural law at all to begin with. Murphy's verbiage stresses the overweening dominance of that form of natural law which apparently has reference to biblical cosmology or Neoplatonism, which, for reasons which we will discuss, bears a resemblance to biblical cosmology. Most philosophers ascribe to the idea that the two are the same thing, but they cannot be. It certainly is not based on biblical cosmology, since the Bible does not comport with Rational divination, but it seems to have reference wholly to a pantheistic doctrine of mysticism which looks suspiciously biblical. In other words, outside some reference to Neoplatonism, natural law is scarcely conceivable. Nowadays, pains are taken by virtually everyone to emphasize the essential sameness of Christian cosmology and Neoplatonism? Why is this? Christian cosmology cannot be the same as paganism, but that is what Neoplatonism is. In fact, it seems to have been the most potent and socially cohesive force in Babylonian idolatry. It seems to have become so also in Rome.

Neoplatonism is very much like Hinduism. Not all practitioners of Hinduism are radical pantheists and polytheists. Many promote monism. Were Brahmin not monistic?

Natural law is a counterfeit. It can only exist at all, either as a shoddy copy of the original or a confabulation altogether, in a kind of secondary role to the original Law and Prophets and the Gospel. It birges, attempting to bask in the glory of the original in the hopes of garnering, by osmosis, not the light of the truth but honor and glory. The motivation is pride not truth. It often claims to be Christian but is actually humanistic.

In *The First Grace: Rediscovering the Natural Law in the Post-Christian World* (Notre Dame Press, 2002), Russell Hittinger, a

Catholic apologist, makes the case for paradigmatic, or theistic, natural law. He is in the minority these days. Most natural law theorists, so loathe to attribute to God any credence whatever, (even a *false* monotheistic god) but desirous to explain the source of a universal morality, pursue the more incoherent naturalistic course (incoherent with natural law doctrine).

> Discourse about natural law can gravitate toward any one or a combimnation of these three foci: law in the human mind, in nature, and in the mind of God.

Howard Kainz, in a 2014 article on *The Catholic Thing* website, "Do Natural Rights Really Exist?" promotes the theory of theistic natural law.

> if natural law is a law in any unequivocal sense, it implies a Lawgiver; and if there are any concomitant rights implied by natural law, these rights have been bestowed by the Lawgiver. Evolution, fellow feeling, social customs, etc. cannot function as lawgivers. If there is no Lawgiver as the source of natural law, then, for example, the judges at the famous Nuremberg trial at the end of World War II were appealing at most to the authoritative fact of the military victory by the allies, in their condemnation of Nazi officers and officials – many of whom were arguably within their rights according to the then-prevailing German civil laws.

But God cannot be the lawgiver mentioned here because God is not contacted in the pantheistic methods required of natural law. First of all, there is no natural law. It is the conscience. This is not a semantic issue. Sematics are involved in calling it *law*. The so-called lawgiver in such instances is the general moral compass of man, a point upon which we elaborate later. Certainly, one does not need law to tell us that the massacre of innocent people, the charge of the Nuremberg Trials, should be condemned. Nor, outside biblical law or even other codes, should it be considered as substantial as supposed empirical law.

Although I deal with the subject of pantheism at length in other books, perhaps I should explain my use of the term.

Christians view God as transcendent. God is independent from Creation, even if the Holy Spirit is viewed as maintaining life (Ecclesiastes 12: 6).* Other monotheistic systems view God in some sense connected to the universe, the *physical* universe, often in a process that I call "graduated or staged pantheism." Rather than Creation having originated at a point in time, the universe is, in some sense, constantly springing from Him. These systems qualify their ideas variously. Unitarians, for example, emphasis the peripatetic view, "the universe as God's thought." However, all of these systems are variations of Plato. Controversially, no doubt, I lump all monotheistic systems in two categories, God-as-transcendent and the pantheistic. Is it contradictory to call a monotheistic system *pantheistic*? Yes, but the adherents are the ones calling it *monotheism*. I attempt to clarify. What they call *monotheism* really has pantheistic overtones. One product of modern philosophy which disingenuously attempts to bridge the gap, resulting in the staged pantheism I mentioned above, is *panentheism*.

But the facts are these: Since the transcendent God cannot be contacted outside Jesus Christ ("No man cometh unto the Father but by Me," John 14: 6b), any system that purports, in whatever manner the proposition is qualified, to communicate with Him or even perceive invisible attribute of Him in nature (Why? Because Jesus said, "I am . . . the *truth*," John 14: 6a) is pantheistic error.** While natural law theory may allow that God, in a deistic sense, had made law (Platonic Forms) implicit or inherent in the universe, "immanent," yet still maintain His transcendence (panentheism), it cannot escape the accusation of subjectivism because its objectivity cannot be proved. Be that as it may, in point of fact, natural law is Neoplatonic. It resembles biblical cosmology but allows for mysticism, which is usually called *Rationalism*. In any event, Roman Catholics (or Roman

* This need not be particularly contradictory. Evolution is a central tenet of pantheism: that is, reality is constantly in a process of creation.

** Romans 1: 20 does say "the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen . . ." but Paul is speaking of the manifest proofs of God's handiwork in Creation not pagan mysteries via mysticism.

sympathizers) claim that it comes from Jesus Christ, but their method too is wholly Neoplatonic. Historical Neoplatonism is avowedly pagan, thus pantheistic.

Inconvenient Truth

Disregarding biblical revelation, cherry-picking which laws to consider authoritative, based upon the standard of man, shall we say, with double meaning, the "rule" of man, humanism, and opting for divination, however it may be qualified, is not wise.

Proverbs 13: 13-14:

> Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed: but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.
>
> The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.

What is the "law of the wise"? It is the fear of the LORD. Proverbs 14: 27:

> The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.

Heeding the Bible is the fear of the LORD. Doing so is wise, from a practical juridical perspective, as Hebrews 4: 12 says:

> For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Ancient History: Platonism

Chapter 4
Plato and Natural Law

Paradigmatic natural law is theistic natural law. But where did all of this start? John Wild, in *Platos' Modern Enemies and the Theory of Natural Law* (1953), says that Plato was the inventor of natural law. It was first cogently formulated by Plato, but it seems to have predated even Judaism.

Ancient Origins

Natural law, a universally human response to the need for a moral justification for law, predated Plato. But it appears to have claimed a religious justification from the beginning. That said, however much an objective order was religiously justified, the reality of lawmaking was different. Laws were nonetheless made on a humanistic basis. In this sense, it was little different from the atheistic, positivist view. Frankly, it is the method of false prophets, insofar as natural law proponents claim connection to an objective moral order. Given this, postivism is more honest. Even those modern positivists which claim affinity to natural law only do so because the terminology has been changed. But David Hume* showed the contradiction of naturalists claiming

* Hume propounded natural religion. While natural religion can allow for natural law, technically it only does so in that form of natural religion which allows for mysticism, though mysticism is qualified with different terms. The

natural law in its traditional Realist (Idealist) sense.

The Seven Pillars Institute (*.org*) online, an article entitled "Natural Law Theory - An Explanation," notes his objection.

> There are two main objections to Natural Law Theory, both raised during the Enlightenment period (17th and 18th centuries). The first, advanced by Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-1776), is that Natural Law Theory conflates that which is the case with that which *ought* to be the case. One cannot, as Hume pointed out, logically derive a moral imperative or value judgment simply by observing facts of nature. Natural Law theorists often argue, for example, that because God's laws (and laws of nature in this case) dictate the purpose of sexual intercourse is reproduction, it is unnatural and thus, *immoral* to have sex for any other purpose. The fallaciousness of this reasoning is especially obvious when we consider natural tendencies which, are seemingly irreconcilable with ethical behavior. For example, if one concedes that it is natural for human beings to care for themselves before strangers, then one must also accept that this *ought* to be the case (Rachels, 2007: 60-61).

Nevertheless, Hume did propound a type of natural law, but he revised the definition, establishing modernist appropriation of the term, to accommodate biology and social tradition.

> The second argument against Natural Law Theory is the theory's assumption that moral principles are written in the laws of nature (or by God). Modern science contradicts this assumption. The scientific perspective sees only cause and effect in the natural world; morals and values, it claims, are inventions of the human mind. From this worldview, the continued use of Natural Law Theory in the Catholic Church (where it is most prominent) is a holdover from Medieval thought (Rachels, 2007: 61).

This Humean language is used by Hans Kelsen in "Plato and the Doctrine of Natural Law," an article in the *Vanderbilt Law Review* (1960). Kelsen underscores this interpretation and shows

---

anthropocentric view of natural law is untenable.

the drawbacks of the anthropological view:

> The assertion that norms of the correct, just law are immanent in the empirical reality of nature could only be proved if an analysis of this reality could actually show a system of incontestable norms for the proper conduct of men as such an analysis shows a series of generally recognized, verifiable causal laws. Despite centuries of effort in this direction there has been no success.

Notice that he introduces a word which is inferred in all the literature, but most scholars are loathe to mention it because of the proposition it insinuates: "immanence." While he, by no means, has yet proved his point, Kelsen is clearly pocking holes in the prevaling theories by showing the hypocrisy.

> That which the proponents of the doctrine of natural law claim to have deduced from nature is in reality subjective—value judgments which they have projected into nature and which they retrieve from nature as objectively valid norms . . .
>
> Nature as empirical reality is an aggregate of facts causally linked together. It is the answer to the question, "What is?" and why it is. The answer to the question, "What ought to be?" therefore can not be found in nature.
>
> Since norms which command good and prohibit evil constitute values, particularly social values, the assumption that these norms can be determined by an analysis of empirical reality means that value is immanent in reality. Thereby the dualism of reality and value—or more generally formulated—of the "is" and the "ought"—is rejected.
>
> In respect to the relationship of the "is" and the "ought" the doctrine of natural law has a monistic character.

This is in keeping with the anthopological theory. However, it contains a fallacy, which is exposed by Neoplatonists.

> But this monism is in contradiction to the irrefutable fact

> that the assertion that something is has a completely different meaning from the assertion that something ought to be. To this many proponents of natural law declare that the immanence of value in reality which they assume does not mean the identity of the two; the "is" and the "ought" are to be distinguished.

But Kelsen also suggests that anthoplogical *positivism* or *legal realism* is itself a kind of Platonic dualism. We will speak more of the various terminology that has developed, but it is best to do it in historical context. Now we start at the beginning. We must consider the ancient, indeed universal, impulse to natural law.

Pre-Hellenistic

Modern interest in Neoplatonic natural law is a reaction to the failure of "progress," Kelsen says; failure of the bankrupt, scientistic, Marxist, naturalistic idea* that man improves morally through history. In this sense, Roman Catholicism has greatly benefited; although Rome employs the same methods.

> As a result of the shocks which the existing social orders have experienced through two World Wars and the Russian Revolution, an intellectual movement is becoming increasingly evident in the Western World—one which, in sharp reaction to a scientific-positivistic and relativistic philosophy, aims at a return to metaphysics and theology, and—closely connected with this—to a renewal of the doctrine of natural law. The proponents of this trend believe they find valuable support in the philosophy of Plato, whose authority until recently was virtually uncontested—and in this they are justified.

* I was about to say "anthropological," in terms of the modern science of anthropology, the manner in which Hume and others in natural religion used the term. But this term also denotes Thomist natural law and is linked to Realist thought. This is manner in which the term appears in most natural law literature. Although tempted often to speak of modern anthropology, I try to be consistent by using the term "anthropological" with reference to the Thomist naturalistic variant of natural law, since this is our subject matter.

Many scholars have opened their minds to Plato's Ideas (Forms), but, at the time of Kelsen's writing, only two were stumping for natural law, Joseph P. Maguire (*Plato's Theory of Natural Law*, 1947) and John Wild (*Platos' Modern Enemies and the Theory of Natural Law*, 1953).

> Wild goes so far as to assert that Plato is the founder of the theory of natural law.

Kelsen clarifies terms. "Realistic" in modern parlance refers to "Legal Realism" which is the naturalistic view. What Kelsen calls "Idealism" has essentially supplanted the Catholic terminology "Realism." It alludes to Plato's Ideas, his Forms.

> The so-called doctrine of natural law is a variety of certain theories of law, which may be designated idealistic, and which, in contrast to a realistic theory of law, assume that there is, beside and above the real or positive law established by human acts—custom or legislation—an ideal law, just or correct.

The modern terminology is arguably better. Like most things Roman Catholic, the term *Realism* is an inversion of the simple facts of reality. The term *Idealism*, however, suits the doctrine in two ways: it is "idealistic" in a conventional sense, that is, "fanciful"; and—this seems to be the reason for the nomenclature—Plato's Forms are also called *Ideas* or perhaps *Ideals*.

> The idealistic theories of law, of which the doctrine of natural law is only a particular case, are characterized by a *dualism* of two legal orders, one ideal and one real, whereas the realistic theory of law recognizes only one form of law, *positive* law, and by not seeking the reason for its validity in a superior normative order thus dispenses with a justification for positive law.

Notice that anthopological positivism seeks no reason for its validity. How can any endeavor claim authority and have no bearing to truth, particularly one as crucial as jurisprudence? It has a reason, but the reason is largely a historical justification and beyond that the possibly that law is genetically inherent

(which is closely aligned with natural law), at least in a social sense: this is the anthropological view. The truth of positivism is quixotic, shifting relativism.

However, natural law provided a semblance of certainty. Seven Pillars Institute (*.org*) online "Natural Law Theory - An Explanation" provides a definition.

> Natural Law Theory proposes that as physical laws of nature exist, so do universal moral laws. These laws disclose themselves to us upon close examination of the world and the nature of humans. Aspects of natural law theory date back to Plato, who posited the existence of transcendental "Forms" (Plato, 1992).

This is an essential doctrine of natural law, that immanent moral law exists with the certainty of laws of nature. Among other problems, this theory rests upon the fallacy that laws of nature even exist. The supposed "laws of nature" are known by scientists to be, in every instance, themselves theories. While this is admittedly a semantic argument, it is substantial and is in no way an equivocation of my thesis.

Empirical Morals?

The website *Answers in Genesis* does a great job of correcting some fundamental nonsense about natural law theory. First off, author Werner Gitt* says cosmological and ethical questions are outside the realm of science. Science establishes the regularity of relationships, this is all. Then he notes another a problem. There is a legitimate question whether there are even any laws of nature. Not only can one not equate supposed immanent moral law with empirical laws of nature, so far from proving moral law, empirical law cannot be proven.

