

The concept of natural laws vs. human laws in the decameron



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The Concept of Natural Laws vs. Human Laws in the Decameron The concept of natural law and human law are both evident in the Decameron yet it is clear that natural law or what we may call karma is stronger than human law which is made through the dictates of the court or the traditions given to us in legal terms. Certainly, the rules of the world do not change for the individuals in the Decameron yet the heroes of the story manage to evade the laws and even if the law is applied to them, the application comes up towards their benefit rather than their detriment.

As to the book itself, it must be noted that The Decameron was written by Giovanni Boccaccio in a period where the very idea of justice and fair play was changing. The stories are concerned with a lot of things but it is the everyman hero which comes out on top rather than a Christian knight or a great king. Topics such as love, practical jokes, the hypocrisy and corruption of the clergy are all covered and often the hero of a tale comes from the mercantile class which was coming up at the time (Barolini, 1983). Since the audience itself was largely composed of individuals from this class, their notion of natural law being more important than human laws is certainly reflected in how the tales take shape.

For example, in the very first tale a sinner is canonized as a saint which not only shows the fallacy of human law created by clergymen but also the power of natural law as the man who did wrong in his life was not appreciated by anyone except the foolish priest who came to see him. In the same series of tales of the first day (sixth and ninth tales), we see examples of how disputes can be better resolved by words amongst individuals rather than resorting to the proper application of the law which might have resulted in the detriment of all concerned parties.

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It must be noted that Boccaccio does not seek to eradicate laws or even consider them bad since many laws are good for protecting the people. However, laws which make no sense to him or those which he considers archaic traditions are ridiculed extensively. As a replacement of those laws, Boccaccio shows us that natural laws are not only their equal but perhaps an improvement since they result in more equitable answers. The tales of the second day directly connect with this since they all deal with an individual losing his fortune and then through the workings of natural law is restored to his fortune while winning out over those who oppose him.

In fact, to take it a step further, it can be said that the relationship between natural law and human law in the Decameron is very similar to the relationship between what fate ordains and what fortune brings. Human law can be likened to fate or the lot of the people by which the poor are supposed to be poor and even die in poverty. On the other hand, the landed gentry and the nobility are born rich and will die rich. However, natural law or fortune can change that by which a person who may be born in poverty is able to rise to a high rank while a person of high rank may be reduced to poverty and ignominy simply because of their deeds or interactions with the people around him.

In conclusion, it becomes easy to say that while human law is present and may even be a guiding force for the plot within many of the stories put in the Decameron, it is the path taken by fortune, chance and natural law which defines where and how an individual gets what he deserves. While human law may create situations that are nothing less than absurd, natural law puts things right and even right the wrongs done through the enforcement of human law.

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Works Cited

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