

Outline the key principles of natural law

Law



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Jamshed Masjedi Outline the key principles of Natural Law Let's start off with a definition of Natural Law: a moral code existing with a purpose of nature, created by God. Aristotle theory of purpose inspired St Thomas Aquinas to develop his idea of Natural Law to present a rational basis for Christian morality. Aquinas developed an absolute and deontological theory which states that certain acts are innately right or wrong. Natural Law directs people to their great purpose, and can be deduced through reason.

Good acts are those which enable humans to fulfil their purpose, and are in unity with the primary precepts. Through Aristotle's idea that everything has a purpose (theory of causality) and we have a purpose to do good and avoid evil and seek happiness and fulfilment in life (eudaimonia), Aquinas started by trying to work out what the purpose of human life was. Aquinas developed the primary precepts which follow from this idea. The Primary precepts are connected with preservation of life, reproduction, education, living in a society and worshipping God.

These Primary precepts can then be developed into secondary precepts as practical human rules that govern our daily behaviour. For example from preservation of life, one could argue someone who is in desperate need of organs or bloods would be correct. This could lead to a secondary precept of you donating your organ(s) to saves lives of other. Another example is about reproduction linking it genetic engineering with Natural Law suggesting that humans have an essential nature and manipulating it, through genetic engineering, is conflicting to the natural order of things and so is wrong.

Aquinas developed four kinds of law: eternal, natural, human, and divine. Eternal law is humans being not being able to know gods intention. Natural

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law is humans with a natural sense and the discovery of reason. Human law is some sort of man-made law with the natural law supplied by the government to the societies, and divine law is the specially revealed law in the scriptures. The main aspect of Natural Law theory is that it relies heavily on reason. It can be discovered by anyone, regardless of any religious alignment.

For this reason it is universal and not a relativist argument but an absolutist argument. Reason is used in order to establish how we should live our lives. We use our reason to fulfil the requirements of the primary precepts and therefore to achieve our aim of doing good and avoiding evil. If everything is created for a purpose, human reasoning in examining that purpose is able to judge how to act in order to conform to that purpose. Thus, the role of reason plays a huge part as Aquinas states " To disparage the dictate of reason is equivalent to condemning the command of God. Hence, humans shouldn't be trapped by their desires and that the duty of a Christian is alike to the duty of an atheist or agnostic. Reason is the superlative human asset that ultimately separates us from animals. However, if human reasoning is misguided it could lead us to the wrong moral choices such as following ' apparent goods' which could leads away from Natural Law rather following ' real goods. ' An example of an ' apparent good' is getting drunk or taking drugs as it seems like we are doing a good thing in the short term however, on the long term, it's not.

Or as a rather deeper example, perhaps we can consider that Hitler with his misguided belief about Jews, seeking an apparent good to remove them, in the end, it wasn't such a wise move. Jamshed Masjedi For Aquinas, both the

intention and the act are important. According to Aquinas, God knows the secrets of our hearts and thus, our actions must be interior rather than exterior. The purpose behind an act gets recorded. For example we should help an elderly person cross the road because it is the honest thing to do not because to gain admiration of others i. . someone watching nearby. It is said that if humans act towards this way, it's said that god is glorified. Is this theory relevant to the 21st century? Many theories have been created 10 years ago, 100 years ago or 1000 years ago that still shape and dictate our society today, since it's the 21st century, many theories have been developed and improved, but as far as questioning the theory of natural law and it's standing, it's a theory holding major significance around the world today.

For example the Roman Catholic Church supports the theory with them making the primary precepts into absolute rule thus, meaning no room for negotiation. Natural Law has many benefits to society and for individuals. Since it's an absolutist argument, it provides moral foundation to rules with clear guidance at all times. Most individuals are in favour of Natural Law because it offers a universal code. Most people believe in preserving life, education etc. On the Flip side, Natural Law theory cannot seem to get at certain individuals.

It relies to use reason correctly, however, it is fair to say that we do not all have the same ability to reason. If we do, everyone can come up with the same conclusions and decide what's right and wrong. The precepts are to be looked when one finds them in a situation, but this also is disputed. Homosexuality is a common example of something that Natural moral Law is

unable to provide a succinct response to. Furthermore, in modern forms Natural Law does not allow room for negotiation because the Roman Catholic Church has made the secondary precepts into absolute rules.

The book of Genesis seems befuddling with Natural Law. It's inconsistent with the story of the Fall. Genesis 3 teaches that that human reason was separated from God Through sin. Thus, if our reason is corrupt then how can we deduce God's purpose? Society can never guarantee people's safety but with the theory of Natural law, it's open in arms for offering protection, therefore will always be relevant. Furthermore, natural law is a good guide for the believers in God. Natural law will provide an instructive and dependable guide to moral behaviour.

The Roman Catholics Church is in favour of Aquinas's brilliant knowledge of reasoning in the Natural law. What's more, Aquinas himself was a Catholic and so, some might question from whom is it relevant to? It can hardly be claimed that Natural Law ethics is irrelevant to Roman Catholics. Linking to situation ethics, Natural Law would be helpful when making a logical decision depending on the situation a person's in and with its deontological and absolutist status, it would also create guidelines to follow for all especially for individuals or societies wanting the absolute right and wrong.

Due to the adaptation in the 21st century, the Natural Law theory is always going to be controversial. I think the most usual criticism for during our time is that it may be too inflexible over major issues. There is no direct reference to issues, for example likeabortionoreuthanasia. Others might argue that the theory is too old and other types or similar systems of ethics are better than the Natural Law theory. For example, if Aquinas could have been wrong

about the primary precepts, he could have also been wrong about the secondary precepts.

Finally, I believe this could be the strongest negative assessment of Natural Law, is that this God-based ethic may no longer be relevant to, what is an increasingly secular society. On the whole, I believe that taking both arguments in on the balance, Natural Law has become not irrelevant, but less relevant, because the modern definition of human nature is much wider than that offered by Aquinas. Natural law is based purely on deductive, rational reasoning. This makes it an objective theory, it is not open to interpretation - should everyone reason correctly we should all come to the same conclusions about what is right and what is wrong.

We can see this in action around the world, with many societies sharing common beliefs about morality - this is strength of the theory since there is evidence of a common system of morality in place, although that is not to say the universal theory is natural law. Natural Moral laws relies on our ability to reason correct, that is to use casuistry to deduce the correct action based on how it fits in with our precepts. However, it is fair to say that we do not all have the same ability to reason.

Whilst Aquinas maintained that all humans were equal he did say that some were better at reasoning than others and therefore we should practice our logical skills so that they become habitual. This is fine to an extent, but if we were to encounter a totally alien situation we would have no prior experience to draw reference from, and so our ability to decide the right course of action would come down to our individual ability to reason correctly. In such a

situation we should stick to the precepts; since they are logically sound, but even these can be ambiguous.

Homosexuality is a classic example of something natural moral is not able to provide a succinct response to. On the one hand we can say since homosexuality doesn't lead to procreation, and so it is a misuse of humangenitalia, but on the other hand we can say that since it is pleasurable, that pleasure is there for a reason.