* Werner Gitt is the author of *Did God Use Evolution?* (1993), *In the Beginning was Information: A Scientist Explains the Incredible Design in Nature* (1997), and *Information: The Key to Life* (2023).

Gitt cites Hans Sachsse, a German chemist, to this effect.

> Conclusions about matters that do fall within the scope of (natural) science can be formulated with varying degrees of certainty. The certainty or uncertainty of the results can be expressed in various ways.
>
> If the truth of a statement is verified repeatedly in a reproducible way so that it is regarded as generally valid, then we have a natural law.
>
> Statements about natural events can be classified according to the degree of certainty, namely: models, theories, hypotheses, paradigms, speculations, and fiction.

This is a syllogism. Proven statements equal laws of nature. But proven statements are qualified. Therefore, laws of nature are qualified. The supposed "laws of nature" are expressible in varying degrees from models to fiction.

Nobel laureate Max Born says:

> Ideas like absolute correctness, absolute accuracy, final truth, etc. are illusions which have no place in any science. With one's restricted knowledge of the present situation, one may express conjectures and expectations about the future in terms of probabilities. In terms of the underlying theory, any probabilistic statement is neither true nor false.

Similarly Wolfgang Wieland:*

> Ideas originally formulated as working hypotheses for further investigation, possess an inherent persistence. The stability accorded established theories (in line with Kuhn's conception), is of a similar nature. It only appears that such theories are tested empirically, but in actual fact observations are always explained in such a way that they are consistent with the preestablished theories. It may even happen that observations are

* Wolfgang Wieland is a theoretical physicist at the University of Freiburg, Germany.

twisted for this purpose.

When it comes to collisions between paradigms and empirical reality, the latter usually loses, according to Kuhn's findings.

Kuhn* said that scientific fact was gauged by nothing other than the "number of its sworn-in adherents." This is consensus. Evidently, even empirical fact is a democratic affair, a political affair.

The unprovability of the laws of nature has been characterized as follows by R.E. Peierls, a British physicist [P1, p 536]:

> Even the most beautiful derivation of a natural law . . . collapses immediately when it is refuted by subsequent research. . . . Scientists regard these laws as being what they are: Formulations derived from our experiences, tested, tempered, and confirmed through theoretical predictions and in new situations. Together with subsequent improvements, the formulations would only be accepted as long as they are suitable and useful for the systematization, explanation, and understanding of natural phenomena.

Nevertheless, for practical purposes, since much of science is utilitarian and not theoretial,

The law of the unity of nature (the universal validity of laws of nature) will hold until a counter example is found.

The laws of energy and gravity, the law of energy conservation, the second law of thermodynamics, and the like.

All known observations indicate that the laws of nature have never changed. It is generally assumed that the known laws are constant over time, but this is also merely an observation that cannot be proven.

* *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* online says that Thomas Kuhn was perhaps the most influential philosopher of science in the 20th century.

The supposed laws of nature as employed by science are meaningful. They provide a better understanding of natural phenomena and events; enable predictions; make technological development possible; make reasonable predictions and other scientific discoveries possible as well.

Gitt concludes the article by classifying the laws of nature. They are theorems: conservation theorems, equivalence theorems, directional theorems, and impossibility theorems. They are all theories.

What is so shocking is that in an inverse way, positivists as well as natural law advocates use the shifting nature of scientific probability to vindicate their own promotion of relativistic law. This is more insanity than likening an immanent moral law to the supposed certitude of empirical law.

The facts are these: God's law (legal and revelation in the Bible) is more certain than supposed facts of physical science, but this does not mean that God's law is immanent. There does seem to be a moral sensibility in man, to which God, on some level, holds man accountable. But His written law is really the immovable reality. It is immutable. It is the intractable reality from which man will not escape; namely, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Dimension

In "A Secular Theory of Natural Law" Lloyd L. Weinreb, a Professor of Law at Harvard Law, attempts to convince the Fordham Natural Law Colloquium (the paper being a copy of his speech to them) that there is good reason to be enthusiastic about the application of natural law philosophy in law courts, if the discussion is qualified. By focusing on the naturalistic and Rational aspects one can dismiss the uncomfortable suggestion that the law system in the United States is governed by religious ideas, namely Catholic ideas.

My intention is to return to the original natural law tradition,

> the tradition out of which the doctrines of Thomas emerged, and to ask whether, those doctrines apart, anything can be found in the tradition that speaks to our present circumstances.
>
> A distinct philosophy of natural law emerged clearly in fifth century Athens.

The Greeks assumed that a spiritual or supernatural dimension existed, says Weinreb. This naturally coalesced in a kind of national psyche in Socrates, who promoted some Creator-type god which was in a different category than general polytheism. Scholars have long remarked upon this fact. Since the first century, with the ascendancy of the church, the conversation has been so dominant that virtually everything else has been ignored, the cacophony drowning out the Bible. Platonism was identified with Christianity.

> There is a direct line from these ruminations, by way of the Greek and Roman Stoics and later the Roman lawyers and Church fathers and Christian theologians, to Thomas Aquinas. Cicero, not himself an original thinker, provided the phrase "natural law." Brought into contact with Christian belief in a personal, all-embracing God, the normative natural order of the Greeks became Divine Providence, in which human beings, able in some measure to provide for themselves, have a share.

This was Neoplatonism. "As regards their philosophy," says Charles Bigg, in his 1895 *Neoplatonism*, "they were purely Greek."

Platonic Mysticism

Neoplatonism by Charles Bigg (1895),* a volume in the Chief

* Charles Bigg was a Church of England clergyman, theologian, and church historian. Pastor of Christ Church in Oxford, he delivered Divinity Lecture Sermons at the University of Oxford. These were published in 1886 as *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria*.

Ancient Philosophies series of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, naturally enough, as the title suggests, speaks of later developments in Platonism. But he begins with Plato. Although we will discuss Neoplatonism in more detail later, it is salient for us to realize that Platonic mysticism, which was present from the beginning, *is* Neoplatonism. And natural law is impossible without Platonic mysticism, however it is qualified.

> the *Timaeus*, the Platonic Book of Genesis. Jowett called the *Timaeus* "the most obscure and repulsive to the modern reader of all the writings of Plato," and the reader, who does not mind obscurity, is puzzled by a further difficulty, whether the dialogue is to be taken seriously or regarded as a mere jeu d'esprit. But there can be no doubt that the later Platonists took it very seriously indeed. They found in it the keystone of the Platonic system; and if Plato had a system at all it is certainly here that its leading principles should make themselves felt, for the subject is nothing less than the relation of God to the world and to man. Now in the Timaeus God is expressly distinguished from the ideas. They are the "eternal pattern," to which God looked when He created the world.

This is Neoplatonism in a nutshell. It is the premise that God Himself is beholden to the eternal verities of the Forms. Because men can access the Forms they can in effect compete with God. Neoplatonism not only maintains the eternality of the world but also the eternality of the spiritual realm, all being natural.

People may have problems with the *Timaeus*, but it was not a fluke for Socrates. The problem rests upon the preconception that readers bring to the material. This blinds them. Socrates himself skirted dangerously close to pantheism.* As Bigg characterizes it:

> Plato distinguishes between two worlds, the invisible and the visible, the spiritual and the material. The first is the eternal pattern of the second; the second exists, only as it "participates in," reproduces, the first. The first is the world of Being, the

* Reference my introductory statement about pantheism.

> second of Becoming; because here all things are born, grow, decay, and die.

This "becoming" is connected by some, like the Illuminati, with reincarnation; others, spiritual evolution: self-actualization or Hinduistic godhood.

The influence of Aristotle was pivotal to the development of Neoplatonic thought:

> men held that God thinks His own thoughts, and that the world, in which we live, is a copy of the Divine Mind. The former of the two propositions is in fact the Aristotelian doctrine that God "thinks Himself." Perhaps this is the best instance of the sense, in which the Neoplatonists were eclectic. It is evident how greatly their native system gained in simplicity and coherency by this adaptation of a Peripatetic formula.

For example, the Neoplatonist

> . . . Alcinous identified the intelligible world with the mind of God.

Plato's World-Soul is a pantheistic counterfeit of the Holy Spirit, which can be accessed by mysticism. But, curiously, in Neoplatonism, it is called,

> "the only begotten and created heaven," "a blessed god," and is said to have received soul and intelligence through the providence of God.

This interpolation of a third person (third in the development of the religious philosophy) actually seems to have been prompted by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is preached in the Gospel.

> It is not in their thought, but in their mysticism that we must seek for Oriental influences if they are to be found at all. Even here there was a Greek root. Mysticism is of all countries and all times.

> quickened by the increasing influence of the Mysteries; and of these the most powerful form was the Egyptian superstition of Isis.
>
> Here arises the question, whether Mysticism in the shape given to it by the Neoplatonists, was essential to their system, or whether it was really a foreign adjunct . . . . we must postpone the point, till Plotinus has shown us what the Neoplatonic mystic was at its best.

We will explore a concomittant idea which Bigg may be suggesting here later. Certainly others noticed that Neoplatonism did not congeal until, and probably as a reaction to, Christianity. In any event, Neoplatonic mysticism was inherent in Plato.

> Yet it is to be observed, that there is not a single element in the new combination, which is not to be found in Plato himself. Plotinus merely defined and arranged in logical sequence, what the *Timaeus* tells us . . .
>
> in Neoplatonism as a system there is not one single idea, that does not flow in a straight line from the dialogues of Plato himself.

Monotheism

In "Platonic Mysticism" (2017) Arthur Versluis distinguishes the Platonic nature of mysticism.

> That we focus on this current of mysticism originating with Plato and Platonism and feeding into Christianity should not be understood as suggesting that there is no mysticism in other traditions. Rather, by focusing on Christian mysticism, we see much more clearly what is meant by the term "mysticism," and *because* we are concentrating on a particular tradition, we will be able to recognize whether and to what extent similar currents are to be found in other religious traditions. At the same time, to understand Christian mysticism, we must be-

> gin with Platonism, because the Platonic tradition provides the metaphysical context for understanding its latest expression in Christian mysticism.

The common denominator here is monotheism. Platonism and Christianity seemed similar because Platonism ostensibly supported monotheism. But Platonism is inevitably pantheistic, thus the term *monism* used in the contexts which are ostensibly Neoplatonic.

Neoplatonism and Hellenism

> Vacherot . . . regards Neoplatonism as an energetic reaction of Hellenism against foreign influences.*

Can you guess the catalyst for the reaction? What were the "foreign influences"?

> These were no doubt of many kinds; but the most menacing were either directly Christian or set in motion by Christianity.

Celsus was an example of angry alarm at Christianity.

We have more to say about Neoplatonism and Hellenism, defining them and exploring the topics a little, but, suffice to say at this point, Neoplatonism is glorified Platonism, a later syncreticstic development designed to counter Christianity. In some aspects it counterfeited Christianity.

As we discuss these topics they will overlap one another. Ideas interweave in an arabesque, but they coalesce somewhat inchoately like a flock of birds.

Liberal Toehold

"The Natural Law Tradition in Ethics," a 2019 entry in the

* Charles Bigg, *Neoplatonism*, 1895.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy online by Mark Murphy of Georgetown University

> when we focus on God's role as the giver of the natural law, the natural law is just one aspect of divine providence.

There are extra-biblical moral and ethical laws, which can be ascertained somehow. Naturally, to lend repectability to the concept, it is suggested that these are ascertained rationally. But they are *divined*. It stands to reason that in a system where God has hidden laws, which, ostensibly, He is willing to reveal to man, that only holy men would be granted this knowledge, or the most comprehensive grasp of it. Holy men, not necessarily the most rational unless rationality and holiness are considered analogously. In most modern systems of thought, they are. It is sacerdotalism, judge as priest and prophet or vice-versa.

Irresistible

There is a kind of inevitability to natural law.

> The history of natural law is a tale of the search of mankind for absolute justice and of its failure. Again and again, in the course of the last 2,500 years, the idea of natural law has appeared, in some form or other, as an expression of the search for an ideal higher than positive law after having been rejected and derided in the interval. With changing social and political conditions the notions about natural law have changed. The only thing that has remained constant is the appeal to something higher than positive law.*

> The concept of natural law has taken several forms. The idea began with the ancient Greeks conception of a universal governed in every particular by an eternal, immutable law and in their distinction between what is just by nature and just by

* "Greek Theory of Natural Law" (2021) by Manmeet Singh on the website of Legal Services of India.

convention.

It was a Hellenistic idea, but it found practical application in government and law with the Roman Stoics. Stoicism itself was very Roman, and the Patrician class, later Equestrians also, were educated in the philosophy and implemented it in government.

Chapter 5
Roman Stoicism

Positivists (atheistic, naturalistic) deal not at all with the philosophic basis of law. The closest that Radin comes is to say that it is Roman. The philosophic basis is deferred. With regard to most laws, men decided in times past what they would be. Radin does note the Stoics as the chief influence on Roman law. *The New Encyclopædia Britannica* (15th edition, 1998) says that through the Stoics the Romans incorporated natural law. The Stoics, in distinction from Aristotle, who employed a general social-historical positivist examination of law,

> conceived an entirely egalitarian law of nature in conformity with the "right reason," or Logos, inherent in the human mind.

This is pure Platonism. "Egalitarian law of nature" simply means that it is inherent in the cosmos to be apprehended by whom would. While Platonists had developed ideas about the Logos prior to the Gospel according to John (John 1: 1),* this

* *Logos* first appears in Heraclitus (c. 535 – c. 475 BC), who seemed to conceive of it as a universal reason with which human reason could interface. *Wikipedia* says, "The Stoics spoke of the *logos spermatikos* (the generative principle of the Universe) which foreshadows related concepts in Neoplatonism." It adds: "Within Hellenistic Judaism, Philo (c. 20 BC – c. 50 AD) integrated the term into Jewish philosophy. Philo distinguished between *logos prophorikos* ("the uttered word") and the *logos endiathetos* ("the word remaining within")." The Stoics referenced Platonism and Philo, both Platonism and the Old Testament. Apparently some general idea of a God principle predated John,

concept was not widely popularized until the Neoplatonism of the second century, which aped Christianity with duplicitous motive.

The author of "Natural Law Theory - An Explanation," on the website of the Seven Pillars Institute (*.org*), online concurs.

> While Plato alluded to what we today refer to as "natural law," the Stoics developed the theory more fully. The Stoics claim the order of the universe is fundamentally rational. Human rationality, therefore, is a person's innate moral compass. To reason and act rationally is to be in harmony with the universe. Violence and vice are consequences of irrationality and not being in harmony with universal laws.

