

The natural law essay sample

Law



a) Explain what is meant by a natural approach to ethics.

Natural Law creates ethical principals from the rules or guidelines, laid down by God in the bible and in the Ten Commandments. This was first suggested by St Paul who inferred that we should live according to God's law. It is a moral code that human beings should be naturally inclined to follow. The natural law has does not favour one situation over another, therefore making it an absolute deontological approach to ethics. Thus, the question has to be asked, ' shouldn't every situation be judged individually? Isn't the substance of actions different for everyone?'

Thomas Aquinas was a Roman Catholic Theologian, who understood everything was created for a particular purpose. Fulfilment of this is the good to which everything aims. He developed this from Aristotle's ideas arguing that the world we live in was created by God and has God's ultimate purpose as its final end or good. Thomas Aquinas understood this purpose to be reproduction, and learning to live harmoniously in society as we worship God. These primary precepts followed by natural law lay down how things are and indeed ought to be.

Aquinas believed the idea of law to work at four different levels. Natural Law was our inborn sense of right and wrong, discovered through the conscience. However it also depends on the superior laws, eternal and divine. He said that behaviour should not be worked out exclusively on what is natural, but with reference to Holy Scripture and church teaching, with the imperative need to educate our consciences. Aquinas also involved Aristotle's ideas of potentiality and actuality of all existing beings. Potentiality is the possibility

to alter within an existing thing, and actuality is the existence. For example a foetus has the potentiality to become a human. Aquinas felt that the more things that moved toward actuality, the better it becomes at fulfilling its purpose. He merged these into Christian theology. All of these ideals can be developed by living life within the cardinal virtues. These are reasons which distinguish between a real good and apparent good.

Real and apparent goods have to be distinguished from one-an-other; an apparent good meaning to think something is good when it is ultimately bad (a man masturbating for example is against God as it is morally wrong, but this has an alternate good meaning when the man has to masturbate for IVF treatment which links in with the five primary precepts of reproduction). Differing from other ethical approaches, the Natural Law causes us to reflect upon the basic value of actions rather than that of individual value.

By pursuing Natural Law, we should do what comes naturally, with the end justifying the means. In other words everything has an efficient cause 'to get things done', and an end product as the final cause, a final purpose to everything we do. A primary example is the act of sex. A child would be the natural outcome; so contraception is seen to interfere. Therefore, it is unnatural. Another illustration of the end justifying the means is; if killing hundreds of people aids the breaking down of a dictatorship, then the murders are justified because the country is made a better place. The end has justified the means, even though the means was not necessarily a natural act.

In the past, natural law was a very valuable approach to moral dilemmas in situations where there was no reference in the Bible and no obvious relevant principle given by revelation. It is a theory dependent on the understanding that all who use it believes that God created the world and that it must be a final cause to the world's creation.

Although it is not a religious theory the Roman Catholic Church has since adopted it. It is seen as a way to involve both faith and reason, and for this, it appeals to a varied group of people who are attracted to the use of reason and intuition together.

b) “ The strict application of Natural Law goes against common sense”.

Discuss

Natural Law attempts to make good people out of us, and guides us towards our ultimate purpose which may be eudaimonia. Along the way, on this path to this “ goal” we are supposed to have; we follow guidelines, and accept certain aspects of life as good or evil. The management of situations we find ourselves in has been assigned to us by those who first developed the concepts of natural law. We therefore find that conflict never arises within ourselves about how to deal with others actions.

Practical decision making abilities come from previous knowledge, of how consequences transpire as a result of actions. A following of the Natural Law would lead us, never to have a chance to know what it is like to make a wrong decision, and to learn from the consequences. This sheltered approach to life would suit some, but not all of us. Many want to experience certain things for themselves and would not be happy with another telling <https://assignbuster.com/the-natural-law-essay-sample/>

them that it is wrong to do a certain thing. This perspective is one gained from the liberated society in which we do live, however ignorance of this (had we always been made to live within the natural law), would leave us without understanding of whether or not something was “ good or bad”, for ourselves. How ideal would this existence be?

Natural Law enables people to establish common rules to structure communities, links faith with reason, gives guidance on everyday life and links them to the fundamental principles of life and can be seen to be the basic principles of many different cultures. However, there are also many criticisms of the theory; for example not everyone believes that the world was created for a purpose, and instead believes it came about by chance and even if it was created for a purpose it is not obvious what that purpose was. The philosopher Bertrand Russell was one believer of this and therefore could not believe in Natural Law as he did not believe in the starting point of the system. Other criticisms include the fact that Natural Law suggests humans should aim to get married and have children which would mean that those who devote their lives to something else, such as charity or developing a cure for a disease, would be wrong in how they chose to have lived their life.

Another criticism of Natural Law is that humanity has several purposes in life to fulfil and Natural Law does not allow for one purpose to be sacrificed in order to fulfil another, it only advises the use of reason determining what would be the best answer. Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution has also caused problems for the concept of Natural law and caused criticisms towards it. Darwin’s theory says humans exist by chance and look after their

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own interests and survival whereas Natural Law would say humans exist because of a deliberate will of God and are naturally inclined towards the good. Karl Barth a theologian of the twentieth century had another criticism of Natural Law as he stated sin caused by Adam and Eve's downfall made it impossible for humans to have a reliable concept of what is reasonable. Therefore humans cannot depend on their powers of reasoning as Aquinas said they should, instead Barth believed we should accept God as being the only source of truth.

Despite Natural Law being an absolutist theory, it can still be seen to contradict itself, for example in the argument about homosexuality; Natural Law has frequently been said to condemn homosexuality as it is 'unnatural' however the recent suggestions that say that sexuality could be determined by genetics; raises the issue that homosexuality could in fact be a natural part of the way humans are made.

Natural Law has had a great impact on ethics. It is the basis on many people's beliefs and morals as they base what they believe to be right or wrong in which is seen to be natural. However as there are differences in opinion about what is considered 'natural' there can be criticisms of this theory, some of which people cannot accept the principles of Natural Law at all.