

# Natural Law – St Thomas Aquinas’ Natural Law



**By the end of this lesson you will have:**

- Re-capped your key terms for ethics
  - Been introduced to Aquinas’ 4 levels of law
- Understood how Natural Law is based on the use of human reason

# Spec Check

## AO1

### Thomas Aquinas' Natural Law – laws and precepts as the basis of morality

Aquinas four levels of law (eternal, Divine, natural and human); natural law derived from rational thought; based on a belief in a Divine creator (the highest good as being the rational understanding of God's final purpose). Natural law as a form of moral absolutism and a theory which has both deontological and teleological aspects; the five primary precepts as derived rational thought and based on the premise of 'doing good and avoiding evil'; the secondary precepts which derive from the primary precepts; the importance of keeping the precepts in order to establish a right relationship with God and gain eternal life with God in heaven

## AO2

- The degree to which laws should be influenced by Aquinas' natural law
- The extent to which the absolutist or deontological nature of Aquinas' natural law works in contemporary society
- The strengths and weaknesses of natural law
- A consideration of whether Aquinas' natural law promotes injustice
- The effectiveness of Aquinas' natural law in dealing with ethical issues
- The extent to which Aquinas' natural law is meaningless without a belief in God

Recap starter- pick at least 4 words from the selection below & explain them!

Blue = 1 point each

Red = 2 points each

Black = 3 points each

Moral argument	Objective	Subjective
Teleological	Deontological	Absolutist
Divine command ethics	Subjective	Moral Agent

# Natural Law – Brief Definitions

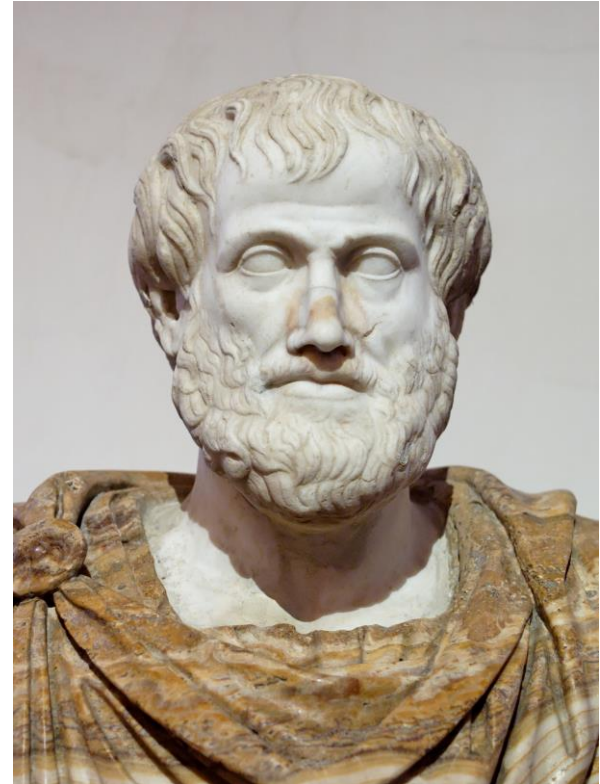
- **Natural law**, in philosophy, a system of right or justice held to be common to all humans and derived from nature rather than from the rules of society, or positive law. – Britannica.com
- **Natural law** (Latin: *ius naturale, lex naturalis*) is a system of law based on a close observation of human nature, and based on values intrinsic to human nature that can be deduced and applied independent of positive law (the enacted laws of a state or society). According to natural law theory, all people have inherent rights, conferred not by act of legislation but by "God, nature, or reason." Natural law theory can also refer to "theories of ethics, theories of politics, theories of civil law, and theories of religious morality." – Wikipedia.com

# Natural Law – KEY WORDS

- Natural Law is:
- **OBJECTIVE** – What is right and wrong is factually true, regardless of opinion
- **ABSOLUTIST** – Actions are always right or wrong regardless of the situation
- **DEONTOLOGICAL** with some **TELEOLOGICAL** elements