Manmeet Singh, in "Greek Theory of Natural Law" (2021) on the website of Legal Services of India, also notes Stoicism.

> Stocism provided the most complete classical formulation of natural law. The Stoics argued that the universe is governed by reason, or rational principle; they further argued that all humans have reason within them and can therefore know and obey its law. Because human beings have the faculty of choice (a free will), they will not necessarily obey the law; if they act in accordance with reason, however, they will be "following nature."

Radin traces most moral valuations of modern society to the Republic, from whence it spread to the subsequent Empire, and beyond, eventually to the whole world. Traditional Roman Stoicism seems to be the underlying cause of law as far as he can tell. What was Stoicism? The Stoics were Platonists. Stoicism was a form of Neoplatonism. Radin does not say this, but it is

---

but its prevalence in Judaism and Neoplatonism transpired during the Christian era. That said, there is no problem with John 1: 1. There is a rational God with whom rational man should be able to converse. John is simply saying that any such conversation only transpires in Christ Jesus, discounting the Platonic notion. He utilized the concept in a way similar to that employed by the Apostle Paul at Mars Hill in speaking of the Unknown God (Acts 17: 23). It was designed to establish grounds for communication.

a fact, nonetheless. Therefore, he stumbles out of the starting gates. Having conceded the religious justification for law, that is *natural law*, without realizing it, he never regains a commanding position.

Roman Stoicism

In *Handbook of Roman Law* (1927), Radin propounds the moral justification for the entire corpus of Roman law. It is the brazenly hypocritical idea of "equity and natural law."

> the famous dictum *ius est ars boni et æqui*—"law is the art of doing equity" . . .

(Why is it hypocritical? Natural law claims universality. As we demonstrate, conscience can be influenced and swayed. Since natural law is equated with conscience, justice is corrupted. Nothwithstanding the fact that, generally, the idea of equity is a good rule of thumb for positive law.)

As with the modern positivists and legal realists, the Stoic method seemed to be embroiled in relativitistic case law. And this was certainly true.

> The mass of doctrine which these books [Roman law] contain is in no sense an application of a general philosophical or ethical or legal theory. It is, on the contrary, the rationalization of concrete applications. It is very decidedly a case law, in which the cases are related, classified, reconciled, and systematized.

However, early Romans, other cultures as well, considered equitability to be an outgrowth of nature, predicated evidently by biology or some spiritual principle. This is natural law. What is significant about this is that the *ius naturae*, which was largely based on Stoic teaching, was an "imagined ideal." Their natural law, as we shall see, was based on Platonism. While it may have participated with a concept of conscience, it definitely entailed a spiritual dimension. This feature does not align with biblical

cosmology: it does not comport with the facts of reality, the Bible establishing the truth of reality.*

The Bible supports the notion of conscience (Romans 2: 15) but not mysticism. Since natural law is in some sense part of nature or accessible through nature, it can justifiably be called either *naturalistic* or *pantheistic*.

Is God interested in equity? Of course. In Mark 12: 29-31, Jesus Christ Himself establishes man's responsibility to man. But His citation of Leviticus 19: 18 is prefaced by something:

> The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:
>
> And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.
>
> And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

But the "first of all the commandments," from Deuteronomy 6: 4-5, is to love God. It is not only the first chronologically. It is first in preeminence. But, be that as it may, any attempt to establish a moral justification for the law with only equity in view, to the exclusion of God, is erroneous. It is humanism. And claiming reference to God in any extra-biblical sense, without reference to the written word, is itself a clever ruse. One cannot know about God and His Law apart from the Bible.

Radin connects the Late Roman Empire with the traditions

* I do want to suggests that in some sense God has not fostered some cultures, though they be heathen, because they were more inclined to right behavior, because they adhered, somehow, to a knowledge of God's ways; a condition that can either be explained by the sanguinity of personality type or maintenance of the transmission of the knowledge of God (from the teaching of Adam, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Shem, etc.). Midrashic gloss seems to be correct: the Tower of Babel dispersion was designed, among other things, for this very purpose. But speculating about it is senseless. The Bible tells us right and wrong. It is the unequivocal law not a vague biological explanation, which in any event, says nothing about the strange decrees which can originate in the flesh, the carnal nature. Certainly no extra-biblical mysticism will do.

of Stoicism. But could not the Roman Catholic clergy be seen here as well?

> For one reason or another a great many of the future jurists and magistrates of Rome were trained in Stoic schools. The "law of nature"—law in accordance with nature—was a familiar concept to many philosophic systems, but was one in which the Stoics were peculiarly interested, and about which they had much to say.
>
> In some, at least, of the Stoic writings, we meet the concept of the Cosmopolis, a "City of God" or "City of the World," an ideal state, which was neither a past Golden Age nor a future Paradise, but wholly removed from limitations of time, and an actual contemporary fact for those who could enter it; and any one by an effort of the will could enter. It was in this ideal community that the law of nature prevailed, and this law was a law of perfect equality, in which what seemed to most men fundamental distinctions did not exist. Here, as in the City of God of St. Paul (Gal. 3, 28; Heb. 12, 22), there were no free or slave, no Greeks or barbarians, and no men or women.29 The rules of conventional morality fared as badly as those of social differentiation, and opinions on these matters were gravely pronounced, which shock us as they shocked their own time.

Marcus Aurelius is extolled, of course. According to George Karamanolis, in his *The Philosophy of Early Christianity* (2013), the Emperor, himself a famous Stoic, established a school of Stoic philosophy in Rome. But his persecution of Christians is swept under the rug.

The topic of Stoicism is often brought up in the philosophy of natural law. Why is this? Because Stoics were idealistic. Under the surface of "nature" lay the fanciful dreams of the law. But notice what Radin says:

> But the Stoics had neither a completely consistent nor a fixed and unchanging doctrine. Many of them were rather muddle-headed . . .*

* Max Radin, *Handbook of Roman Law*, 1927.

When Christianity came many Stoics claimed Christianity because of its ineffable certitude, but much Stoic Rationalism would not comport.

> and the clearer thinkers among them were careful to push the troublesome and revolutionary conception of a perfect equality and a complete freedom from convention into the City of God, that natural state which lay just outside—but after all quite outside—the city of flesh and blood, of mortar and stones, in which men were in fact living . . .

The more profound the Stoic thinker, the more despair and perhaps cynicism. Why——? Because their "City of God" had nothing to substantiate the hope. Christianity provided one, but it was mutually exclusive of much Rationalist thought, which included the dominionist idea.

Radin is saying that Augustine's City of God was a pagan dream, spawned in the hearts of Stoics. Dominionism was a Stoic dream. The City of God being the City of the World was not a messianic dream. It is Satanic to the core. Of course, the dream was adopted by Roman Catholicism, the heir of Rome.

Radin's tome truly is the *Handbook of Roman Law*. But the voluminous pages are so much frittering about case law, without the moral justification once expounded. The fact that the section on "Equity and Natural Law" is only four pages and this represents the whole of Roman law, the idealism of the Stoics, illustrates the point.

In "Natural Law and Natural Rights," an article in the *Yale Law Journal* (1950), Radin writes:

> . . . Hellenistic philosophy like Stoicism had much the function of a religion in the modern sense for the Greeks and Romans. And the Stoic emphasis on world-citizenship was shared in theory by Cynics and Epicureans, and had earlier precursors among pre-Hellenistic Greeks.

In his 1895 *Neoplatonism*, Charles Bigg says that the words *Hellenism*, *Rationalism*, and *Idealism* are virtually synonyms.

Idealism, which is the modern term referring to Plato's Forms, or Ideas—it was formerly called *Realism* (Catholic Platonism)—itself is Neoplatonism. Therefore, these terms, *Hellenism*, *Rationalism*, and *Idealism* are also synonyms of *Neoplatonism*.

Are Radin and the lawyers superficial? They comprehend nothing of the vagaries in the transition from pagan Rome to Christianized Rome. Perhaps there was no difference? While the Neoplatonic system remained much the same, the whole process would be qualified uniquely. Natural law would be inevitably and irrevocably conditioned by Roman Catholicism.

In *Jews Among the Greeks and Romans* (1915) Radin shows how natural law originated in religion. The account is almost verbatim of that in *Handbook of Roman Law*, very succinct, one or two paragraphs. And this is his final word on the subject of the origin of natural law, we can assume that this is as far as his expertise goes. It is simply a nod in the direction of the priests. But he quickly scuttles away as if he does not want to illuminate it for too long. Were one to meditate upon the insight one might realize the truth.

> Natural law—the only law properly so-called, for the Stoics—was, according to them, right reason emanating from Zeus, commanding what was good and forbidding the opposite. And the Stoic Zeus was not the lusty Olympian, but an almost abstract godhead, the World-Soul, symbolized by the flame of reason in the human soul. What all men did or did not do was irrelevant to what Reason, if obeyed, would impel them to do.

Radin does not elaborate, and one wonders if he understood at all. The code of Zeus was the legislation of priests, period. Reference to the Platonic World-Soul proves that the Stoics were involved with Neoplatonic mysticism. What's more, this mumbo-jumbo is called "Reason," by Radin, with a capital "R." Of course, Radin is only parroting Enlightenment philosophers, who themselves were weak-minded.

The following seems to be the justification for calling natural law "reason":

> Natural law could . . . be arrived at by thinking about it.

No one thought more than sophists; no one, more barren of truth.

Radin does not directly say that law originates in religion, but he incidentally demonstrates it, nonetheless.

Priestly Caste

In *Jews Among the Greeks and Romans* (1915), Max Radin himself a Jew (the book published by The Jewish Publication Society of America), mentions "Roman Religious Concepts."

> Roman religious ideas were in many respects like those of the Greeks, partly because they were borrowed from the Greeks and partly because they were common to all the nations of the Mediterranean world.

Romans were glorified Greeks. Radin had already discussed the Greeks and concluded that

> The religion briefly and imperfectly sketched in this chapter was not really a system at all. There is a deal of incoherency in it, of cross-purposes and contradiction. There was no priestly caste among the Greeks to gather into a system the confused threads of religious thinking.

The Greeks had no unified priestly caste. But the Romans would organize religious thinking. It was pretty cogent during the Republic but became unmanageably diffuse as the Empire wore on. Nevertheless, the Neoplatonic core held things together. About that time, Christianity showed up.

But, by that time, something had changed with the Romans. Their eclecticism resulted in the lowest common denominator.

> The openness of the Romans to foreign religious influences is an outcome of a conception, common enough, but more pro-

nounced among the Romans than anywhere else.

"Greek Theory of Natural Law" (2021) by Manmeet Singh on the website of Legal Services of India alludes to this.

> Natural law has fulfilled many functions. It has been the principle instrument in the transformation of the old civil law of the Romans into a broad and cosmopolitan system . . .

But Radin seems to confirm that mysticism was a bequest of the Greeks. Stoicism was originally Greek, although Romans of the Republic adhered to many of its tenets.

> During the vogue of comparative mythology, the Roman myths were principally discussed, and the patent fact that these were mere translations from the Greek seemed a complete summing up of Roman religion. It is only when the actual Roman calendar, as recorded on stone during the reign of Augustus, came to be studied that the real character of Roman religion began to be apprehended.

Roman religion was ceremonial magic on an epic scale.

> The results of this study have made it clear that during the highest development of the Roman state the official religious ritual was based upon pastoral and agricultural conditions that could scarcely be reached even in imagination. Propitiatory and dramatic rites carried out with painful precision, unintelligible formularies carefully repeated, ceremonial dances in which every posture was subject to exact regulation, all these things indicate an anxious solicitude for form that is ordinarily more characteristic of magic than of religion. Now, magic and religion have no very definite limits in anthropological discussions, but most of those who use the terms will probably agree that magic is coercive, and religion is not.

Radin's characterization of ancient Romans fits the bill for Catholic prelates through the ages, right up to the present day.

> The name of his deity was often an abstraction, and even when

> this was not verbally the case, the idea was an abstract one. And this abstraction had so little plastic form that he was scarcely certain of the being's sex to which he addressed words of very real supplication, and wholly uncertain what, if any, concrete manifestation the god might make of his presence.

The gods were an abstraction.
Nevertheless, the Etruscans were magicians as well.

> The Etruscans, as far as anything can be said definitely about them, were especial adepts in all the arts by which the aid of deities, however conceived, could be secured.

Rome was priestcraft on a massive scale. The emperor was the chief priest, Pontifex Maximus, chief magician in an occult kingdom.

Never did any empire honor more gods than Rome. It was syncretistic, could we say "ecumenical"? But with regard to law and the religious connection to it, Radin believes that, in the midst of this polytheism, Stoicism maintained the continuity until Christian times. What was Stoicism? What its claim to natural law? It was Neoplatonism.

In his 1908 book *Neoplatonism in Relation to Christianity*, Charles Elsee says that Neoplatonism was *the* religion of Rome in the third century.

> The period in which Neoplatonism takes its rise is essentially an age of transition. Lying as it does between the age of pure Graeco-Roman paganism and the final triumph of Christianity, it is the period in which both of the opposing forces are making their preparations for the last great struggle. Paganism arms itself with the new philosophy and summons to its aid all the forces of Roman conservatism; whilst Christianity, which has already in great measure secured its hold on the masses now attacks the highest circles of society, and endeavours to satisfy the craving for a true system of religious philosophy.

While the Cambridge Platonists characterized the situation as the triumph of Christianity, the process is more correctly

characterized as the corruption of Christianity.

Stoicism was very influential from the Republic through the Empire. While I have inferred a connection between Stoicism and Platonism, we must prove it. Neoplatonism was Platonism matured, and it arose in large part in reaction to Christianity, a statement we will substantiate.

Chapter 6
Stoic Platonism

Max Radin traced the Western tradition of law to Roman Stoics. Of course, he, a legal realist, was loathe to admit that the Stoics were proponents of natural law, but virtually all scholars of natural law trace its Western origins to the Stoics. Thus we conclude that Western jurisprudence has its origins in natural law. Many early church fathers were more or less Platonists. And many of them admired the Stoics. But, apparently, Stoicism is where Platonism was employed in government and law. In the fifth century, when the Roman Church assumed governmental roles, this tradition of civil law found traction. In the foregoing, I suggested that this was because Platonism is a major Western source of natural law, and Stoics were Platonists. At this point it simply remains for us to prove that the Stoics were Platonists. This in itself should be sufficient to show how the tradition of Western jurisprudence was born in natural law and still claims this origin. The philosophy would become entrenched with the biblical commentary of the Scholastics. Tradition is a powerful tool for the promoters of natural law. All creeds accede to the power for social tradition, not only positivists. But natural law has another incentive. It provides moral justification. It is the only *tradition* (there is no tradition of positivism,* except the *ius*

* Technically, the only substantial claim that positivism makes is that it refers, ultimately, to nothing but social or civil tradition. "The word positivism etymologically derives from the Latin word, *Positum* which refers to the law that is already laid down or posited," writes Mukul Rathore in "Decline

gentium of the Romans, the mercantile law which was arguably a lower-level law, a law with human latitude[*]) which contains the rationale to more or less consciously circumvent God and His law. What is amazing is that this rationale is developed from its supposed authorization in the Bible.[**] Natural law seems to be endemic to humanity, and Plato (Hellenism) became a great philosophic source, but the civil tradition and religious rationale are both Roman.

