

# Moll flanders



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An appropriate explanation of Locke's theories on natural law and the state of nature are given to the summary of three ideas. Self-preservation, leaving enough for others, and not attaining more than needed are given as the concepts of Moll's personal acceptance to larceny. Moll's theft of a necklace from a child is warranted under Locke's concept. In her reflection of the theft, Moll optimistically moralizes her actions under natural law. Moll's uses natural law theories throughout the novel to alleviate internal condemnation of her social misconduct (Zhang).

Defoe creatively modifies Moll's moral, spiritual, and sexual thoughts, that would normally govern human behavior, into mercenary values. McMaster goes on to view Defoe as being detached from Moll; judging her and the social class that she represents. Defoe's overall theme for Moll Flanders is that of mercenary values being placed above all others (McMaster). The narrator's layout of Moll's perspective to the reader of the story is based on the experiences of her life. She has repented; however, the effect of her wicked sins are still apparent. out of fear, not out of belief.

Moll's repentance is a christian style device for controlling her fear of punishment for her crimes (Zimmerman). A very detailed breakdown of seven main themes of John Locke's theories are discussed in this article. Most importantly reviewed are the Law of Nature, State of Nature, and Property (Tuckness). In this article, Daniel Defoe's novel, Moll Flanders, is analyzed in accordance with 18th century marriage law and natural law (Ganz). Analysis Morals have been more than just a topic of debate throughout the world; they have defined entire cultures and the subcultures within them.

Unexamined interpretations of right and wrong provide groundwork to societal judgment and persecution. Legal murders are committed in wars over right/wrong controversy. Society forms laws, religions, and caste systems around these suggested morals. Failure to accept and live by these morals allows punishment to be justified in the social realm. Daniel Defoe's novel *Moll Flanders* has been banned by the index of the Catholic Church and many other organizations in lieu of Moll's theoretically immoral actions. Perceptively, I submit that banning an excellent source of higher education is unethical.

However, either decision could be right and social morality isn't a terrible thing at all. An understanding that everyone has the right to a socially respected, experience inspired, individual perspective of morality is required before judgment is passed. This project will link Moll's moral perspective to John Locke's theory of Natural Law and justify, by natural law, her larceny, bigamy, and insincere repentance. Before the bitter analysis, let's gain some relevant interest in the theory of Natural Law. It's a common assumption that the U. S. A. was established on Christian principles.

However, the study of history tells a different story. In 1776, Thomas Jefferson was chosen to write the Declaration of Independence by the Continental Congress. Jefferson retired to a hotel to complete the task. The Declaration turned out to be more than strikingly similar to John Locke's philosophical works. The Declaration of Independence states, " We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (Richards 5).

This mirrors Locke's writing with the exception of exchanging the pursuit of happiness with property (Richards). Property was interpreted to be anything tangible. In light of this disposition, Locke's theories on Natural Law and Natural Rights formed the support structure for the new American Government. The quote above from the Declaration of Independence gives an abstract of Locke's natural law theory. Locke's social theories were very popular during Daniel Defoe's period. Therefore, Defoe, knowingly or not, created Moll Flander's character to portray a natural law perspective on morality.

An appropriate explanation of Locke's theories on natural law and the state of nature are given to the summary of three basic concepts. These concepts are self-preservation, leaving enough for others, and not attaining more than needed (Zhang). Throughout the novel Moll uses these three concepts to internally justify her actions. Moll's second theft of a necklace from a child can be understood as morally acceptable when judged by natural law. Twice Moll reminds herself that she has done no harm to the child. She also states that the necklace may have belonged to the child's mother being that it was too big.

In other words, the child didn't need the necklace to survive. Moll views her larceny as justified on the basis of her right to property based on necessity and the idea of the child having more than needed to survive. All three concepts of natural law are met in this setting (Zhang). Everyone has the right to eat, breath, and live in this world regardless of social or financial status. Moll's situation presented few choices in the 18th century. If the only choice is larceny to sustain the right to life, then let it be morally correct.

In contrast, 18th century morality viewed larceny for any reason as a crime punishable by execution or transportation to the new world. These laws were transcribed by those who had never had to struggle for their right to live. Their lack of experience concealed the actuality of what was naturally correct; that being the absolute right to eat, breath, and live. To execute someone for a crime of sustainability is cruel and unnatural. Moll's use of sexual favors for personal gain, or prostitution, can be viewed as a natural act. Sexual intercourse in its many forms is instinctual.

Marriage only makes sex proper by social, religious standards that have been handed down through the generations. Moll gains property for sustainability and the man gains natural pleasure. Human life would cease to exist without sex. The sex drive in every man and woman, regardless of social status, is 100% natural. Everyone has the right to do as they please with their body. It is as simple as two individuals with mutual consent driven to commit a natural act. Once again Moll meets the three basic requirements of natural law. For the time period, prostitution was common and legal.

