



The Decline of Mercy in Public Life

Alex Tuckness, John M. Parrish

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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.

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