Middle Stoicism

I cite at length "Origen and the Tradition of Natural Law Concepts" by William A. Banner in the journal *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*,[***] (vol. 8, 1957). William Banner offers the most concise and cogent insights on the subject available.

> The development of the doctrine of natural law was one of the significant traditions in patristic and mediaeval thought, as this thought was shaped through the synthesis of pagan and Christian ideas.
>
> It remained for the Stoics, in the changed setting of Hellenistic times, to present the idea of natural justice with considerable rigour, placing this concept at the very center of their ethics. The roots of Stoic thought were old . . .

Early Stoicism in Greece was connected not only with Socrates but also the Cynics, who were materialists. In time the affiliation would swing more exclusively toward Socrates.

of Natural Law Theory In 19th Century" (2016).

* Unless one considers Duns Scotus and Ockham; the Jesuits, Molina, Bellarmine and Suarez; Hugo Grotius; and the Enlightenment philosophers a tradition.

** Later we look at some scriptural source texts that natural law adherents use to substantiate their arguments.

*** Dumbarton Oaks are the Trustees of Harvard University.

> Diogenes Laertius represents the Stoics as regarding themselves related Socrates through the Cynics, and there appears to have been a Cynic in the school during the whole of its history. In early Stoicism one may see the ethical ideal of the Cynics presented in its logical and metaphysical foundations. In their emphasis upon a rigid life of virtue . . .

Cynics and Stoics had something else in common. Rather Stoics appropriated another tenet of Cynicism.

> In their asceticism, the Cynics were the natural opponents of those who held pleasure to be the end of life. In their deprecation of the civic community and of civic virtue, the Cynics were the proponents of the the natural equality of all men and of the membership of all men in one society . . .

While civic virtue and the equality of all men may seem to be the same thing, the distinction for the Cynics seems to have been upon the Greek emphasis on *polis*, the city state, as opposed to a kind of universalism in a political sense, the borderless society of the New World Order. Stoics would always support this. It would find ready acceptance also in the nacent Roman Catholic Church.

> The Stoics continued the ethical emphasis . . . . In avoiding much of the harshness and offense of the Cynics, the early Stoics were able to give to the older ideas of natural virtue (τὸ κατ' ἀρετὴν ζῆν), justice, and human equality a broad currency and respectability. In this the Stoics were absolutists, utterly opposing the Epicureans who, in opposition of φύσις to νόυος, had reduced all moral judgments to taste and convention.

But, as time wore on, Stoicism began to lean more toward the Platonic side.

> It appears that the Stoics, again in opposition to the Epicureans, as a theory of knowledge that there are two veridical modes of apprehension, sensation (αἴϛθησις, καταληπτιὴ, φανταία) and preconception (πρόληψις). Preconception em-

> braces general notions or universals which arise within as the gift of nature (ἔστι δ' ἡ πρόληψις ἔννοια φυσικὴτῶν καθόλου).

"Preconception" alludes either to Platonic Forms or something innate in man. Not that the two are mututally exclusive, though.

> These general notions are common to all men and they are in their roots inborn (ἔμφυτοι) or natural (φυσικαί) in contrast to the edge which arises solely out of experience.

The shift to full-blown Platonism in Stoicism seems to have taken place in what August Schmekel, in *Die Philosophie der Mittleren Stoa in ihrem geschichtlichen Zusammenhange* (1892), calls *Middle Stoicism*.

> The importance which Stoic ideas were to have for subsequent philosophical development, particularly for Christian theorists, was to a considerable degree due to the modifications in teachings which occurred in what has been designated as *Middle Stoicism*. It was in this period that teachers gave evidence of the influence of Platonic thought, as *Middle Platonism* in turn reflected a Stoic influence.

Banner cites a Middle Stoic, Panaetius, which establishes the time frame for us, the second-century BC. Panaetius was the founder of Roman Stoic philosophy. He was a friend of Scipio Aemilianus and Polybius.

> In Middle Stoicism, mechanism becomes absorbed in teleology as materialism yields to the creative rational intelligence.In the world things are governed by an immanent order, within and corresponding to their forms or natures, derives from rational design. It is the nature of man to be rational, and from the freedom of human reason follows the freedom of human will and action. Human good depends upon the choices and actions of men.

Jewish Kantianism was preceded by the Kantianism of Rome.

> Political life arises out of the nature of man and depends upon coöperation founded reason. The natural end of man in society is the realization of virtue and happiness among the citizens.

These ideas are represented in Cicero's *De Natura Deorum, II* (45 BC). Jesuits have always been Cicero enthusiasts.

Middle Stoicism represents the birth of Platonic Roman Stoicism, notwithstanding the fact that the next great Stoic would be a Greek. Romans would incorporate his thought, as well.

Platonic Roman

Among the next generation of Stoics, Poseidonius was the greatest. This Greek philosopher was studied by Cicero, Strabo, and Seneca. He synthesized Plato and Aristotle, a syncretism we note in the Neoplatonists as well; "together with elements taken over from the Pythagoreans," Banner adds. And Neoplatonism would become the de facto religion of Rome.

Notice, the validity of the moral principle is based on men not God's word, which, naturally enough, had not entered the picture yet.

> As did the early Stoics, Posidonius rests the validity of the moral principles upon the elements of truth which all men bear in themselves.

But Roman tendencies would not essentially change even with the advent of Christianity. It remained entrenched humanism.

In any event, experience played a role. Though experience men ascertained the effects of the moral compass and were thus able to define the immanent law.

> Morality and Justice are discovered, therefore, not in experience but through experience.

Hellenistic humanism.

Essentially, it is pure Hellenism.

> In this eclectic period the Stoics took over from Platonism materials which had been largely ignored in the skeptical period of the Academy itself. Stoicism, in a sense, took over what was best in Platonism in the shaping of a philosophy of natural duty under which men act for the preservation of society in the pursuit of a common natural end. The validity and scope of this morality had been established by the early Stoics. Refinements in theory in Hellenic philosophy would be appropriated, therefore, and original Stoic meanings would be modified in the direction of Attic concepts in order to strengthen an ethical universalism which was really Hellenistic.

We see this a generation later with Neoplatonism, as well; the ensconcing of Hellenism in Rome. Granted, Neoplatonism was a reaction to offset the influence of Christianity, but, as with all things Roman, the syncretistic spirit prevailed.

> Antiochus saw in certain Stoic ideas merely an extension in development of that Platonic which he regarded as faithful to the teachings of the old Academy. The result was the acceptance not only of Stoic emphases in epistemology but also in anthropology, in ethics, and in cosmology.

Here Banner references a 1947 paper by Henry Chadwick, "Origen, Celsus, and the Stoa," in the *Journal of Theological Studies*.

> Whether from the side of platonizing Stoics or that of stoicizing Platonists, Stoic ethical teachings were set forth in a form more and more acceptable to moral idealists and the devotées of religious philosophy.

Aristotelianism was also added to Stoicism by later Stoics.

> The important center in Hellenistic times for the meeting of philosophy and religion was Alexandria. It was here that the search for moral and spiritual certainty produced a spirit of syncretism . . .

Alexandrian Jews Influence Natural Law

> What is important for our interest is the merging of Greek and Hebraic notions of morality and law in Philo. Philo accepts, as did the Fathers after him, the law of Moses as the valid principles of morality and justice revealed to man in the Scriptures. But while this revelation itself is received without benefit of reason, its content is not beyond reason. The divine is a rational law; it is in the true sense a natural law, being established by God who is the creator of nature itself. This law is, therefore, universal, eternal and unchanging. In making explicit the character and content this law, Philo follows the mode of designation and discourse which one finds in Plato and in the Stoics. It need not be thought, however, that Philo accepted all of the metaphysical details of the conception of nature represented in the Greek philosophers, particularly the Stoics. It is sufficiently clear that for him Greek natural law ideas supported an ideal of virtue justice which was in general agreement with the ancient Hebrew moral law.

Banner synopsizes Philo's concept of natural law:

> Law or reason, which is incorporeal, is in the universe and in man, and between these λόγοι there is complete indistinguishable agreement, man too possessing a copy of the archetypal mind.

This is pure Platonism. One finds the same thing among the Scholastic Realists of the Middle Ages.

> It is against the background of the eclecticism and syncretism which centered in Alexandria that the work of the Christian fathers, Clement and Origen, becomes intelligible.

Of course, the Roman Church adopted much Alexandrian theology. This is conventional thinking.

> In their interest in and use of philosophical materials, Christian writers would encounter the deposit of metaphysical and ethical concepts which had persisted in Middle Stoicism, in Middle Platonism, in Philo, as well in the doxographical literature.

Origen seems to have recognized the danger of using natural law as a pretext, but he ascribes to it, nonetheless.

> In all human activity providence governs through the agency of right reason in those who choose to realize the intention of nature. Right reason is the foundation of all good (φιλανθρωπία) which men do for each other in society.

How astonishing the advocacy of subjectivism. "Choose to realize"? Everyone thinks that they are doing right. Who more than psychopaths? But Origen, like all sophists, is completely unaware of the incoherence. Notice, "the intention of nature." How miserable to see theologians straining in matters where they had no business. Virtually, all of them did it.

> The investigation of the character and sources of the doctrine of natural law in Origen would seem to show that this doctrine is fundamentally Platonic in its philosophic character and not Stoic. The Stoics largely modified expression and emphasis to ethical notions which had been current in Hellenic thought, but grounded their formulations in a universalism which overcame the social and political bias of Hellenic society. In Middle Platonism, the Stoic ideas were brought into systematic relation to older Platonic thought which really supported in a more fundamental way the concept natural justice. It is in Origen that the synthesis of Platonic, Stoic and Christian ideas yields a truly adequate doctrine of natural law which is, more than in Clement, a defense of the rational nature of man, of human freedom, and of the validity of common moral notions as the foundation of just in society.

Many church fathers labored long over trite truisms, such as "Man has the ability to choose virtue." With such meaningless

statements, they justified natural law; from Basil of Ceasarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, to Chrysostom, who said, in Banner paraphrase:

> All men have within them the knowledge of the natural law (ὁ φυσκὸν νόμον) and of the distinction of good and evil.

The unmistakable continuity in patristic natural law ideas emerged out a synthesis of Greek and Christian concepts in Clement and Origen.

But where does all this historically lead?

> This tradition is important as part of what has been called theological phase of Roman jurisprudence. This phase embraced not the idea of the limitation of the power of the ruler by church prerogatives and canon law, but also the notion of the application to secular matters selves of the principles of divine or natural law.

It leads precisely where I have said it leads, where it did then and where it inevitably always leads.

In the next sentence, Banner switches gears slightly, but the implication is insightful.

> It is this latter aspect of influence of Christian thought that is important for this study. The idea νόμος ἔμψμχος, of the legislator or ruler as himself superior to the letter enacted or written laws, appears in Hellenistic times not only in Pythagorean fragments (and later in Themistius) but also in Philo and Clement, as we have noted. The tendency, as seen for example in Themistius, to regard the ruler as himself the character and source of law (νόμον ἔμψμχος εἶναι φησι τὸν βασιλέα, νόμον θεῖον ἄνωθεν ἥκοντα ἐν χρονῳ τοῦ δ' αἰῶνος χρηστοῦ) however, a dangerous qualification of the Christian idea of the supremacy of divine or natural law to all political authority.

Recognizing this, the power could only be attributed to one who is qualified to issue decrees of providential import. Who is worthy of such authority? Natural law leads to the Vatican and

pope as God and King.*

Banner notes that the Code of Justinian invokes the divine right of rulership only once but

> The exposition of notions in the *Institutes* is really more Roman than Greek.

Natural enough, since, as we show in *Did Rome Really Fall?* the so-called Byzantine Empire considered itself Rome; or, at the least, Roman.

> There was the tendency among the Roman jurists either to identify *ius naturale* with *ius gentium* . . . or to locate *ius naturale* some pre-political state of nature . . .

The pre-political state of *ius naturale* is a reference to Platonism, the immanency of natural law; *ius gentium* is manmade law. But Banner sees the Byzantines themselves conflating the two.

> In the *Institutes* a virtual identification of *ius naturale* and *ius gentium* . . .

This would become the model of Roman Catholicism.

> What is important in the *Institutes* is the recognition of *naturalis ratio* as itself validating the things which are universally regarded as beneficial for man. That this reflects Greek as well as Roman influence is reasonable to conclude in the light of the adoption of Greek legal ideas and Greek terms from the time of the reign of Constantine. With this influence came a new importance for the concept of natural justice, and for the philosophical theological supports behind this concept.

* In the 18th century the Franciscan theologian Lucius Ferraris wrote in his encyclopedia of Canon Law, *Prompta Bibliotheca canonica*, *juridica*, *moralis*, *theologica*, *necnon ascetica*, *polemica*, *rubricistica*, *historica*, that the pope "is able to modify . . . even divine laws."

Preface to Early Christian Neoplatonism

Stoicism seem to be the angle where Platonic natural law found application in jurisprudence and government. Naturally, early church fathers were also interested in this. The church does exist in the world, after all, and it desires to influence hearts and minds if not political affairs. Never more so than with those early father who had strong dominionist ideas, and many did, particularly from the time of Constantine onward.

On a more fundamental level, influenced as they were by the Hellenistic world, by Hellenism itself, they had to struggle to maintain orthodox spiritual ideas.

> The association of heresies with Hellenic philosophy is a recurring theme in early Christian thinkers.*

Be that as it may, some early fathers were conflicted. In effect these would synthesize Hellenism and Christianity.

Hellenism is virtually a synonym for *Neoplatonism*, a word which will begin to assume dominance in the history of natural law from this point on. Neoplatonism is systemized Platonism, which incorporates Artistotelianism and ideas syncretized with Christianity.

