masterfully and comprehensively demonstrated, stable, consistent, and organized, even in times of crisis.

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*Von der Allegorie zur Empirie: Natur im Rechtsdenken des Spätmittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit.* Susanne Lepsius, Friedrich Vollhardt, and Oliver Bach, eds.  
Abhandlungen zur rechtswissenschaftlichen Grundlagenforschung; Münchener Universitätsschriften: Juristische Fakultät 100. Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2017. vi + 328 pp. £79.95.

This ambitious collection of essays examines the role of natural law in legal thought from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries. It contributes to the growing literature on conceptions of nature in medieval and early modern Europe, using law rather than moral philosophy as a lens. The editors aim to unite philosophical and juridical concepts of natural law, and they argue that a historical division between natural law (*ius naturale*) in legal theory and the theological concept of a law of nature (*ius naturae*) converged after 1600. The collected essays demonstrate the wide reach of natural law in religion, science, politics, and literature, and they address a staggering range of topics, from the human-animal divide, to Protestant theology, to legal niceties, to political theory, and to literary utopias. The volume has resonances with Lorraine Daston and Fernando Vidal’s *The Moral Authority of Nature* (2003), but it focuses on the late Middle Ages and early modern period and specifically emphasizes natural law.

The thirteen essays are divided into four sections. The first part, on natural law from the Middle Ages to the early modern period, focuses on questions of humans, animals, and their place in the natural order. Elisabeth Schneider’s essay examines the discussions about criminal charges against animals among French jurists in the early sixteenth century, while David von Mayenburg’s fascinating article explores early modern ideas of the farmer as a being somewhere between human and animal. The following section examines broader conceptions of natural law in theological and Scholastic writings, including Tilman Reppgen’s detailed exploration of Spanish Jesuit Francisco de Vitoria’s interpretations of late medieval Scholastic theology; Wim Decock’s essay on legal conceptions of debt; and Oliver Bach’s examination of Protestant ideas of natural law according to jurist Johann Oldendorp, a close collaborator with Melanchthon.

The largest section of the book, united under the broad umbrella of “Anthropologie, Naturrecht, Utopie,” contains a series of essays focused on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Norbert Breiskorn and Gideon Steining both examine ideas of statehood and natural law, Breiskorn using the example of Spanish Jesuit Francisco Suárez and Steining comparing the Italian Scholastic Marsilius of Padua with Dutch humanist
Hugo Grotius. Wilhelm Vosskamp’s and Astrid Dröse’s essays address the question of natural law and the natural order in utopic writings, with Vosskamp focused on Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis* and Dröse examining Georg Greßlinger’s German adaptation of Henry Neville’s *Isle of Pines*. Susanne Lepsius contributes a helpful overview of the use of nature in seventeenth-century legal dissertations. Finally, the last section of essays focuses on nature and system building in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Contributions include Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann’s essay on natural law in church-state legal conceptions; Walter Rech’s examination of Giambattista Vico’s historical natural law; and Friedrich Vollhardt’s essay on natural law and sociability in the German jurist Christian Thomasius’s interpretation of Daniel Vairasse’s utopian *Histoire de Severambes*.

All of the essays represent substantial pieces of scholarship and will be useful to scholars working on the respective topics. The volume demonstrates the fascinating range of arenas in which questions of natural law emerged in late medieval and early modern Europe. For such an interdisciplinary and wide-ranging array of essays, however, the volume addresses a perplexingly narrow audience. On the whole, the editors and individual authors demand a significant level of existing knowledge from their readers. Many of the essays (with some notable exceptions) do not even introduce their main subjects or explain why they are worthy of study. In most cases, the authors also do not address the substantial English-language scholarship on medieval and early modern concepts of nature. Some small gestures toward context in both the editors’ introduction and the individual essays would have made the volume more accessible to a larger number of readers. For academics specifically interested in the varied understandings of *ius naturale* in late medieval and early modern Europe, these essays provide excellent contributions to the field.

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*Sperone Speroni and the Debate over Sophistry in the Italian Renaissance.*

Teodoro Katinis.


Teodoro Katinis opens his timely study of the rebirth of sophistic rhetoric in early modern Italy by appealing to some neglected and relativistic strands in the political and cultural environment of sixteenth-century Venice. He also invokes the necessity of reconsidering the cultural impact of a new form of skepticism that permeated the public sphere of Bologna, Padua, and Venice, going beyond what Edward Muir has established for the Counter-Reformation. Often, the vibrancy of such intellectual life was associated with institutionalized Peripatetic schools. Moreover, as Katinis explicitly