

This section covers AO1
content and skills

Specification content

The need for humans to be more God-like by developing the three revealed virtues (faith, hope and charity).



The Apostle Paul c.4 BCE–c. 62–64 CE

quickfire

2.6 Why is it important to clarify agape as the Greek word for love?

Key terms

Agape: Greek word for pure, unconditional love

Beatific vision: the state of perfect happiness through supernatural union with God

Key quote

Faith has to do with things that are not seen and hope with things that are not at hand. (Aquinas)

B: Aquinas' Natural Law: the role of virtues and goods in supporting moral behaviour

The three revealed virtues

One way that correct reasoning can be developed is through the cultivation of certain virtues. Aquinas identified three theological virtues (revealed in the Bible) that are known as the three revealed virtues; he actually referred to them as 'articles of faith'. These are:

- 1. Faith 2. Hope 3. Love (charity).

Although charity is the word often used in translation, it is derived from the Greek word for 'love' used by Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 13, 'ἀγάπη' (**agape**), which is often understood as pure, unconditional love as opposed to sexual, empathetic (usually associated with family love), and, affection (usually associated with friendship) which are different Greek words but also translated as 'love'.

1 Corinthians reads:

'If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.'

For Aquinas these are the superlative virtues that define and direct all other virtues. As they are the absolute and superlative they are perfect. However, they are aspirational in that they cannot be fully achieved in this world, being far above the capacity of a human being, but should be a standard that is aimed at. It is with God's grace through these virtues that enables a human being to strive towards perfection. Of course, the final and absolute end is supernatural union with God. This state of perfect happiness, towards which the superlative virtues guide human beings, is known as the **beatific vision**. As Aquinas writes, human beings 'attain their last end by knowing and loving God'.

In order, faith is more than just an intellectual acknowledgement of assent to the divine. Faith is an act of will for Aquinas: it is 'an act of intellect which assents to the divine truth at the command of the will, moved by God's grace'. Faith involves the whole person and reflects a total outpouring and deference to the divine as an active assertion.

Secondly, hope is the constant and consistent trust in achieving the beatific vision. This is like an inspired positive state of being, a spiritual energy that drives a person in pursuit of final end. It is a pure form of desire focused on the highest aim alone. It is an underlying virtue that supports the active participation in other non-theological, moral virtues.

Finally, the greatest of them all is love (charity). Love for God is reflected in the love for one's neighbour and is the real key to Aquinas' view of morality. Love is the one virtue that actively directs all other virtues towards God. As reflected in 1 Corinthians 13, without love, all other virtues are 'nothing', meaningless and empty. Love also has the healing property that restores our 'fallen' nature.

Key quotes

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 22:38–40)

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. (1 John 4:16–18)

One vital aspect of love as a virtue for Aquinas is that it incorporates the 'gift' of wisdom, a virtue in itself and so significant in the thought of Aristotle also. But for Aquinas, wisdom was the insight into the supernatural truths of creation, the goodness of God and the beatific vision; the 'sovereign good, which is the last end ...' This is crucial to moral philosophy as it is those who are wise and have a comprehensive understanding of the goodness of God that can then direct others towards the virtuous life. In this sense the superlative virtue of love is the essence of all other virtues in that it directs them towards the correct end.

AO1 Activity

Design a diagram that will help to summarise the three revealed virtues and that also links to the idea of the beatific vision.

Four cardinal virtues

As well as the superlative revealed virtues, Aquinas identified some natural virtues. He argued that one way correct reasoning can be developed is through the cultivation of specific natural virtues and he identified four virtues as the most important of these. These are known as the 'cardinal virtues':

- 1. **Prudence** 2. **Temperance** 3. **Fortitude** 4. **Justice.**

For Aquinas these were the main framework for moral behaviour that helped human beings become more God-like in their application.

Prudence involves being able to make sound judgements in reasoning. It is the application of 'wisdom concerning human affairs', that is, 'right reason with respect to action'. Prudence involves being aware of both the moral principles established through Natural Law but also the specific situation wherein such principles need to be applied. In effect, prudence is the basis of casuistic endeavour.

In other words, prudence is the capability and competency of rational evaluation of circumstances in order to establish direct true and good courses of action. It does this in three steps: counsel, which is a consideration of possible courses of action; judgement, which decides upon the correct course of action; and, command, which is the application of that judgement. This is the art of casuistry.

Aquinas relates prudence to other virtues that depend upon it such as memory, intelligence, docility, shrewdness, reason, foresight, circumspection, and caution.