> It is often pointed out that Christian philosophers appropriated, took over, followed or integrated Platonic, Peripatetic or Stoic views. There are several studies on the Christian appropriation of Plato, the Christian use of Aristotle or the Stoicism of the Church Fathers.

Thus much early Christianity was Neoplatonized. Modern scholarship

> implies that early Christian philosophy is, to some extent at least, reducible to Platonism, to Aristotelianism, to Stoicism,

* George Karamanolis, *The Philosophy of Early Christianity*, 2013.

> or a mixture of all those. . . . Their philosophies were thought to be a mixture of Platonism, Aristotelianism and Stoicism.

And this consensus is not wrong.

> Early Christian thinkers were concerned with the sceptical dispute of the attainability of true knowledge.
>
> . . . Clement and Origen have a conception of philosophy close to that of Stoicism.

In *The Philosophy of Early Christianity* (2013) of the Ancient Philosophies series, George Karamanolis tells us.

> . . . Origen draws on Stoic epistemology and on Epictetus' views on will (*prohairesis*) in order to build his own theory of human freedom of will, and Tertullian is inspired by Stoic psychology, although elsewhere in his work he criticizes Stoicism as a source of heresy (*Praescr.* 7.3) . . .

Later, in discussing Neoplatonism, we note the symbiosis of Christianity and Neoplatonism. Perhaps it would better be characterized as the parasitism of Neoplatonism. The Christianity mentioned in this statement is nominal, a Christianity which vies with the world. Perhaps it is best not to judge the relative exponents, those early church fathers who philosophisized.

> The central role of theology and of ritual in Christianity actually confirms that it is a typical product of late antiquity; these elements shape Christian philosophy as they do that of Neoplatonism. I cannot see, though, why this fact alone can cast doubt on the philosophical status of Christians or Neoplatonists.
>
> It seems to me that the philosophical side of early Christianity has been underestimated by the historians of late antiquity.

Hellenism and Neoplatonism often crept through the guise of Stoicism, which conveyed a kind of statesmanly prestige.

> And in *Against Hermogenes*, Tertullian blames Stoicism for the view of Hermogenes that matter exists eternally and is a principle of what there is (see esp. *Adv. Herm*. 8.3; cf. *De an*. 3.1).

But, as I said before, the deeper manifestations of Hellenism and Neoplatonism were taking place in the spiritual ideas, which were philosophical.

> Although on the one hand Tertullian explicitly rejects Platonism and Stoicism, on the other hand he argues, like Justin (*Dial*. 2.1), that philosophical reasoning points to God (*Adv. Marc*. II.87.6), the source of reason (*De an*. 16.2). And he seems to imply that Hellenic philosophy represents a progress of reason in history, the perfection and fulfi lment of which has come with Christianity (*Testimonium Animae* 5.6–7).

Hellenic philosophers

> remained committed to Aristotelianism and Stoicism respectively.
>
> I would argue that the case of the Christians is not much different from that of Hellenic philosophers. Adherents of these schools tried to show how exactly their school authorities should be understood so that they can be philosophically most plausible. This is also the case with Christians. Their statement that Scripture is the measure and the authority did not amount to much in substance ultimately, because the Scriptures alone did not help them settle the crucial philosophical issues they were concerned with; nor did it help them in addressing the objections from non-Christians or fellow Christians, such as the Gnostics.

Christian theologians (philosophers) were concerned with extra-biblical questions.

Karamanolis notes that the dialectic, specifically Christian drawing from heathens, betrays the symbiosis between heathen ethics and Christian ethics.

> One might argue, however, that the fact that Christians conceived of ethics as the aim of philosophy does not necessar-

ily mean that Christians share a conception of ethics similar to that of Hellenic philosophers. This similarity has actually been challenged. In her seminal article on modern ethics, G. E. M. Anscombe has argued that, unlike ancient philosophical ethics, Christian ethics is marked by an attachment to law and in this sense, she claims, Christianity deformed ancient ethics. This is a claim to consider. This claim also raises the broader question about the extent to which early Christian ethics develops along the lines of contemporary Hellenic philosophy or differs from it. Th is question becomes particularly relevant in view of a number of modern studies that point to the similarities between the ethics of Hellenic philosophers, especially of Stoicism, and early Christianity. The authors of these studies actually claim that they take as a starting-point remarks made by early Christian philosophers to the effect that Stoic ethics is close in spirit to Christian ethics.

Religion Any Way You Slice It

Of course, Catholic priests consider natural law religious, but this does not anul the observation. In fact, they explicate the matter. In "Natural Moral Law and the Canon Law" (2009), Danilo Ramiro Flores of the University of Santo Tomas says:

> The origins of the concept of natural law lie in the speculative reflections of the philosophers and the jurists of the ancient world. It is generally accepted that the notion of natural law does not have direct scriptural derivation and for the fact that it is a "truth of the natural order" it is therefore pre-existing. Although it is not considered as an enunciation of the Revealed Truth, "nonetheless it is intimately related to it in such a way that the definitive character of its affirmations derive, in the last analysis, from the Revelation itself;" hence, it has "also theological meaning."
>
> The primeval thinkers were convinced of the existence of the rules for human behavior based upon objective and eternal norms. They conceived these norms as something that have been established by and in the nature itself that human reason

could perceive.

Flores mentions as examples Heraclitus (c. 535-475 BC) and Parmenides (c. 515 BC).

Chapter 7
Neoplatonism

In the course of discussing natural law, we have mentioned Platonism. Catholic Platonists were called *Realists* during the Middle Ages, an oxymoron actually, but such was their belief in the verity of Platonic Forms. But the nomenclature has changed. Nowadays, since the Enlightenment, philosophers and jurists who have similar ideas are called *Idealists*. Catholic theology, being predicated by Augustinian and Thomist Scholasticism,* is now called *Idealism*.

The *Wikipedia* entry "Neoplatonism" states:

> . . . Neoplatonism being a pure form of idealism.

Catholic theology is, at the least, classed in philosophy with Neoplatonism.

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy online concurs with *Wikipedia*:

> . . . Neoplatonism inevitably turned out to be an idealist type of philosophy.
>
> the radically top-down idealism of the Neoplatonists . . .
>
> the Neoplatonists' idealist perspective.

* Augustine and Thomas Aquinas were Platonists.

> . . . Neoplatonic ideas have continued to influence Western thinkers of the idealist persuasion, such as the Cambridge Platonists (who were really Neoplatonists), Leibniz, Hegel, Schelling, Fichte, Bergson and Teilhard de Chardin, to name but a few.

"Neoplatonism" Defined

Wikipedia states:

> Neoplatonism is a version of Platonic philosophy that emerged in the 3rd century AD against the background of Hellenistic philosophy and religion. The term does not encapsulate a set of ideas as much as a series of thinkers. Among the common ideas it maintains is monism, the doctrine that all of reality can be derived from a single principle, "the One".

Monism is a pantheistic idea.

> Neoplatonism began with Ammonius Saccas and his student Plotinus (c. 204/5–271 AD) and stretched to the sixth century.

Craig Carter, in "Christian Platonism, Neoplatonism and Modern Naturalism" (2022), on *cedomag.com* adds:

> This was a mixture of Plato, Aristotle, and Stoicism as taught by Plotinus (204-70) and his disciples.

The 2016 article on *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* website entitled "Neoplatonism" says:

> . . . Neoplatonism became the dominant philosophical ideology of the period, offering a comprehensive understanding of the universe and the individual human being's place in it.

As we shall see, it was a reaction to Christianity. It was an entrenchment of paganism.

> their signature project is more accurately described as a grand synthesis of an intellectual heritage that was by then exceedingly rich and profound.

For practical purposes, Neoplatonism began with a Roman philosopher in the pagan tradition, Plotinus.

> the Egyptian-born Plotinus (204/5–270) is commonly regarded as the founder of Neoplatonism.

He has bearing not only on natural law Platonism but also the church, as Nadia Delicata notes in her 2015 paper, "Natural Law in a Digital Age,"for the *Journal of Moral Theology*:

> . . . Plotinus, the immediate philosophical precursor of the fourth century Church Fathers immersed in Neoplatonism . . .

Cambridge Platonists

On the subject of Neoplatonism, I cite three 19th and early 20th-century authors, all Cambridge men: William Ralph Inge, William Kaye Fleming, and Charles Elsee. I also cite Charles Bigg of Oxford of the same period.

In his "The Permanent Influence Of Neoplatonism Upon Christianity" from *The American Journal of Theology* (1900), Inge says that Plotinus was the prototypical Neoplatonist.

> the advantages of choosing Plotinus (for when I say Neoplatonism I mean Plotinus) as the representative of Alexandria are obvious. He was incomparably the greatest of the pagan philosophers of the empire, and he was an independent thinker, not fettered, like Clement and Origen, by membership in a religious society which aimed at converting the masses. He at least believed himself to be a Greek and a Platonist; and if Alexandrianism was the last effort of Greek philosophy, it is in Plotinus that we can best study the last message of Greek philosophy to the world.

William Ralph Inge was an Anglican priest, a professor of Divinity at Cambridge and Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in the early 20th century. He was President of the Aristotelian Society and a Fellow of the British Academy. In addition to receiving honorary degrees from every major university in Great Britain, he was nominated for the Nobel Prize in literature three times. One of his favorite writers was Benjamin Whichcote, a founding member of the Cambridge Platonists. He was also a eugenicist.

Inge appreciated Neoplatonism. But he believed that he was fighting for the underdog. He expounds upon the distinction in an attempt to illustrate that "Christianity won, Neoplatonism lost." This was the general approach of Cambridge Platonists. But is this correct?

Pagan Religion

Charles Elsee was an minister of the Church of England. His book *Neoplatonism in Relation to Christianity* (1908) was his doctorial thesis for a Divinity degree. He agrees with a certain amount of Rationalism and Neoplatonic mysticism, too.

> In the period between Lucian and Plotinus there occurred an extraordinary revival or recrudescence of paganism. This was not merely a revival of external ceremonial, such as took place in the time of Augustus. It was a genuine reformation, and it led to the growth of a more spiritual religion than the Roman world had ever known.

Lucian, a Greek rhetorician, who advocated paganism, lived in the mid-second century, Plotinus, in the mid-third century. What was transpiring on the Roman stage during this period that could have stimulated paganism? Christianity appeared. Neoplatonism was a reaction to Christianity.

> The question has often been discussed, as to the amount of borrowing that took place between the two systems in the

> early period, and the answer given has usually been that little or no direct borrowing could be traced, although the indirect influence exercised by each system upon the other was probably considerable.
>
> There is a general agreement among modern writers that in a certain sense the rise of Neoplatonism was the result of the spread of Christianity.

Of Neoplatonism, Elsee says:

> its chief importance lies in the fact that it is one of the signs that the general drift of paganism tended towards some form of monotheism.

Montheism itself was a huge similarity.

Syncretistic Corruption

Natural law makes a religious claim. It is in fact a religion. But what is the religion? It is Neoplatonism. It was a religion from the beginning. William Kaye Fleming, in *Mysticism in Christianity* (1913), taking so much for granted, refers to it obliquely.

> It must be remembered again that Plotinus, as a Platonist, put the knowledge of God, the Beloved, as the condition of life.

Plotinus, an admitted heathen, talking about God. On and on, an enormous amount of material, "God this and God that."

Fleming cites Father Sharp's *Mysticism, Its True Nature and Value*, which says that

> "we must accept the experience of Plotinus as one of those manifestations of divine grace outside its regular channels, the occurrence of which from time to time, has been quite unmistakable," . . .

With modern Scholastics and Jesuits the subject of grace is veering into wholesale universalism.

> The system of Plotinus and Proclus, however, although outside the pale of Christianity, perhaps wilfully outside, cannot be passed over in any study of Christian thought. . . . Through Victorinus, who clothed sheer Neo-Platonism in Christian phraseology, and through Augustine, who had passed not unaffected through the stage of Neo-Platonic thought; through pseudo-Dionysius and Erigena, through Eckhart and his followers, Neo-Platonism found in the Church a congenial, and, it may be added, a lasting home.

Alexandria

The Alexandrians paved the way, Fleming says.

> (I) By their encouragement of the syncretic spirit within the Church; and Neo-Platonism was sympathetic to this since it claimed to be "the philosophy completing all systems".

Fleming's characterization of Neoplatonism is essentially the same as ours of Rosicrucianism. Indeed, Rosicrucians are always Neoplatonists. Rosicrucianism is Neoplatonism.

> Alexandria, where all tides of opinion met, was the very place whence the belief could spread amongst Christians that the best of Pagan philosophies, far from being really hostile to Christianity, formed a sort of "*praeparatio Evangelica*". (2) By their use of the mystery terms; and, again, with the mystery cults the later Neo-Platonists were in close alliance. (3) By the distinction, in Clement's case already drawn, between the two lives,—higher and lower—, which might be followed by the Christian, the higher, the "contemplative"? as opposed to the lower, the "practical".

Chapter 5, "The Influence of Neo-Platonism in Christianity," is uncompromising.

> OF the "profound and many-sided" influence of Neo-Platonism on Christianity there can be no doubt whatever. The system of Plotinus, with its intellectual Trinity, that perfect flower and sum of Greek philosophic thought, could not but assist strongly, if indirectly, the formation of Christian dogmas concerning the Being of God . . .

Similarities with Christianity

Monotheism

Augustine used Neoplatonic arguments for monotheism. Neoplatonism was

> purely Greek in its origin, but its emancipation from pagan myth was complete.*

Even Hinduism has been touched by the biblical concept of monotheism.

Neoplatonic Trinity

Neoplatonism by Charles Bigg (1895)** in the Chief Ancient Philosophies series of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, prefaces the subject of the Neoplatonic trinity by showing the relationship with Christianity.

> SOMEWHERE about the middle of the second century a change came over Platonism in its two main articles—the doc-

* Inge, "The Permanent Influence Of Neoplatonism."

** Charles Bigg was a Church of England clergyman, theologian, and church historian. Pastor of Christ Church in Oxford, he delivered Divinity Lecture Sermons at the University of Oxford. These were published in 1886 as *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria*.

> trine of God and the doctrine of the Ideas. Out of this change sprang Neoplatonism in the strict sense of the term.

Biggs explains the process.

> Side by side with this change [the Peripatetic formula "God thinks Himself"], by which the Ideas became finally the contents of the Divine Intelligence, another was in progress, by which the number of the divine Beings were increased from two to three. In the *Timaeus* there are two, the Creator and the World- Spirit.

