

Natural Law Theory Evaluated

<p>Do good and avoid evil</p>	<p><i>Pope Benedict has expressed great concern with our 'relativist society'. Many Catholics like the idea that some types of action or activity are bad. They don't want a Pope who accepts divorce, abortion, homosexuality etc. In the Church of England, they talk of abortion as an evil, but sometimes the 'lesser of two evils'. Some criticise Natural Law, claiming that it is the outcome that is wrong (e.g. a 9 year old going through the agony of childbirth). Rather than 'Do good [actions] and avoid evil [actions]' it should be 'Bring about good things and avoid bringing about bad things'.</i></p>
<p>Teleology - everything has a telos, end or <u>purpose</u>. Morality involves working out what our purpose as humans is, and acting in a way that fulfils it.</p>	<p><i>Aquinas starts off by asking what humans were designed for, or what are purpose is (as did Aristotle). Many people believe we weren't 'designed' at all. Others argue that we don't all have a common purpose - there is no shared 'human nature'. Aquinas strongly rejects this claim. His belief is that the world was created deliberately. As such, you ask very different questions about it. For example, if I spill paint on paper, you may ask why there are differently coloured smudges. I might give a scientific answer about how colours mix together. If I had painted the picture myself, this sort of explanation wouldn't explain why the colours were there. You would need to ask what I was intending - what was it meant to be? If God made us, we need to ask what he intended for us - what are we meant to be?</i></p>
<p>Primary Precepts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worship God • Ordered society • Reproduce • Learn • Don't Die - Protect & preserve the self 	<p><i>A good set of statements about the purpose of humanity, although some would reject 'worship God', and add several other purposes. This seems better than Bentham's idea of desiring pleasure and avoiding pain. It is the status of these precepts that many question - it may be the case that people have children, but can we move from this to say that people should have children? (Naturalistic fallacy - moving from is to ought). Aquinas responds as Kant does - he doesn't say we can prove that God exists from statements about the way the world is. Instead, he starts from the belief that God exists.</i></p>
<p>Deontology - morality is about doing your <u>duty</u>, an obligation to follow rules or do right actions</p>	<p><i>Natural Law produces absolute moral rules - the secondary precepts. This makes morality straightforward and uncomplicated. Roman Catholics know what their morality demands - no contraception, no abortion, no divorce etc.</i></p>
<p>Secondary precepts e.g. Do not have an abortion Do not commit suicide</p>	<p><i>It is unclear how Natural Law should deal with conflicting rules - where there is overpopulation and limited resources, reproducing seems to conflict with living in society and protecting the innocent. Many people believe that Natural Law leads to wrong decisions, not taking into account the human suffering that, for example, not using condoms might cause.</i></p> <p><i>Another criticism is that Aquinas comes up with the wrong rules. The primary precept concerning reproduction leads to a secondary precept - monogamy. But is this necessarily the best way to ensure that reproduction occurs?</i></p>

<p>Aristotle: Efficient cause and final cause - the efficient cause is what gets things done, while the final cause is the purpose of a thing. For example, why do people have sex? The efficient cause is enjoyment (“I have sex because it is pleasurable”), but the final cause is procreation (“God designed sex to result in children”).</p>	<p><i>This is a useful distinction. It is claiming that there may lots of reasons why people do things (efficient causes - ‘scientific-type’ explanations), but everything also has a final purpose or telos. Natural Law looks at the way God designed the world to work out what we should do. For example, a foetus is designed to grow in the womb until it is born. This is it’s final cause, and therefore it is wrong to abort a foetus. Critics claim Natural Law moves from an ‘is’ (a statement of how the world is) to an ‘ought’ (statements about what should or shouldn’t happen) - the naturalistic fallacy.</i></p>
<p>Real and apparent goods - everyone tries to do good. Some people follow apparent goods (such as a person who has an affair - they seek pleasure, but it diminishes human nature). Real good is reached by using reason to determine our true purpose.</p>	<p><i>Some people disagree with Aquinas that all people seek good - there are certainly people who claim they are knowingly choosing the ‘bad’ path. Aquinas has found a way, however, of explaining why we disagree about morality. Utilitarians see pleasure as a good, so try to bring about pleasure. Aquinas believes the real goods are virtues such as prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance - sometimes suffering can lead to these goods; pleasure is clearly only an apparent good.</i></p>
<p>Interior and Exterior Acts - Your intention (e.g. to help someone who’s starving) might be good, but your action (stealing bread) might be wrong. Both interior and exterior are important.</p>	<p><i>This is a useful distinction, as it is possible to do good things (e.g. give to charity) for bad reasons (to look good). A utilitarian would have to say that the intention doesn’t matter, as it is the outcome that counts. Sidgwick saw this problem and argued that the consequences didn’t matter, but the intention to bring about good consequences did.</i></p>
<p>God - Aquinas said God designed us with a specific purpose which could be discovered through reason. He said that acting accordance with reason was the same thing as acting in the way a Christian would act. He did believe that humans are immortal though, and argued that natural law had to take account of this.</p>	<p><i>Aquinas reaches different decisions because of his belief that God is the goal of all human desires. He might argue that someone suffering greatly should not kill themselves - their life continues eternally, and they must not go against God’s design or purpose for them. However, you cannot reach a belief in God through reason. If people don’t believe in God, their reason may come up with very different moral rule. Aquinas, in agreement with Kant, would say that moral responsibility doesn’t make sense without God.</i></p>
<p>Double Effect - It is wrong to do bad acts (e.g. abortion). However, you can do a good act (removing the uterus of a woman with cancer) that may have a ‘double effect’ of resulting in an abortion. The ‘good’ act has to have a good intent (to save the woman’s life) and must be a good exterior act (removing the cancer).</p>	<p><i>Many criticise this aspect of Natural Law theory, claiming it allows evil acts in through the ‘back door’. The response is that it is never right to want the evil act, but if the evil is not worse than the good of the good act (ie if the evil is proportionate) then it is acceptable. The cancer would have been removed anyway, so the act itself isn’t wrong. The by-product isn’t worse than if you do nothing.</i></p>
<p>Reason - morality is not based on following commands from the Bible but on following rules that can be discovered through reason. “To disparage the dictate of reason is equivalent to condemning the command of God.”</p>	<p><i>Aquinas argued that reason could be used to demonstrate how we should act. Reason could tell us what God’s purpose for us is, and how to achieve this. He believed that basic moral rules would be the same in every culture. Some argue that this is clearly not the case, and that reason alone cannot produce moral rules.</i></p>