The virtue of mercy is widely admired, but is now marginalized in contemporary public life. Yet for centuries it held a secure place in Western public discourse without implying a necessary contradiction with justice. Alex Tuckness and John M. Parrish ask how and why this changed. Examining Christian and non-Christian ancient traditions, along with Kantian and utilitarian strains of thought, they offer a persuasive account of how our perception of mercy has been transformed by Enlightenment conceptions of impartiality and equality that place justice and mercy in tension. Understanding the logic of this decline, they argue, will make it possible to promote and defend a more robust role for mercy in public life. Their study ranges from Homer to the late Enlightenment and from ancient tragedies to medieval theologies to contemporary philosophical texts, and will be valuable to readers in political philosophy, political theory, and the philosophy of law.

Alex Tuckness is a professor of political science and philosophy at Iowa State University. He is the author of *Locke and the Legislative Point of View* (2002).

John M. Parrish is an associate professor of political science and director of the University Honors Program at Loyola Marymount University. He is the author of *Paradoxes of Political Ethics: From Dirty Hands to the Invisible Hand* (2007).
For Anastasia Tuckness
and
for Lynn Mitchell-Parrish
THE DECLINE OF MERCY IN PUBLIC LIFE

ALEX TUCKNESS
Iowa State University

JOHN M. PARRISH
Loyola Marymount University
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**Acknowledgments**

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Acknowledgments

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus responds to those who criticized his habit of sharing meals with tax collectors and sinners with these words: “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’” This book is the result of our journey in trying to learn for ourselves a small part of what this means, by chronicling what mercy has meant across a range of philosophical, political, and religious traditions and trying to understand how and why the answers they collectively provide have come to seem so persistently confused.

A brief word about the ordering of our names. When Alex called John in 2007 to propose working together on a project exploring mercy’s history as a political concept, John readily agreed, but suggested that because the idea had been Alex’s, his name should come first in any resulting publications. Since then, the project has been in every sense a joint venture; each of us has taken the lead in drafting one section or another, but by now every sentence of the manuscript has been written and/or rewritten by both of us.

Our first debts are to the institutions that support our work as teachers and scholars: Iowa State University and Loyola Marymount University. The political science departments at those institutions have provided each of us with a stimulating and supportive environment of friends and colleagues for many years. In particular, our department chairs (at LMU, Evan Gerstmann and Richard Fox; at ISU, Jim McCormick) and department administrative assistants (Ngoc Nguyen, Christie O’Rourke, and Michelle Larson at LMU; Shirley Barnes, Darlene Brace, Sandy Foltz, and Joyce Wray at ISU) have supported us in a range of ways to facilitate our work on this book. The library staffs of the William Robert Parks and Ellen Sorge Parks Library (ISU) and the William H. Hannon Library (LMU) managed our access to books and articles related to this project for half a decade. Our institutions also provided sabbatical leave or course reductions, funds for travel, and summer grant support related to this project. We are grateful for their consistent help.
From 2010 to 2012, our project was enhanced by a generous grant from the University of Chicago’s “A New Science of Virtues” project, funded by the John Templeton Foundation. In addition to providing valuable course relief and travel funds, the grant aided our exploration of the unfamiliar terrain of comparative religious studies by providing for consultations with experts in Buddhism (Charles Goodman), Islam (Arzoo Osanloo), and (Eastern) Orthodox Christianity (Paul Valliere). Alex also participated in three meetings in Chicago, where he gained much-needed feedback both from the scholars working on other projects and from the Executive Committee, led by Jean Bethke Elshtain. Her recent death is a great loss for our profession. Conscious of how fortunate we are to have work like this funded by external support, we express our deep appreciation and gratitude to the project and its funders; we also offer this book as a small return on their investment in us.

We learn consistently from teaching our students. John would especially like to thank the students in his course Punishment and Mercy and particularly his co-instructors, Jonathan Rothchild and Andrew Dilts, for contributing much to his understanding of this topic. Alex thanks his students in his upper-level History of Political Thought courses where mercy has likely received disproportionate attention over the last few years.

Several scholars graciously responded to our arguments and provided valuable corrections and improvements. We offer our gratitude to Danielle Allen, Terence Ball, Matthew Dillon, Andrew Dilts, Samuel Fleischacker, Charles Goodman, Wayne Le Cheminant, Thomas Niehof, Arzoo Osanloo, Daniel Philpott, Jennifer Ramos, Jonathan Rothchild, Timothy Shanahan, Daniel Speak, Mina Suk, Paul Valliere, and Jeffrey Wilson. We additionally thank audiences and discussants who commented on our work at Iowa State University, Loyola Marymount University, and the University of Chicago, and at the Annual Meetings of the American Political Science Association, the Association for Political Theory, the Society for Christian Philosophers (Central), the Southwestern Political Science Association, the Western Political Science Association, and the Henry Institute Symposium on Religion and Politics. Any errors that remain belong to us.

We also benefited from valuable research assistance. At Iowa State, Kestrel Henry and Richard Ward deserve special thanks for their extensive and expert help. Both worked for two or more years on the project. At Loyola Marymount, a larger contingent assisted for shorter periods: Elizabeth Chitty, Meghan Fitch, Sean Grant, Samantha Hay, Ryan Pickering, Cynthia Salim, and Matthew Vallejo.
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Hilary Gaskin encouraged us in the development of this project and guided the manuscript through review and revision. Arindam Bose, Anna Lowe, Mark Fox, and Zeneb Khan carefully and patiently oversaw the book’s production and copyediting and Matthew Vallejo took the lead in preparing the index.

Our greatest debt is to our families: our loving parents, siblings, spouses, and children. John’s two children were born during his work on this project, and their names, Sophia and Grace, may have resulted partly from his preoccupation over a long period with the subjects of discerning judgment and unmerited blessing. Our faith communities have also been a form of familial support for which we are very grateful.

To our spouses, Anastasia Tuckness and Lynn Mitchell-Parrish, we owe most of all. With deep appreciation for their patience, support, and love, we gratefully dedicate this book to each of them.
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GT

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Hobbes L

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