# Aristotle's Natural Law

- Aristotle was the first scholar to discuss natural law
- 4<sup>th</sup> scholar BCE
- Aristotle suggested that humans know how to be good through the use of their reason
- He suggested that if all humans in a society used their reason well, then we would reach a happy society – known as Eudemonia
- [The good life](#)
- **Q. Where have you heard of Aristotelian Ethics before?**



# Aquinas' Natural Law

- **13<sup>th</sup> Century** Catholic Monk
- Wrote ***Summa Theologica***
- Was heavily influenced by the works of Aristotle from over 1,500 years before
- **Integrated** the theory of Natural Law with the basic premise of Christianity
- **Theologised** the theory to include God as the ultimate source of the Natural Law, and heaven as the final purpose for human beings (Eudaimonia)



# Natural Law derived from rational thought

- Aquinas believed that ALL humans can discover how to be ethically good through the use of their GOD given **reason**
- It is **reason** which makes us distinct from the animals
- **Reason**, or **rationality**, is how humans learn what their most important purpose in life are
- If humans use their reason and attempt to do the right thing, they will reach Eudemonia or 'the good life'
- Where or what do you think the 'good life' is?
- **HEAVEN!**



DOES NOT HAVE GOD  
GIVEN REASON



DOES HAVE GOD GIVEN  
REASON



# Aquinas' four levels of law

- So, how does a 'God Given' and 'Natural' law filter its way into human behaviour?
- Aquinas suggests that there are 4 levels of Natural Law which enable humans to behave in a morally just way which is pleasing to God
- Read your sheet entitled 'four levels of law'
- Eternal
- Divine
- Natural
- Human
- **TASK:** in your group, try and explain the four levels of law in your own words. Where can you think of examples of people following Divine law and Human law in real life?
- Which group can think of the most examples?



# Four levels of law

- Aquinas suggested that ethical laws are bound up in the four levels of law which filters through from God to the human experience
- **Eternal law** – this represents the everlasting aspect of natural law and the principles by which God governs the universe
- **Divine law** – this represents the law which is given from God to humans. It refers to the Bible largely.
- **Natural law** – the represents the part of the eternal law in which humans can make choices
- **Human law** – this represents the way in which natural law is played out in traditional human laws eg. Do not kill.

# God's final purpose



What is the NATURAL purpose of the images above?

Who do you think Aquinas believes is governing such NATURAL purposes?

# God's final purpose – the teleological aspect

- Aquinas believed that every living thing has a **God given and 'natural' purpose**
- Natural Law is hinged upon this idea that natural **purposes should be allowed to flourish** and this is pleasing to God i.e. a Sperm's natural purpose is to fertilise an egg (i.e. condoms prevent this natural purpose from occurring and are therefore bad)
- Most importantly, **human's natural purpose** is to restore a right relationship with God in **heaven**
- Therefore, Aquinas urged humans to pursue acts which are **good within themselves** (deontological ethics) to allow our natural purpose to flourish and to **enter heaven** (the teleological aspect)

# Guestimate: Does this follow 'Natural' and final purposes according to Natural Law?



- With the following images, try and GUESS whether Thomas Aquinas would think they are images which FOLLOW natural purposes or GO AGAINST natural purposes

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**Guestimate: Does this follow 'Natural' and final purposes according to Natural Law?**



# Natural Law as a form of Moral Absolutism and Deontological Ethics

- Natural Law states that you should always follow the law, regardless of the situation. This makes it an **absolutist** theory.
- It is also a **deontological theory** (with teleological aspects as seen above), but what do we mean by 'deontological'?
- **TASK:** Speak out these sayings with your partner – explain what you think they mean. Pick the sentences you understand the most:
  - You shouldn't look at the consequences of a moral action
  - It is wrong to abort because killing is inherently wrong
  - Never use something as a means to an end
  - Some things are intrinsically right and wrong
  - Natural law is a deontological approach to ethics



# Natural Law as a form of Moral Absolutism and Deontological Ethics

- Natural law is a **deontological** approach to ethics, which has some teleological aspects
- It is a deontological approach because it claims that certain actions are right and wrong within themselves (**intrinsically**) and that we ought to therefore do good acts, and avoid bad ones
- For example, 'to live' is good within itself and to murder is bad within itself
- This means that it **doesn't consider consequences** when deciding what to do in a particular action. It is the action that is important, not the end result.