Temperance is all about moderation and we can see here the idea of Aristotle's doctrine of the mean. It involves sobriety and restraint. Temperance has the ability

Key quote

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. (John 13:34–35)

Key quote

The things that we love tell us what we are. (Aquinas)

Specification content

The need for humans to be more God-like by developing the four cardinal virtues (fortitude, temperance, prudence and justice).

Key terms

Courage: a cardinal virtue involving physical, moral or spiritual endurance and strength of character

Justice: a cardinal virtue involving guidance in how we act towards others

Prudence: a cardinal virtue involving sound judgement

Temperance: a cardinal virtue involving balance and restraint

quickfire

2.7 Give an alternative word to explain each of the four cardinal virtues.

Key quote

Actions are about singular matters: and so it is necessary for the prudent man to know both the universal principles of reason, and the singulars about which actions are concerned. (Aquinas)

to purify and refine physical pleasures. He writes, 'sensible and bodily goods ... are not in opposition to reason, but are subject to it as instruments which reason employs in order to attain its proper end'.

Part of temperance is also the virtue of humility, of knowing how to present oneself in the correct and balanced manner. Meekness, generosity and studiousness and also part of temperance as they restrain such vices as anger and vanity.

The virtue of courage, sometimes also referred to as fortitude, incorporates discipline, patience, endurance and perseverance in the face of difficult circumstances, whether physical, moral or spiritual. A courageous person will not be beaten or broken by stress and sorrow. Courage also encourages nobility of character and one that is not controlled by fear on the one hand, yet on the other hand not subject to reckless, irresponsible or rash behaviour.

The final cardinal virtue is justice. It is interesting to note that whilst the first three are to do with individual qualities, the last cardinal virtue has a specific focus on others, that is, our actions towards them. It is less to do with our own character but more to do with how our actions are governed. Justice covers the law, both general as regards community welfare and also individual cases. It also involves the specific way in which matters are administered, both in terms of goods and responsibilities which, according to Aquinas, 'are [fairly] apportioned among people who stand in a social community' and in 'due proportion'.

It is interesting to note that Aquinas' idea of justice does not mean equality for all, but recognises individual needs, relative to circumstances and needs. For example, someone in poverty requires more assistance from justice than a wealthy person.

AO1 Activity

Use your knowledge and understanding of both the revealed virtues and the cardinal virtues to complete the following task: A person has been caught stealing from the funds of a local charity. They feel very guilty and sorry for what they have done and turn to you for help. How would you encourage them to act and what advice would you give in applying the virtues? This practises the AO1 skill of being able to show an accurate understanding of ethical concepts.

Study tip

Remember to use examples when explaining the four cardinal virtues so that you can fully explain your answer.

Specification content

Aquinas' definition of different types of acts and goods: internal acts (the intention of the moral agent when carrying out an action) and external acts (the actions of a moral agent); real goods (correctly reasoned goods that help the moral agent achieve their telos) and apparent goods (wrongly reasoned goods that don't help the moral agent achieve their God-given purpose).

Aquinas' definition of different types of acts and goods

Internal acts and external acts: intention and action

Aquinas made a distinction between the intention of an act and the act itself. For those looking on, it may well be judged that an action was good. However, if the onlooker knew the real motive or intention, then it may well be seen rather differently. Likewise it is not acceptable to do a bad act intentionally even if the aim is to bring about good outcomes.

This approach to understanding intentions is important when applying Natural Law to moral dilemmas. It is at the heart of what is known as the 'doctrine of double effect'. This states that even if a good act results in bad consequences, then it is still right to do that act. It is still right to do that act, even if it was known that bad consequences would result. The important issue is the intention. If the intention was not to bring about these bad consequences, then the unfortunate side effects do not make the act morally wrong.

Classical formulations of the principle of double effect require that four conditions be met if the action is to be morally permissible:

1. That we do not wish the evil effects, and make all reasonable efforts to avoid them;
2. That the immediate effect be good in itself;
3. That the evil is not made a means to obtain the good effect;
4. That the good effect be as important (proportionate) at least as the evil effect.

An example of this would be treating a pregnant woman for cancer in order to save her life but at the same time destroying the unborn child. Since the death of the unborn child was not the intention of the act that produced it but rather an unfortunate side effect, then the act that brought it about is deemed good and morally right, according to Natural Law ethics.

Real goods and apparent goods: right and wrong reasoning

As we have seen, Natural Law is within all of us but it is not like a physical law that has to be followed. It derives from reason but sometimes the reasoning can be incorrectly directed or applied.

Reason should tell us what we should desire, since we have a natural inclination. This should lead us to our goal of perfection (image of God). This is what is known as a real good, for example being generous and giving to charity, with correct intention of course!

However, Aquinas recognised that sometimes we do not do the things that we should. We can reason wrongly.