Later,

> we find the soul of the World-Spirit distinguished from its Intelligence. Thus we get a triplet-Soul, Intelligence , and a higher Intelligence. The last is spoken of as One, as a point, as. neither good nor evil because above both, as having no differences, no qualities, and wanting nothing, yet at the same time as mind and as selfconscious.

The World-Spirit is actually a pantheistic counterfeit of the Holy Spirit, which can be accessed by mysticism. But, in Neoplatonism, it is called,

> "the only begotten and created heaven," "a blessed god," and is said to have received soul and intelligence through the providence of God.

Strangely this interpolated third person seems to have been prompted by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is preached in the Gospel. Platonism was already mystical, but Neoplatonists shuffled the persons and their respective attributes, to deny the truth of Jesus Christ alone as mediator (Hebrews 8: 1).

The most significant thing about this is that, in some sense, Jesus Christ is conflated with the pantheistic World-Soul, which, itself, was already conflated with the Holy Spirit. In other words, Jesus Christ is the spirit divined. Ultimately, this underlies the Roman Catholic doctrines of *Vicarius Christi*, *ex cathedra*, and

others.

Modern writers also see trinitarian ideas in Neoplatonism, while noting the distinctions with Christianity. In "Christian Platonism, Neoplatonism and Modern Naturalism" on *cedomag.com* Craig Carter 2022 comments:

> The doctrine of the Trinity has very faint parallels in Neoplatonism, but the differences are extreme. In Neoplatonism the One emanates the Demiurge, which is an image of the One and the archetype of all things.
>
> The similarities between the Demiurge and Christ and the World-Soul and the Spirit may seem striking, but the differences are overwhelming. The Demiurge and World-Soul stand in between the One and the material world in a "Great Chain of Being." But in Christian theology Christ and the Spirit are homoousios with the Father, one being in three persons.

Is the doctrine not incoherent? Neoplatonists do not seem to know which person or attribute does what.

> The last [not in sequence mimicking the biblical Trinity but the last to be added to Platonism to form Neoplatonism] is spoken of as One . . .

Their Jesus is spoken of as "One." Is it supposed to be a knock-off of Jehovah-Father at the same time? In any event, all of this has pantheistic overtones.

> It is the Pythagorean Monad, the Absolute Cause, and yet it is the Aristotelian Deity.*

Reference to Aristotle confirms this.

Platonism had infected the Jews during the intertestimental period and continued to do so during the Church Age.

> Numenius was the first to speak distinctly of Three Gods.

* Bigg, *Neoplatonism*.

> He was a Syrian, and possibly a Jew; for he was well acquainted with the Old Testament, quoted and allegorized the prophets, spoke of the Book of Genesis as a prophecy, and called Plato "an Atticizing Moses."

Immediately, it insinuated itself into Christian doctrine, too. Platonism itself promoted an impersonal God . . .

> One further step was needed, before this physical and intellectual trinity could be brought into a satisfactory shape. Two divine intelligences might have been possible, if they had been endowed with mutual desire. This, however, was altogether repugnant to the Platonic notion of Deity. God wants nothing.

How much more Neoplatonism:

> He is Cause of All in a very peculiar sense, not as man is cause of his own actions, but as a magnet is cause of movement in iron filings; not an impelling, but an attracting cause.

"He is that towards which all things strive." Pantheistic and universalist. A deterministic kind of pantheism, the spiritual evolution of avatarism or Brahmanism.

This "One" is wholly Hinduistic.

> as a point, as neither good nor evil because above both, as having no differences, no qualities, and wanting nothing, yet at the same time as mind and as self-conscious.

> a certain impalpable tinge of Orientalism lies possibly at the very root of both Pythagoreanism and Platonism in the doctrine of metempsychosis, and in a general leaning towards mysticism, which in the former is strongly marked.

How can we explain the incoherence? In point of fact, the doctrines seem to be simply a Rationalistic attempt to disprove the biblical concept of God.

> We might say without absolute error that these three rep-

> resent the Platonic World-Spirit, the Aristotelian Deity, and the Pythagorean Monad, and that we find here at the top of Neoplatonism a fusion of three schools of thought.

To attribute such a cynical motive to the cobbling of heathen doctrine in Neoplatonism is not far-fetched, as we shall see.

Comparing the teaching of Augustine with that of Plotinus on the subject of the Trinity, Elsee concludes:

> There is of course at first sight an obvious similarity between Neoplatonism and Christianity in this matter. Both alike speak of the Supreme Being as in some sense threefold.
>
> At the same time, a very little examination will make it plain that this resemblance is only superficial.
>
> It may be remarked that the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity is anterior to the rise of Neoplatonism, so that it is not to be imagined that the Church derived her teaching from the philosophers. At the same time it is possible that the writings of Philo and the Neoplatonists helped the Christian Fathers to clear their ideas . . .

Differences

Problem of Evil

Discussing Dionysius the Areopagite, Charles Elsee writes of his doctrine, which is emblematic of Neoplatonism generally:

> evil, as such, has no real existence. It is a falling short, a failure to reach the full development of which this or that creature was capable. Evil objects exist in abundance, but they owe their existence to the fact that they all partake in some measure, however small, of good.

> "But," says 'Dionysius,' "God knows the evil as it is good." He looks, that is, not at the extent to which this or that being has fallen short of His design, but at the extent to which it is fulfilling it.

Pantheism.

> 'Dionysius' then goes on to show that all creation is in harmony with God. The purpose for which it was made, and the gradual realisation of that purpose both owe their existence to God, and are derived from Him.

In mysticism this is called "illumination" or "enlightenment" not Christian salvation. One could quibble, saying, "Mature Christians are more adept than they were at a more immature stage." But this not what Dionysius and other Neoplatonists meant. They were making cosmological statements, and these statements can be lumped under pantheism.

Elitism

> Neoplatonism was the most potent and influential form of Platonism at that time, and it was both a philosophy and a mystical religion. But it was not a religion for the masses; it was definitely an elite phenomenon, unlike Christianity.*

Eternality of Universe

> This is a huge difference between Neoplatonism and Christian Platonism. For the Neoplatonists, the universe is eternal so far as we know.

* Craig Carter, "Christian Platonism, Neoplatonism and Modern Naturalism," *cedomag.com*, 2022.

Chapter 8
Anti-Christian

But was Neoplatonism simply a competitor? What competes with the truth? Is Christianity not the truth? It appears that there may have been at the least unconscious motives, which were more nefarious. If the destruction of Christianity was not in view, then its infiltration was. In *Neoplatonism in Relation to Christianity*, Elsee suggests

> that Plotinus by his very silence was aiming a blow against Christianity . . .

We see this silence and implied antagonism in several other Neoplatonists, as well.

Conspicuous Silence

The *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, written by Philostratus, would become the first piece of Neoplatonic propaganda.

> the resulting picture is not that of the historical Apollonius but of the incarnation of the religious ideal of the Neopythagorean circle by whom the book was published.

Elsee proposes that Philostratus was passive-aggressive.

> throughout the whole of Philostratus' work there is no direct reference to Christianity, and this too can hardly have been accidental.

By conspicuously avoiding the topic, he was expressing hostility to Christianity. What's more, perhaps a plan to undermine it.

Gnostic texts, some pseudepigraphical, pretending to be written by identifiable church fathers, were produced in the first centuries of the Christian church. Some of these forgeries were strictly Neoplatonic, such as *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* and the testaments of Dionysius the Areopagite.

> Is it then unreasonable to suppose that in the brilliant circle which gathered round the Empress Julia Domna there were men capable of devising an attempt to cut away the ground beneath the feet of the Christians, by re-writing the Christian gospel in the support of paganism, without acknowledgment and without any show of controversy?

This is a brilliant insight, from a presumably young Elsee at Cambridge.

> The advantage of such a device is obvious. A work that claimed to be historical [*Life of Apollonius of Tyana*] would gain access in quarters where a controversial treatise would be debarred.

The process was identical with that of the notorious Gnostic fabrications.

> They accordingly produced an account of a man whose existence no one could question, and whose character they portrayed in colours so attractive as to gain a measure of approbation even from their opponents. Round his name they grouped a series of incidents, copied from the Christian Gospels, but with sufficient alteration to escape the charge of direct plagiarism. By this means they hoped to secure the allegiance of many who admired the Christian faith, but whose conservatism made them anxious to cling to the old religion, if only it could be

shown to hold its own against the attacks of its opponent.

later apologists of paganism did make use of the *Life of Apollonius* in the way that has been described.

Antagonistic Scheme

The silence of Plotinus upon the subject of Christianity is difficult to explain until we see that it is deliberate and intentional. In the whole of his published writings . . . Christianity is not once mentioned by name . . .

Nor can we set his silence down to an idea that the Christians were not worthy of his criticism. If he condescended to write a treatise against the Gnostics, why did he not deign to spend a passing thought upon the larger and more important body of orthodox Christians?

The very fact that direct reference to Christianity can nowhere be found, although its indirect influence seems to be distinctly traceable in Plotinus' system, points towards intentional concealment of his obligations on the part of the writer.

Plotinus and the Neoplatonists were not really interested in syncretically appropriating Christian terms and ideas. They were loathe to attribute any dignity to Christianity, in other words. They wanted to edify the pagan system.

. . . Plotinus studiously avoids using the term Logos as the title of the second principle of his trinity.

if Neoplatonism was from the first an endeavour to justify on its own merits the existence and the supremacy of the old system, it is not surprising that the search for the direct use of Christian doctrines by the Neoplatonists has been productive of such very scanty results.

they sought out from earlier systems of philosophy those elements which were in keeping with the spirit of their day, and

> carefully concealed the principles upon which their selection was based.

This appropriation of paganism and haughty flouting of Christianity veiled another motive.

> . . . Plotinus edited and retouched Christian theology in the light of Platonic philosophy.

Plotinus did not necessarily plot a takeover of the church, but Elsee's statement shows the dependence of Neoplatonism on Christianity. This is the evolution of Gnosticism. In point of fact, most core Gnostic doctrines come from Plato himself and Neoplatonism. It assumes the role of a surrogate but actually exists parasitically. It interposes itself into church affairs, tares becoming black and poisonous at harvest time.

Because of the threat of Christianity, Pagans scrambled to shore up defenses.

> There is no doubt whatever that from the time of Porphyry to the time of Julian one of the chief objects of the school was the defence and maintenance of the old paganism.

Nevertheless, it was "opposed to Christianity."

> if we are to view Neoplatonism as a deliberate attempt to re-establish paganism on its own merits, the early stage of its history assumes a new aspect. Whatever the attitude of Christianity might be towards Neoplatonism, Neoplatonism was essentially opposed to Christianity.

This truth has deep significance. Natural law is a product of Neoplatonism. The two are in effect one and the same. Elsee says that Neoplatonism was the de facto Roman religion of the third and fourth centuries. Ergo, natural law, too, is a religion.

Church Culpability

But the Church also coveted the things of Neoplatonism.

> The period in which Neoplatonism takes its rise is essentially an age of transition. Lying as it does between the age of pure Graeco-Roman paganism and the final triumph of Christianity, it is the period in which both of the opposing forces are making their preparations for the last great struggle. Paganism arms itself with the new philosophy and summons to its aid all the forces of Roman conservatism; whilst Christianity, which has already in great measure secured its hold on the masses now attacks the highest circles of society, and endeavours to satisfy the craving for a true system of religious philosophy.

One of these "things of Neoplatonism" was pride.

> The Church was passing through a great crisis: she had to face the question whether she was to remain a small society of religious devotees, or to go forward and take her place at the head of the great religions of the world.

While the Apostles prophesied a time when Christianity would become a world religion, it was never expected to assume a dominionist role.

Famous Neoplatonists

We cannot discuss the Neoplatonists that affected the church in detail. Hierotheus the Thesmothete, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Origen, Victorinus, Hilary of Poictiers, Gregory of Nyssa, Jerome, Synesius of Cyrene, Augustine, Boethius, and John Scotus Erigena are examples of them. We mention a few mainly for the purpose of elaborating the doctrines.

Dionysius the Areopagite

It was not without reason that the unknown author assumed a title which suggested the combination of Christianity with Greek philosophy.

Indeed, the works themselves do so.

In the four great treatises which are still extant we find a careful attempt to show that the teaching of Proclus and the teaching of the Church supplement and illuminate each other.

He preached works mysticism.

At every stage in this series there is a certain knowledge of God attainable by the faithful worshipper, at every stage too it is possible for him to climb to the stage above, where he will gain a closer fellowship with the Supreme Being.

Pseudo-Dionysius also preached natural law.

man's knowledge of God, though incomplete, is not necessarily false, for God reveals Himself to man, alike in the world around us, and by special means which He has employed at various times; and if man makes use of these opportunities, God will lead him on to something higher.

It was thoroughgoing Platonism.

Here we learn that there is on earth an image or reflection of the great system in the heavens. It stands on a lower level than its heavenly counterpart, just as the material world in which we move is on a lower level than the spiritual world in which the angels have their being.

Pagans ingratiated themselves with monotheists by promoting monism.

We must begin by asserting the Unity of God. God is above all One; all that exists comes from Him, and was therefore itself originally one. And when creation comes to that perfection for which God has designed it, it will be completely at unity with

itself and with Him.

This language is often used by mystics and Neoplatonists, and at first glance it seems orthodox. But it is a Hinduesque New-Age doctrine: by philosophic enlightement or illumination, in tandem with a mystical-pantheistic dissolution of ego consciousness, we *realize* that we are one. It is not what the Bible calls "glorification."

Dionysius attacks biblical nomenclature such as "Father, Son, Word . . ."

> Others, as Father, Son, Word, Spirit, apply to particular Persons. But both sets of terms are true, and both are inadequate, since they only express God in terms suitable for our limited understandings.

And he supports the traditional Neoplatonic doctrine of the unreality of evil.

> evil, as such, has no real existence. It is a falling short, a failure to reach the full development of which this or that creature was capable. Evil objects exist in abundance, but they owe their existence to the fact that they all partake in some measure, however small, of good.
>
> "But," says 'Dionysius,' "God knows the evil as it is good." He looks, that is, not at the extent to which this or that being has fallen short of His design, but at the extent to which it is fulfilling it.

Pure pantheism is preached.

> 'Dionysius' then goes on to show that all creation is in harmony with God. The purpose for which it was made, and the gradual realisation of that purpose both owe their existence to God, and are derived from Him.

One could quibble, saying, "Well, as Christians mature they become more adept than they were at a more immature stage."

But this not what Dionysius and other Neoplatonists meant. They made cosmological statements, and these statements can be lumped under pantheism. Psycho-mystical "illumination" or "enlightenment," not Christian salvation.

