

Natural Law

Strengths	Weaknesses
Rational – Natural Law uses practical reason, it is a common-sense approach.	Too simplistic - Humans do not have a single ‘fixed’ human nature.
God - Doesn’t require belief in God, as it is based on empirical observations of our nature.	God - Requires belief in God, as it relies on a God-given purpose
Objective – Natural Law gives us rules that are true independently of our individual thoughts and desires.	Outcomes - Leads to immoral outcomes e.g. not allowing contraception led to spread of AIDS and overpopulation in Africa
Purpose - The world has meaning, purpose and values.	Purpose - The idea of ‘purpose’ in nature can be explained by science (evolution and natural selection).
Flexible - allows for secondary precepts to vary according to culture, as they are the practical working out of the universal primary precepts.	Cultural Relativism - Neilsen questions the unchanging nature of Primary Precepts in Natural Law, using Cultural Relativism. Gareth Moore argues our nature is a product of culture and society.
Double Effect - gets around problems of conflicting secondary precepts.	Double Effect - brings in consequentialism through the back door. You are allowed to do some terrible things because of double effect, and at other times you can’t do really helpful things.
Instinctive - Natural Law’s rules are in line with our instincts and intuitions.	Agape - Jesus was opposed to legalism, and broke rules in order to do the most loving thing.
Virtues - Focuses on human virtues and excellence – the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, fortitude, and the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity	Too optimistic - It has a too optimistic view of human nature. Augustine disagrees (original sin), as does Calvin (total depravity).
Thriving - Helps humans achieve health, happiness, friendship etc.	Unholistic - Vardy/Grosh – Aquinas’ view of human nature is unholistic and over-simplified
All-encompassing - There are issues not covered in the Bible such as Genetics.	Unreliable - Scripture is more reliable than reason, as reason leads to corruption.
Human dignity - Values human life highly.	Consequences - Doesn’t consider consequences. (Bernard Hoose and Proportionalism).
Human Rights - Protects the absolute nature of Human Rights.	Conflicting rules - As with any absolutist theory, what if two universal rules come into conflict with each other?
Reliable - Predicting consequences is not reliable. Natural Law gives us rules that we see in societies throughout the whole world e.g. Do not kill.	Impractical - Predicting consequences works, and is the best way of deciding what will do the most good.
Absolute - Our ‘post-modern’, secular society has lost all sense of objective values and truth. Pope Benedict calls this the ‘dictatorship of relativism’.	Out-dated - Natural Law is stuck in the past, enforcing traditional views that are out of touch with 21 st century society. This leads to homophobia, intolerance of other cultures etc.
Autonomy - Natural Law allows the individual, using reason, to work out for themselves what is objectively right and true, not relying on religious authority, scripture or tradition.	Naturalistic Fallacy - how we are is not the same as how we ought to be. Just because sex produces babies, this doesn’t mean that every act of sex <i>ought to be open</i> to procreation.