One example of reasoning wrongly would be if a good was pursued that actually was not a good as understood by Natural Law (i.e. it did not develop perfection). It is what is referred to as an apparent good. It was the philosopher Socrates who first made this distinction and pointed out that we never desire anything that we do not, at the moment of desiring it, judge to be good; this personal judgement, however, does not make the action good. Aquinas argued that it is our fallen nature that can lead us astray to choose things that we desire, but which may not be contributing to our development into the image of God. An example of an apparent good would be following our desires for something that seems good at the time but not in line with our good overall in relation to Natural Law such as eating as much as possible because the food tastes good. This shows a lack of the cardinal virtue of temperance and cultivates a greedy character. Therefore, Aquinas did not believe that people choose to be 'evil' but rather they performed evil acts because they used their ability to reason incorrectly.

AO1 Activity

Prepare a 30-second YouTube blog explaining how Natural Law distinguishes between actions and intentions, and real and apparent goods. Give examples and this task will allow you to show that you understand the reason why certain decisions may be made as part of ethical theory.

Study tip

Do not confuse real and apparent goods. Make sure you know them accurately. Using examples for each will help you remember.

Key terms

Apparent good: apparent good is a vice or sin that takes us further away from the ideal human nature that God had planned for us

External act: an action that is seen to be good or bad but one that does not correlate with, nor is consistent with, the intention behind it

Internal act: an action that is consistent with intention whether good or bad

Real good: real good is a characteristic that will help people to become closer to the ideal human nature that God had planned for us

Food is good but this does not justify greed



quickfire

2.8 Why is intention important in Natural Law?

quickfire

2.9 What is the difference between real and apparent goods?

Key skills

Knowledge involves:

Selection of a range of (thorough) accurate and relevant information that is directly related to the specific demands of the question.

This means you choose the correct information relevant to the question set NOT the topic area. You will have to think and focus on selecting key information and NOT writing everything you know about the topic area.

Understanding involves:

Explanation that is extensive, demonstrating depth and/or breadth with excellent use of evidence and examples including (where appropriate) thorough and accurate supporting use of sacred texts, sources of wisdom and specialist language.

This means that you demonstrate that you understand something by being able to illustrate and expand your points through examples/supporting evidence in a personal way and NOT repeat chunks from a text book (known as rote learning).

Further application of skills:

Go through the topic areas in this section and create some bullet lists of key points from key areas. For each one, provide further elaboration and explanation through the use of evidence and examples.

AO1 Developing skills

It is now time to reflect upon the information that has been covered so far. It is also important to consider how what you have learned can be focused and used for examination-style answers by practising the skills associated with AO1.

Assessment objective 1 (AO1) involves demonstrating knowledge and understanding. The terms 'knowledge' and 'understanding' are obvious but it is crucial to be familiar with how certain skills demonstrate these terms, and also, how the performance of these skills is measured (see generic band descriptors Band 5 for AS AO1).

- **Your new task is this:** below is a strong answer that has been written in response to a question requiring an examination of the religious basis of Aquinas' Natural Law. Using the band level descriptors you can compare this with the relevant higher bands and the descriptions inside those bands. It is obviously a strong answer and so would not be in bands 1–3. In order to do this it will be useful to consider what is good about the answer and what is accurate. The accompanying analysis gives you clues and prompts to assist you. In analysing the answer's strengths, in a group, think of five things that make this answer a good one. You may have more than five observations and indeed suggestions to make it a perfect answer!

Answer

The Christian denomination that has been most influenced by Aquinas' Natural Law is the Roman Catholic Church. Their theology follows the strict rules and guidelines set out by Aquinas. Catholics believe in Natural Law when it states that all moral decisions can be made using our God-given reason. Aquinas developed Aristotelian ideas that everything has a purpose described as our 'telos'. Aquinas, unlike Aristotle, believed this purpose was given by God. Our 'telos' is to reach fellowship with God through the decisions we make using our ability to reason. Any action that does not bring about causality or fulfil its final purpose is wrong. This is the fundamental religious basis of Natural Law. ¹

Aquinas determined that Natural Law has five primary precepts: to worship God; self-preservation and preservation of the innocent; to live in an ordered society; to learn; and, continuation of the species through reproduction. He then explained the secondary precepts which demonstrate the primary precepts in action. For example, in order to live in an ordered society, we need the secondary precept 'do not kill'. Many Catholics still accept the use of Natural Law because it gives them a clear set of rules by which to lead their lives. The Roman Catholic Church upholds the precept of 'an ordered society' by maintaining an absolutist approach to issues such as abortion and euthanasia which would break this precept. The primary precepts are also supported by the Bible; for example, in Genesis it states the one of our main purposes is reproduction. ²