In any event, the work appear to have been a forgery.

> We find the earliest mention of his writings in 533 A.D. when an appeal was made to their authority by the Severians, a monophysite sect at Constantinople. The appeal was disallowed by the orthodox party on the ground that a work of the Apostolic age which was unknown to Cyril and Athanasius was hardly to be considered authentic.*

From the beginning, the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius were considered to be of doubtful provenance. Nevertheless,

> before many years had elapsed the writings won their way to wide-spread popularity.

Early authorship and provenance continued to be doubted.

> For two centuries and a half the books had been quoted with respect by many Greek writers,
>
> . . . Photius, in the ninth century, pointed out that the books were unknown to Eusebius and the early Fathers, and that they contained various anachronisms.
>
> in 827 A.D., fifteen or twenty years before the date of Photius' objections, a copy of the writings presented by Michael the Stammerer to Louis I of France had been enshrined with much ceremony in the Abbey of St Denis, where the Areopagite was reputed to have been buried. From that moment their position in Europe was secure.

They would influence John Scotus Erigena, who the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* says was the most influential of the

* Elsee, *Neoplatonism in Relation to Christianity*.

early monastic Neoplatonists.

> Not only did the works of 'Dionysius' exercise a considerable influence upon Joannes Scotus in the ninth century, but from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries they formed the subject of a whole series of commentaries and translations, written by eminent scholars and ecclesiastics of the day.

However, the question of provenance was taken up again later.

> It was only after the Renaissance that the doubts about their authenticity were revived, and the Dionysian origin of the books finally disproved.

Conclusion

In the sixth century, the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite appeared. Pseudepigraphical, they claimed to be the writing of an Apostolic Father, but, like the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, they are proven forgeries. Both works claim Christianity, but both are actually Neoplatonic treatises. Furthermore, it appears that Neoplatonism was antagonistic to Christianity from the beginning. Thus the works are heretical. In them one finds a mystical work's salvation plan. The underlying theme of Neoplatonism is Platonism, which is intimately connected with natural law.

Chapter 9
Syncretism

From the beginning, Platonists and Christians alike noted the parallels between Platonism and Christianity. For the most part the similarities were enthusiastically embraced by both.

The New Encyclopædia Britannica (15th edition, 1998) shows the broad similarity in an entry entitled "Metaphysics."

> The essence of Platonism lies in a distinction between two worlds, the familiar world of everyday life, which is the object of the senses, and an unseen world of true realities.

Shadow Play

The quintessential expression of Socrate's metaphysics is found in the famous Allegory of the Cave in the *Phaedo*. In it Socrates illustrates his theory of Forms.

> The theory of Forms has as its foundation the assumption that beyond the world of physical things there is a higher, spiritual realm of Forms, or Ideas, such as the Form of Beauty or Justice. This realm of Forms, moreover, has a hierarchical order, the highest level being that of the Form of the Good.

There were also significant difference from Christianity, though, as a *Britannica* entry, "Platonism," shows.

> The theory . . . rests on the belief that the soul is not only eternal but preexistent. The conception of the tripartite soul . . .

Traditionally, Christians have not believed in the preexistence of souls (nothwithstanding that Catholics do). Neoplatonists believed in the eternality of matter, denying Creation. Despite the enthusiasm of some Christians, there is little in Platonism to distinguish it from traditional paganism at all. Paganism is witchcraft, which presupposes a spiritual realm.

Despite the differences, there were many things to commend Platonism to early church fathers. Not least among them were extra-biblical anecdotes of martyrdoms and miracles. Among these was *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*. If they could extrapolate Platonism from the Bible how much more hagiographies, even if the stories themselves were more or less commendable.

The World a Stage?

Polycarp, a second-century Bishop of Smyrna and a disciple of the Apostle John, was burned at the stake in a coliseum. In his prison cell, the night before his martyrdom, the Lord Jesus said to him, "Play the man, Polycarp."

Plato's metaphysics not only described a distinction between physical and spiritual worlds it emphasized the secondary, or derivative, nature of physical reality. In other words, Platonism suggests the unreality of the physical world. This idea would be developed by Neoplatonists, and it would become truly abstract. Because they also usually believed in reincarnation, it would spawn Gnosticism. The Neoplatonic idea of the unreality of the physical world would contribute to antinomianism. The Russian false prophet Rasputin, who at first was a Flagellant, eventually became purely antinomian, preaching cathartic purgation in sin if not a Shabbatean idea of the "holiness of sin." This alleviation of responsibility would lead the Illuminati, in their Rosicrucian Neoplatonism, to also become antinomian. What's worse, cou-

pled with their Gnostic inversion of good and evil, the doctrine of Lucifer, they began to believe that Antichrist and the promised annihiliation of God could only come by expressly causing atrocious evil, the greater the magnitude the better, as far as they were concerned.

The Martyrdom of Polycarp inadvertently reinforced the Platonic idea of the unreality of the world, notwithstanding the possibility that the Lord actually told Polycarp the words ascribed to Him. The problem is that they have been misunderstood.

Platonists and Platonic Christians understood the Lord's words to Polycarp in a cosmological sense. They thought that He was emphasizing that the world is an artificial stage. Polycarp, simply one transient man upon it, was exhorted to assume the starring role of a valiant man. Certainly, we should overcome fear, but "courage" is not the point that Platonists draw from the story. Rather the unreality of the world is.

It seems more consistent with Christianity not to stress the unreality. The Bible clearly acknowledges reality, and God even commiserates with our suffering, Jesus Himself having suffered death. The Lord's words to Polycarp can be better understood with respect to the psychology of Polycarp and other spiritual Christians. Although Polycarp was avowedly in the world, and the world was undeniably real, (does not the *Martyrdom* portray him distressed?), he was so little invested in it that he scarcely identified with it at all. He had little sense of personal identity. The most selfless ministers of Christ Jesus eventually identify with the office of pastorate, but Polycarp's ingenuousness is on display in the story. This accounts for the Lord's exhortation. Stuck in prison, awaiting death, Polycarp was no longer able to minister, but the Lord revealed to him another identity he was now to assume.

In the play *As You Like It* (1623), Shakespeare famously said, "All the world's a stage." If *Shakespeare* was the pseudonym of Sir Francis Bacon, a legitimate possibility, this maxim is more clearly understood. Bacon was a Rosicrucian, a Neoplatonist.

Neoplatonic Christianity

In "Greek Theory of Natural Law" (2021) on the website of Legal Services of India, Manmeet Singh notes how Christians responded to Stoic Platonism, favorably.

> Christian philosophers readily adapted Stoic natural law theory, identifying natural law with the law of God. For Thomas Aquinas, natural law is that part of the eternal law of God ("the reason of divine wisdom") which is knowable by human beings by means of their powers of reason. Human, or positive, law is the application of natural law to particular social circumstances. Like the Stoics, Aquinas believed that a positive law that violates natural law is not true law.

Law sprang from religion, a 2019 article on the website *First Things*[*] ("Does Natural Law Need Theology? Natural law is and is not a religious enterprise") by David Novak tells us.

> for most thoughtful people in the Middle Ages, *law* and *religion* were two sides of the same coin. Law can make its demands because it is religious: It is revealed by God. God's revelation is normative ipso facto. In this view, the religion that makes law authoritative is a *revealed* religion. It is the religion of the God who commands humans in the context of their own particular sacred histories.

Natural law reveals God, so they say, rather than God revealing law. Natural law is also necessary for universalism.

> the revealed law systems of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all have an essential theological point in common, one that makes possible an interreligious recognition of a common morality.

* *First Things*, a journal published by Institute on Religion and Public Life, was founded in 1990 by Richard John Neuhaus, a Lutheran pastor turned Catholic priest.

Neoplatonism and the Church

In plotting the influence of Plotinus in Christian thought, Inge notes the influence of Neoplatonism on some of the Church Fathers.

> there is a catena of Christian Platonists before Plotinus—Justin, who counts Socrates and Plato as Christians; Athenagoras, who attributes quasi-inspiration to Plato, and teaches that the Logos is the being in whom the ideas—the archetypes of all things—consist; Theophilus, who refutes patripassionism by distinguishing between God and the reason of God, till he trembles on the verge of acosmic pantheism; and Clement, who regards Christianity as perfected Platonism, insists on the solidarity of all life, and identifies God the Father with the unknown ground of existence, while Christ is the light that broods over all history.*

Origen was a substantial part of this.

> But the Platonism of these early Fathers was eclectic, unsystematic, and unphilosophical; it was reserved for Plotinus to build a noble and coherent system out of these airy speculations; and their true bearing on dogma and on life became much more apparent after he had lived.

Origen and Alexandria

Epiphanius said that Origen was the source of all heresy.

> The third century was a period in which Christian speculation was unusually free, and the great Alexandrine Fathers had no hesitation about turning to Christian use the resources of pagan philosophy.

* Inge, "The Permanent Influence."

Alexandria was a notorious spawning ground for heretics.

> He [Plotinus] had no great love for polytheism, but he thought it the most convenient system for the mass of mankind, and endeavoured to point out a philosophical basis upon which it might be supposed to rest.

Then Inges presents a "detailed comparison of the doctrines of Plotinus and Origen."

> Writing [in the *Confessions*] about the Neoplatonist books of which he [Augustine] was at one time a student, he tells us that he found in them, not indeed the words, but the substance of much of the Christology of St Paul and St John, with, however, serious gaps. The great eternal verities described in the opening verses of St John's Gospel he found set forth by the Neoplatonists, but all that brings the Christian into close personal contact with the Eternal Son of God was omitted.
>
> It is much the same with the other great articles of the Christian faith. The Unity and the Goodness of God, and even in some sense the three Persons of the Holy Trinity are doctrines upon which the Neoplatonist, no less than the Christian theologian, lays much emphasis. But the love of a heavenly Father for "His children, and the idea that the very highest of all Beings could be approached by the humblest of mankind, are thoughts which we find in Christian writers alone.

Origen and the Neoplatonists.

> Origen was at one, if not with Plotinus himself, at least with the general practice of the school, in attaching the highest importance to the allegorical method of interpretation.
>
> The time had not yet come either for the Christian to speak of a "progressive revelation," or for the heathen to work out a theory of the evolution of a gradually deepening conception of the deity.

both alike took refuge in the allegorical method of interpreta-

tion, and, once introduced, both alike employed it freely, even in cases where there was no difficulty to be solved.

Resemblance between Plotinus and Origen

Another instance of the same kind is to be found in the view held by Origen that evil is non-being.

Origen is careful however to stop short of the view that "that which is not " is identical with matter, or of allowing his philosophy to carry him into any form of Gnosticism.

Neoplatonic theories had an

indirect influence upon doctrines essentially Christian . . .

But Elsee endeavors

to point out how far this influence tended to prevent the Christian teaching, and how far it served to bring out more fully its deeper meaning.

"Origen was deeply influenced by the new philosophy, which seemed to him to unveil fresh depths in the Bible, " . . .

In the Neoplatonic trinity the difference between Mind and Soul is accentuated by the fact that the latter has elected to become united with the world of phenomena.

The context here is Origen's speculations about the Trinity. He considered one or the other Persons of the Godhead inferior.

. . . Origen was led by his Neoplatonist tendencies into something very like heresy. But the passage passed unnoticed.

To the Christian and to the Neoplatonist alike, the consummation of man's existence is ultimately to be found in assimilation to God. It is true that this is not a doctrine which was borrowed by the Church from the Neoplatonists: on the

> contrary it is possible that Neoplatonism was in this matter affected by Christian influences.

We encounter this idea several times in literature about Neoplatonism: the topic which Elsee considers here, Unity or Oneness in an ostensibly Christian sense, with respect to Christian mysticism, vis-à-vis the Neoplatonic idea of Eastern Monism. In point of fact one does not need the other because both are Monism: that is to say, they are both based on Eastern pantheism. In this sense Neoplatonism won. At least it provided the philosophic rationale for Catholic mysticism.

Origen even allegorizes the resurrection, the literalness of it being a point of orthodoxy in the early church.

> the earnest protest which Origen makes against the extremely literal interpretation current in his day of the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body.

> It is true that there is no Neoplatonic doctrine that Origen can here be said to have adopted, and in some particulars he is following in the steps of Clement of Alexandria. Yet it is difficult to believe that his insight is wholly unconnected with the teaching of Plotinus, that "the soul aspires to freedom from the trammels of matter, and that rising ever to higher purity it ultimately comes to nothing else except itself; and thus, not being in any thing else, it is in nothing save in itself."

Among other things, Origen promoted angelology. And

> It may of course be said that Origen's philosophy is as essentially a philosophy of the few as that of Plotinus himself.

Both were elitists.

Origen was an influential force early on.

> In his *Oration against the Gentiles* Athanasius speaks in terms which remind us of Origen or Eusebius, so completely does he reproduce in Christian form the teaching of Plotinus.

The Nicenean Council, of which Athanasius was a substantial contributor, was apparently influenced by him.

> the greatest of the Nicene Fathers was thoroughly in sympathy with the higher side of Neoplatonism . . .

Eusebius himself had a "twofold relation to Neoplatonism," says Elsee.

> when dealing with Neoplatonism apart from questions of religious controversy, Eusebius shows a distinct sympathy for the teaching of the school.
>
> The opening chapter of the *Praeparatio Evangelica* has about it an undoubted ring of Neoplatonism. Eusebius describes the blessings promised by the Gospel as including " all that is dear to the souls that are possessed of intellectual being," whilst his definition of the true piety, and his reference to the Word sent like a ray of dazzling light from God recall to our minds the phraseology of Plotinus.

Victorinus

> The first link in the chain which directly connects Neo-Platonism and Christianity was the work of Victorinus. Victorinus was a Neo-Platonist philosopher and tutor in Rome, so much revered that he received the honour of a statue in the Roman Forum. He translated the "Enneads" of Plotinus into Latin, and this turned out to be a literary achievement of the highest moment, inasmuch as his translation fell under the eyes of Augustine, and was the means of the latter's deliverance from Manicheeism . . .*

Notice that Augustine was rescued from Manicheanism by Neoplatonism. What about the cross?

Victorinus would convert to Christianity in his old age, AD

* Fleming, "Mysticism in Christianity."

360.

> He set himself to the important and very difficult task of transmuting his Neo-Platonist doctrines of the Trinity into a body of Christian theology, and that in the Latin tongue.

He was radical. Even

> . . . Plotinus would never go so far for fear of confounding That which Is—supra-essential God—with matter, disintegration, that which is not. Yet with Victorinus; this "cessatio" . . .

