This book provides the first systematic, book-length defence of natural law ideas in ethics, politics and jurisprudence since John Finnis’s influential *Natural Law and Natural Rights*. Incorporating insights from recent work in ethical, legal and social theory, it presents a robust and original account of the natural law tradition, challenging common perceptions of natural law as a set of timeless standards imposed on humans from above. Natural law, Jonathan Crowe argues, is objective and normative, but nonetheless historically extended, socially embodied and dependent on contingent facts about human nature. It reflects the ongoing human quest to work out how best to live flourishing lives, given the natures we have and the social environments we inhabit. The nature and purpose of law can be adequately understood only within this wider context of value. Timely, wide-ranging and clearly written, this volume will appeal to those working in law, philosophy and religious studies.

Jonathan Crowe is Professor of Law at Bond University. He is the author or editor of several books, including *Legal Theory* (3rd edn, 2019) and *Research Handbook on Natural Law Theory* (2019). His work has appeared in leading international journals, including the *Modern Law Review*, the *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, *Jurisprudence*, *Ratio Juris* and *Law and Critique*. 
NATURAL LAW AND THE NATURE OF LAW

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## Contents

*Preface*  page vii

**Introduction**  1

### Part I: Normative Foundations  13

1. Normative Inclinations  15
2. Theorising Human Goods  35
3. Acting for Reasons  58
4. The Common Good  85
5. Rights and Freedoms  99
6. The Role of the State  116

### Part II: The Nature of Law  135

7. The Natural Law Thesis  137
8. Law as an Artifact Kind  156
9. The Function of Law  169
10. Law without Authority  182
11. Contextual Interpretation  196
12. The Value of Integrity  224

**Conclusion**  241

**Works Cited**  247

**Index**  259
Preface

This book is about the nature of law. It is also, however, about the nature and conditions of human flourishing. I argue that these two topics are inextricably related. Law is best understood as a kind of artifact with the purpose of marking the boundaries of social conduct. However, the reasons for having law in the first place – as well as the ways in which it succeeds or fails in its function – can be understood only against the normative backdrop of human values and social institutions. Law, viewed from this perspective, becomes a set of communal guidelines for the pursuit of human fulfilment, rather than a collection of rules imposed from above. Any adequate descriptive theory of law must accommodate this wider viewpoint.

This picture of law is illustrated by the book’s cover art. Jean-Frédéric Bazille’s Porte de la Reine at Aigues-Mortes (oil on canvas, 1867) shows an assortment of people going about their everyday tasks in the shadow of a medieval wall. The wall, however, remains permeable, despite its formidable appearance, as illustrated by the opening with light spilling through. This permeability augments, rather than diminishes, the wall’s function as a boundary marker. It enables the local residents to incorporate the boundary into their lives, rather than viewing it as an impediment to their individual and collective life plans. Furthermore, although the wall dominates the painting with its sheer size, it is the people in the foreground who draw the eye. The true law, we might say, is not over there, but among us.

Many people have helped me to write this book. I am grateful to my colleagues in the Faculty of Law at Bond University and the Law School and Philosophy Department at the University of Queensland for their support over many years of research, writing and refinement. Some early and late work on the book was undertaken during my time as a visiting scholar in the Philosophy Department at Georgetown University and the Government Department at the University of Texas at Austin. I thank my
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Preface