Both the attractive, poor and the rich could prosper from it. The only disgrace of being a prostitute was the social class to which the seller was enlisted. Meanwhile, the prosperous buyer remained high upon the social hierarchy. A double standard for engaging in a biological activity. Judge if you will a biological functioning state in which everyone can relate. Thus far, Moll is no more evil or corrupt than I or you. When viewed with new knowledge and perspective, her theft and prostitution cannot be judged. The right to life through natural law gives anyone the right to being morally correct.

It's odd when larceny and prostitution can be morally justified through the proper perspective. Perspective, by the way, is based on individual experience and education. Although, without experience and education, individual perspective isn't flawed. Natural law is instinctual. A child knows the basic rights of life. When the correct path is unknown, think about what is natural and you will find a good perspective on morality. In modern time, as well as in the 18th century, marriage is defined as a legal union between two people.

Two people joined, in finances, by socially created laws. In the 21st century, a woman can divorce and live prosperously. However, in Moll Flanders' lifetime, socially correct women were utterly dependent upon men for support. Moll's four failed marriages do not testify to her corruption; but detail her natural law type perspective of morals. By law, Moll was eligible to remarry after the death of her first husband. That is a natural situation. Nevertheless, Moll was allegedly immoral and could have been punished for remarrying after Draper's desertion.

Moll is very aware of this 18th century social crime. " Thus I say, I was limited from marriage, what Offer soever be made me (Defoe 53). " Until 1857, the Church of England banned divorce. Making the dissolution of marriages punishable (Ganz 8). It's only natural to correct a mistake. Disputes over Defoe's portrayal of Moll, in deciding to remarry after her second marriage, contrast. Some scholars believe Defoe is critical of Moll's remarriage based on a personal opposition to divorce. Others, such as Maximilian E.

Novak, view Draper's desertion as a "de facto divorce". "He suggests that Defoe agrees with the idea articulated by natural law philosophers that desertion dissolves a marriage contract and justifies a deserted spouse's remarriage" (Ganz 2). Moll disregards legal constraint for her remarriage and pursues a more natural and rational state of affairs. Individual moral perspective is in the natural mind of the beholder. According to natural law, spousal desertion is grounds for divorce and moral remarriage. Moll moves forward in order to survive (Novak 104).

Whether or not, Moll could have survived as a poor widow in the 18th century without utilizing the morally questionable resources of larceny, prostitution, and con marriages, is unknown. Then again, she did have a few unflattering options. Such as staying with her first husband's family or remaining with her half-brother. In mind of the inalienable right to live, life is only given once. Naturally, the seemingly most desirable living condition will be chosen over the dull standard, if at all possible. Her desire to have more wealth than required for survival is immoral by natural law. Moll is justified in her fight for survival.

Although, she may have, as we all have at times, gotten a little closer to the dark, unnatural side of morality. There are times, in the novel, when acts of survival cross over into mercenary acts. Moll's overall standards could easily be misconstrued to be mercenary values. As mentioned before, the boundary is walked very closely at times. Yet, Defoe placed Moll in this position to expose a social problem. Mercenary values have replaced sexual, moral, and spiritual values (McMaster 338). In the end, Moll repents for her

wicked life. To stay on track, let's find a connection between Natural Law and Moll's penitence.

Penitence is a psychological means to accomplish a psychological end. Moll was caught in the act of larceny. Never before this point, in the novel, is the idea of repentance or remorse mentioned. Moll never had guilty feelings about her actions before she was caught. Simply because, she could justify them, by order of natural law. The only remorse came when she was imprisoned. That tells us two things. One, her actions were personally moral and based on her survival. Two, she only felt the guilt when society's ultimate judgment, in the form of execution, was realized.

Moll states, " all my repentance appeared to me to be only the effect of my fear of death, not a sincere regret for the wicked life that I had lived (Defoe 218)". Releasing the fear of death, will drive anyone to fight for survival, suppressing the threat at all cost. Moll chose to elude death by repenting for her sins. Everett Zimmerman links Defoe to Moll in this same theory. " Like Moll, he presumably accepts a Christian view of repentance and redemption, but one suspects that his theology is at least in part a device for controlling his fears (Zimmerman 369). In an attempt to retain her natural right to life, Moll has repented. Many scholars question the sincerity of her repentance. " Then I repented heartily of all my life past, but that repentance yielded me no satisfaction, no peace (Defoe 215). " A heart filled religious repentance yields no peace. Moll only finds peace upon the exchange of her execution for transportation, allowing her to retain her life. Once again, Moll's meets the requirement of natural law morality. As to her continued claim of penitence,



Moll sticks with her guns. She knows what works, where it works, and when to use it.