"That which Is—supra-essential God" is code for *pantheism*. But, behold, Victorinus, the Christian, was more pantheistic than Plotinus, the avowed heathen.

Victorinus was renowned for Theological Rationalism, and this codified all manner of thought, coining terms and whatnot.

> The theology of Victorinus was destined to be exceedingly pregnant in the thought of Christian Mysticism. Many of the later philosophical mystics caught up, and pushed to their fullest extent, not in the speculative, but in the psychological sphere . . .

Christian scholarship rolled smoothly between mysticism and Rationalism, even at this early date.

Adolf von Harnack* attempted to qualify how mysticism could in any way be equated with Rationalism, a phenomenon one finds in Neoplatonic philosophy: "Mysticism is rationalism applied to a sphere above reason,"** he said.

> the permanent influence of Neoplatonism may be best considered in connection with Augustine, who, though a Latin, is deeply imbued with it.***

* Carl Gustav Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930) was a Lutheran theologian and Church historian.

** Fleming, "Mysticism in Christianity."

*** Inge, "The Permanent Influence."

So Augustine was the real infection. Well, of course: was he not Platonic? Yes, but Neoplatonism is a system of divination and lawmaking, a natural-law system altogether informed by mysticism. Aristotle contributed even more pantheism to Neoplatonism.

Chapter 10
Augustinianism

If Neoplatonism can be found in Augustine, there is little reason of discussing the development of Roman Catholicism further, Inges says.

> in detail the chief doctrines in which Augustine shows a close correspondence with Neoplatonism. It will not be necessary to repeat the process in dealing with later writers, for we shall then have ascertained what Christian Neoplatonism means, and in what branches of religious speculation we may expect to find traces of its influence.

By establishing the tenets of Augustianism, we do not need to deal in detail with subsequent Catholic theologians and jurists because Augustine predicates Catholic orthodoxy.

> "*Ne ineffabilis quidem dicendus (est) quia et hoc cum dicatur aliquid dicatur*." So the First Person of the Neoplatonic trinity is "beyond being. We can say what he is not; but we cannot say what he is."
>
> God has no qualities; he is above all distinctions, and neither thinks nor feels. "Aeternitas ipsa Dei substantia est." The resemblances to Plotinus here are obvious. The "One" is beyond everything, even beyond the most exalted intelligence. If God were self-conscious, he would be double; "we must therefore deny him consciousness."

Plotinus and Augustine "identify reality with the ideas or thoughts of God . . ." In the pages to come I will sometimes use the formulation "Plato's Forms" to refer to this cosmological idea, natural law as the "mind of God."

Pantheism is a precondition of natural law. Perhaps we should say, more correctly, *panentheism*, since this Neoplatonic avatarism of is ostensibly monotheistic.

> when Augustine says, "Since the Word of God is One, by whom all things were made, and all things exist together and immutably in him, and all things are one," the world-plan seems to lose itself altogether in the Being of the Logos.*

Later Realists would maintain the biblical struggle between good and evil, but Augustine, like Plotinus, abolishes evil.

> On the *nature of man* Plotinus says, "Our object in life is not to be without sin, but to be God," and Augustine is no more afraid of the word *deificari* than Athanasius is of θεοποεῖσθαι. And the process of "deifying" is by something like interpenetration of essence.

Nevertheless, Plotinus himself was not a pure pantheist. But even Inge's characterization is an admission:

> We have a double life—οἷον ἀμφίβιοι—inasmuch as we share in the life of the cosmos, in the half-personal World-Soul which works as a whole in individual part-souls. All that lives has fellowship and membership together . . .

"Augustine has much in common with these thoughts."

> He seldom speaks of the communion of the individual with Christ, but often of Christ and the church as "*unus Christus*." And in the *De Civitate* he regards the universe as a living organism, a view which carries with it the mystical doctrine of

* Elsewhere I deal with the salient scriptures, which are used to prove a pantheistic cosmology and refute them.

life within life, and interpenetration of essence.

Then, Inge deals with a concept popular in mysticism, but it too is essentially pantheistic, the idea of "emanation."

> On the difficult question of emanation *versus* evolution I can only say now that the antithesis seems to me to be a false one; that Plotinus, with his doctrine of ἐπιστροφὴ and his ζωὴ ἐζελιττομένη as no enemy to evolution; and support myself by the authority of B. Bosanquet, who says: "The Homoousian dispute settled the conflict in favor of evolution, and marks the climax to which Platonism and Neoplatonism had long been approximating." The fundamental principles of Plotinus have, I think, little to say for or against evolution. The real deep significance of his doctrine that all things radiate forth from God is the mystical faith that everything visible is the symbol of something invisible, the connection being, not arbitrary, accidental, and subjective, but based on real correspondences and affinities.

Certainly, natural law is connected to the idea of emanation. Otherwise, man could ascertain nothing of Plato's forms.

Fleming quotes A. Harnack to the effect:

> "St. Augustine became the father of that mysticism which was naturalized in the Catholic Church, down to the Council of Trent". Dr. Rufus Jones calls him "the real father of Catholic mysticism".*

Evil as Privation

Earlier, while noting the similarity of certain doctrines of Christianity and Neoplatonism, we mentioned the "problem of evil." "Augustine takes from Plotinus his doctrine of evil as mere privation . . . ." But Plotinus actually believed that evil existed. Not so Augustine, says Inge, who

* Fleming, "Mysticism in Christianity."

> believed that the soul of man is exempt from stain, and that evil is only the necessary lowest term in a series, the all but non-existent.*

Harnack says that, long after Augustine had renounced Manicheanism, Manichean pessimism remained with this early father. He himself also admitted that

> he can still note the existence of his Neo-Platonist conception of sin. "All things that are corrupted are deprived of good. . . .

This refers to the Neoplatonic idea of evil as a lack. What's more, evil does not even exist.

> "But, if they be deprived of all good, they will cease to exist. . . . Evil is no substance".**

The Augustinian idea of the insulation of the soul became Catholic doctrine and would contribute to the antinomianism of not a few Jesuits.

> the Neoplatonic view of sin is apt to produce a rather shallow and facile optimism, as we see not only in Emerson, but in Robert Browning, and to paralyze zeal for the saving of souls.***

Here we see the connection of Neoplatonism and Gnosticism with Communism, the shallow optimism.

> The upward path—ἀναγωγὴ—is the same for Plotinus and Augustine. First comes "purification," the main element in which is the energetic practice of the social virtues . . .

The gullible optimism of Marxism originates in Neoplatonism (Greek/Thomist humanism). Even the Social Gospel,

* Inge, "The Permanent Influence."
** Fleming, "Mysticism in Christianity."
*** Inge, "The Permanent Influence."

Liberation Theology, would develop from these ideas; or, rather, may have been the source of Marxism.

Purification, in orthodox Christianity, is being cleansed in the blood of Christ Jesus and regenerated; not, as we see here, through works. In addition to works, Augustine also promoted Contemplative Meditation.

> The second stage, contemplation, which has been foolishly supposed to mean day-dreaming, is the deliberate concentration of all the faculties-the will, the intellect, the imagination, and the affections-upon the highest of all conceivable objects; it is a wrestling like that of Jacob with the angel, when he said: "I will not let thee go unless thou bless me and tell me thy name." Thus is gained that intellectual enlightenment without which good works are, in the language of the New Testament, "dead."

Elsee is not as dour in his estimation of Augustine as Inge. He does not wholly ascribe to Augustine the theology of insulation from evil but rather a work's theology requiring asceticism.

> According to Plotinus, the source of evil in the world is to be found in the inherent qualities of matter. Matter contains elements of change and decay, and it is therefore the absolute antithesis of true existence or goodness.*

Asceticism would become a tool for cleansing oneself to reach a higher order.

> In spite of the tendency to sin, human liberty is safeguarded, for the soul is capable, if it chooses, of detaching itself from the sensible world and turning back towards the intelligible, nor can the body prevent it from so doing. It is therefore possible for man, by a long course of self-discipline, to purify himself, and to rise at last into union with The One.
>
> These views of Plotinus made a profound impression on the mind of Augustine.

* Elsee, *Neoplatonism in Relation to Christianity*.

> he was always ready to make use of such help as Neoplatonism could supply.

The last stage, of course, is the coveted mystical Oneness.

> The last stage is that which conducts us to the inmost shrine —the famous vision (ὄψις) of the Neoplatonists, the "unitive life" of Christian mystics.*

Neoplatonic and Augustinian language is basically the same on this point. But Augustine appropriates the beauty of the Bible.

> The language of Plotinus [about mystical oneness] seldom or never rises to such beauty [as Augustine's]; but the thoughts are all to be found in his book

Charles Elsee says it this way:

> we cannot fail to be struck by the utter absence of love in the Neoplatonic system.

WK Fleming similarly:

> Augustine's own conceptions about God and the soul retained in many particulars distinctly Plotinian characteristics. He was always "half a Platonist" . . .**

Nonetheless,

> It is perhaps in his insistence on the last named, on Union rather than on Knowledge, that we feel the parting of the ways between Augustine's and Plotinus' souls.
>
> Even illumination, knowledge, are bound up with love.

This emphasis has continued until the modern day, but the

* Inge, "The Permanent Influence."
** *ibid*.

whole Neoplatonic apparatus is maintained. The brotherly love angle has become the Social Gospel of Communism, which is a Neoplatonic-Gnostic outgrowth itself.

> We have seen that the Neoplatonic principles are devoid of love; they are no less devoid of will.*

Augustine, believed that God willed, but Neoplatonists are basically pantheistic. They do not see spiritual will as much as accidental theory. Or perhaps a kind of avatarism.

City of God

We already spoke a little about how Augustine's City of God may have been influenced by the Stoic idea of the same name. Cosmopolitanism today, an idea undergirding the New World Order, derives its name from this and is essentially the same thing. It seems to have been a Neoplatonic dominionist idea from the beginning, a Rosicrucian pipe dream.

On the website *Modern Stoicism*, Jules Evans writes, in a 2013 article, "Features: Stoicism and Christianity":

> Christianity also developed the Stoics' idea of the *cosmopolis*—the City of God—and the idea that the good person should try and serve the *cosmopolis* first, and their own particular tribe second.

This idea of a multicultural global community is also spelled out on the website *Stoic Insights*. It is basically the New World Order. In a 2000 issue of *Phronimon* (*Special Edition*), TL Tsolis of the University of Athens, in "The Stoic Cosmopolis: A Vision of Justice and Virtue in a Multicultural Society," which conflates cosmopolitanism and ecumenicalism, says that the *cosmopolis* idea originates in ontology and cosmology, the nature of being and the origin of the universe. Of course, as we have shown,

* Elsee, *Neoplatonism in Relation to Christianity*.

these ideas are developed Neoplatonically.

Byzantium

In the section "The Codification of Justinian," Radin writes:

> The revival of Roman power and authority under Justinian (supra, § 6) was accompanied with a renewed interest in legal reform. Two great law schools, one at Berytus (Beirut), and one at Constantinople, had worthily maintained the standards of legal scholarship, and these institutions made the projected reform possible.

This was taking place c. 528. Justinian was a Byzantine Christian. One of the major law schools was in Constantinople. However much Neoplatonism may have figured in it, lawmaking was done from a Christian perspective. I mention this because Byzantium preceded Catholic Rome. But Radin does not once mention the ostensible Christian influence or character in any substantial spiritual way. From his perspective, Stoicism and Christianity are very much alike anyway. He understood the historical reality, the philosophic alignment of Neoplatonism and Catholicism.

One broad observation must be noted from the beginning. Both systems, the Roman Empire and the ostensible Christian empire of Byzantium, both have *religious* sources, the natural law and paganism of the Stoics and the Christian, of course, the Bible, however much Neoplatonism actually played a part.

Radin notes that the Greek language began to take precedent in legal matters because of its specificity.

In the Byzantine Empire things took a religious complexion, circumstances similar in Rome, Italy.

> *scholia*—that is, marginal glosses derived from the legal literature after Justinian—were added to the Basilica within the next century and became almost an integral part of the Code.

> the continuity of the Roman law was maintained in an unbroken line from the first lex issued by the assembled *populus Romanus* in the Campus Martius in Rome, an event which must have been many centuries before 500 B. C., and from the first formal vindication before a Roman magistrate, which must have taken place far earlier, to the actual capture of New Rome, Constantinople, in 1453 A. D.

Of course, the Vatican was the heir of Roman law.

> The great institution of the Western Church, of which the supreme head was the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, developed a law of its own, partly derived from Roman sources and certainly organized on Roman models.

The Germans of the later medieval period would adopt most of this, with no small encouragement from the Vatican.

> It quickly superseded most of the local customs of Italy and southern France. It found a growing favor in Spain, and in the innumerable states of Germany. In 'Spain it served as the model in form, just as it furnished the bulk of the contents, for the Great Code of Castile, the Siete Partidas of Alfonso the Wise, of about 1270 A. D. In Germany it was formally received about the fifteenth century and soon became practically dominant. In northern France it supplemented the customs, which meant that, for the law of obligations and for a large part of the law of property and testamentary succession, it was the sole law. . . . Again, in Scotland, as well as in the northern states of Europe, such as the Netherlands, it was adopted consciously as the general and supreme law, which was prima facie to be applied, except so far as expressly derogated.
>
> Only in England did the Roman law encounter a resistance to which it ultimately succumbed, so that its influence there is difficult to trace, although in not a few instances it is unmistakable, and in many more it may reasonably be suspected.

Sounds like he is bringing us up to the Reformation. Indeed, England was the last holdout, if Radin is not speaking of the colonization during the Middle Ages. Soon, Radin notes:

> At the end of the eighteenth century a movement, which had begun long before, resulted in the first great Codes of modern Europe, the Prussian Code of Frederick the Great, and the French Civil Code, often called the Code Napoleon, published in 1804. . . . This may be said even of the more recent restatements of European law, the Austrian Code, the German Civil Code of 1900, the Swiss Code of 1907 (Code of Obligations, 1911), and the newer South American Codes.
>
> The French and the German Codes have served as the model for a great many other legislations, and through them legal ideas of Roman origin are freely applied in Japan, in Turkey, and in Egypt, as well as in the territories settled by Europeans. . . . the only system that can pretend to rival it, the common law of England, the United States, Canada, and Australia.

Roman law has influenced the world. The Bible is correct: Rome rules until the end. But this rulership is more actual than figurative. Radin connects the philosophy of natural law from Stoic Idealism to the Roman Catholic clergy. But Stoicism was essentially Greek itself. It is often brought up in the history of natural law, closely connected with Neoplatonism.