# The five primary precepts as derived from rational thought

- Precept
- Noun:
- *A general rule intended to regulate behaviour or thought*

**Think, Pair, Share:** What precepts do you follow in everyday life? What governs your behaviour?



# The five primary precepts as derived from rational thought



- Using the pictures on the board to help you, what do you think Aquinas' thought were the 5 primary precepts?

# The five primary precepts as derived from rational thought

- The primary precepts help us to identify our God given purposes as human beings. They are:
- To live (to protect the innocent)
- To Reproduce
- To live in an Ordered society
- To Worship God
- To Learn
- **PROWL**
- These precepts are based on the premise of *'doing good and avoiding evil'* (Aquinas Quote)
- The Primary Precepts help us to:
- To re-establish a right relationship with God
- To gain eternal life in heaven
- To ensure that the 'casuistry' of each natural thing is adhered to
- **Ronald Preston:** Believes that casuistry works well for Christians as long as people apply it properly



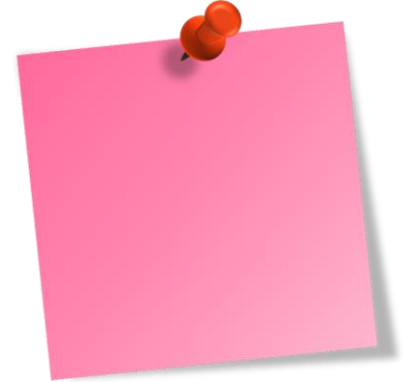
# The five primary precepts as derived from rational thought

- **TASK:** In your groups, read the story provided and make summary notes.
- What would Aquinas say about the news story?
- Which precept does it relate to?
- Does it uphold or reject this statement



# The Secondary Precepts

- Secondary precepts are...
  - [Truancy Laws](#)
  - [Euthanasia Laws](#)
- 
- **A)** What primary precept you think this story relates to
  - **B)** Whether this law is the same all over the world
  - Can you figure out what secondary precepts are from the readings?  
Write your guess on a post it note and stick it on the board.



# The Secondary precepts

- These are rules and laws which **uphold** the primary precepts. The primary precepts are ALWAYS true all over the world. However, secondary precepts may change depending on the culture.
- For example, if the primary precept is to **REPRODUCE** and to live in an **ORDERED SOCIETY**, then a secondary precept could be the laws of marriage.

# Primary and Secondary precepts

- Try and think of as many secondary precepts as you can for each of the primary precepts:
- For example, if to live (to defend the innocent) is a primary precept, then 'euthanasia is not allowed' would be a secondary precept
- Which pair can get the most in 5mins?



# Consolidation: Pictionary

- **INDIVIDUALLY:** draw a picture to represent an element of natural law learnt so far. Don't let your partner see
- **IN PAIRS:** With your partner, draw an element of natural law on the whiteboard.
- Time how long it takes them to guess the element? They have to get it right first time, otherwise they are awarded 30 seconds penalty
- Now the other partner draws an element – who can guess the element the quickest?

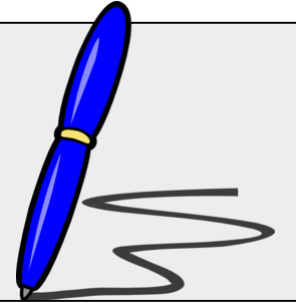


# Consolidation: Reading Task

- Using pages 140, 141 and 142 of your EDUQAS textbook, read the information on Aquinas' natural law and make notes on your own.



# Skills Practise: Essay planning



- As a group, create a general essay plan which would cover what we have learnt about natural law thus far.
- It should include : context, 4 levels of law, deontological approach (with teleological elements), primary and secondary precepts
- NOTE: A question could be set for A01 JUST ON THIS LETTER OF THE THEME (A)
- You therefore need to have enough information to write for 25mins on this part of the spec

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