

## AO1 Explain the theory of natural law

Natural law is a theory that stretches across all cultures and ways of life. It is a universal theory that says there *are* definite rights and wrongs. For instance; taking human life is definitely wrong. In this respect, Natural Law is the parallel of Moral Relativism, as if you live by a Moral Relativism approach to ethics, then no actions are always right or always wrong. That is to be decided by the outcome of an action. This quote from Cicero may help explain Natural law:

“True law is right reason in agreement with nature; it is of universal application, unchanging and everlasting” This means that ‘true law’ or Natural Law is in harmony with nature. E.g., do not have sexual intercourse with those of the same sex or from the same family, as both these things go against nature.

The most famous advocate of the Natural Law ethic was the Christian theologian St Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas developed Aristotle's ideas and argued that the natural purpose of the world is found in God. Humans are free and are capable of choosing to follow the 'natural law' of God, which is understood through reason. He believed the human purpose was, 'to reproduce, to learn, to live harmoniously in society and to worship God'.

In this way, Natural law describes not only how things are but also how things ought to be. When things are fulfilling their natural purpose they are good, are unnatural when they are not, and therefore go against the wishes of God. For example; genitals are only good when they are fulfilling the reasons God made them – to reproduce and to get rid of urine. If this is the case then most types of sex are wrong including masturbation, homosexual sex, sex with contraceptives, oral and anal sex. All of these do not lead to a woman becoming pregnant, and are therefore wrong (or an apparent good).

Moral laws are also grounded in Natural law. Aquinas believed God created all humans, and that each one of us has a particular purpose that we are potentially capable of achieving.

Aquinas also believed in real and apparent goods. If someone helps a sick child, then they are doing good, as they are preserving the innocent. If a man has sexual intercourse with a married woman, then he is seeking an apparent good. To him the situation looks and feels good, but this is only an apparent good as it is not what God would have wanted and goes against the Natural Law theory.

### AO2 'The strict application of Natural Law goes against common sense' Discuss

The pope is a strict upholder of Natural Law. It is an absolutist theory. This can be a good thing as it enables communities to be structured and the law upheld. People know what is wrong and what is right so can easily arrive at the 'right' decision. For the majority of the population the strict application of Natural Law may work. The parts such as 'preserve human life' seem to be a good idea. 'Defend the defenceless, Educate children, Live in society' are all things that most moral people would do, and all are present in the natural Law theory. On the surface, these seem to be good, reasonable ideas. But when tested in a real life situations they may make people arrive at the wrong decision. For instance if a 15 year old girl was raped and became pregnant, under the preservation of human life part of Natural Law she would not be allowed an abortion. This means she would become a mother while she was very young and this would not be in the best interests of either her or the child. She would also have to raise the baby, knowing that it had the blood of her hated attacker. She could never grow to love the baby. In this case Natural Law fails.

Natural Law singles out many different types of people and says they are not fulfilling their potential and are therefore bad. The theory says that homosexuals go against nature as they do not fulfil their potential and reproduce. Some recent research suggests that homosexuality may be genetic, and so natural for those involved. Under the reproduction part of natural law all

those who for some reason do not have children are not fulfilling their potential and are therefore bad. Those who wish to live outside society are bad, Those who wish to take their own lives are bad, even if the quality of life they are living nowhere near fulfils their potential. Those who help the defenceless, only have sex to create children, educate those children, and live in society without harming anyone are still bad if they do not worship God, so any people who live by a religion that is not the Christian faith (about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the world) are bad as they do not fulfil the potential. So when tested against real life situations I feel that Natural Law does indeed appear to go against common sense.