As a deontological theory Natural Law focuses on the action that is performed and Aquinas described both 'exterior' and 'interior' acts. The exterior act is the act itself and the interior act is its motive. For an act to be good both the exterior and interior acts must be good. Many Roman Catholics still accept his ideas and believe that doing the right action for the right reasons will improve oneself and enable humans to get closer to God. This is consistent with the teachings of the New Testament for example, 'God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them' according to 1 John 4:16–18. ³

Aquinas also encourages the development of cardinal virtues such as inner strength-fortitude or temperance (everything in moderation). Jesus taught that virtues were very important for Christians, such as in the Beatitudes. Scholars such as Peter Vardy agree that the idea of improving the self and soul is very appealing to religious believers who aim to get closer to God. ⁴

Aquinas believed that the main purpose of sex was reproduction – as outlined in the primary precepts. Any sexual activity that frustrates this final cause such as homosexual sex is therefore wrong. This is the reason why many Roman Catholics hold the view that homosexual sex is not permissible because it does not lead to the fulfilment of the 'telos' of sex –reproduction. For many Christians this has a biblical basis on Old Testament teaching and the idea of procreation fits in with the creation stories and Adam and Eve in Genesis. ⁵

Overall, it can be clearly seen how Aquinas' Natural Law has a clear religious basis, from being grounded in God as 'telos', the nature of the precepts, the nature of actions and the development of virtuous character, all supported by Christian religious texts. ⁶

Hints

- 1 Basis in God.
- 2 Evidence.
- 3 Explanation and link.
- 4 Virtues.
- 5 Example of application.
- 6 Clarity.

Completed hints

- 1 The answer has carefully selected accurate and relevant information. Specialist vocabulary is also used accurately. A clear religious basis for Aquinas' Natural Law is established.
- 2 The answer has clearly linked the primary and secondary precepts here, not only to each other, but also to Roman Catholic teachings and to biblical evidence.
- 3 The answer has clearly defined interior and exterior acts here and explained why these concepts are important to religious believers.
- 4 In addition to this he has identified the cardinal virtues and their link to human personal development. He has supported the point he has made with a scholarly opinion.
- 5 Here the answer has clearly identified why Roman Catholics would support Natural Law's view on homosexual acts.
- 6 A concise but accurate summary.

This section covers AO2
content and skills

Specification content

The strengths and weaknesses of
Natural Law.

Issues for analysis and evaluation

The strengths and weaknesses of Natural Law

Natural Law clearly has many strengths otherwise it would have not been as influential as it has been throughout history.

The first attraction and strength is that it is based on what it means to be human. To be human means acting in line with your true nature and following our natural inclinations. When the theory is applied, it assumes the special status of human beings.

Natural Law also reveals a universal law, and is therefore not relative to culture or a religion. This means that the primary precepts are common to all. Because it is about following natural inclinations, then the application to a moral issue is always the same, wherever you are and whoever you are.

Natural Law appeals to common sense and some versions, for example that posed by Aristotle, do not need God for its authority. It also gives a clear basis for morality, there is an authority and a clear justification for actions allowed and it is clear how Natural Law is applied. For instance, the primary precepts are clearly identified and justified. It is clear for all to see why abortion is wrong.

Natural Law also judges the intrinsic value of actions regardless of outcomes – it is the action itself, not the outcomes, that decides whether an act is moral. This avoids the problem of seemingly doing an action that appears good but in fact has evil motives. In such cases the theory does not identify those acts as good. This seems a correct judgement.

It could also be argued that its application seems clear even when there appears a conflict within the system itself. Whilst the application of the primary precepts is straightforward, the doctrine of double effect allows for possible conflicts of primary precepts.

Finally, it does encourage virtuous behavior such as love, wisdom, justice and temperance. These are valuable in any society.

However, there are some strong challenges to Natural Law. Perhaps the most significant one is often referred to as the naturalistic fallacy. It is unreasonable to expect someone who does not believe in the existence of a moral God, to accept that what simply exists as human nature has moral authority. It is argued that describing the facts of any situation never leads to making a value judgement. What 'is' (fact) does not imply what 'ought to be' (value). In other words there seems to be a mistake in reasoning (fallacy) in identifying morality with another concept (i.e. nature).

Indeed, what does it mean to say an action is 'natural'? Does it just mean that it refers to the action that is common to a particular group?

There is also a question over whether or not there really is a common human nature? Surely the fact that cultures have different values challenges the idea of a common nature; for example, the Spartan nature was to kill weak or defective children whereas this is certainly not universal. Some would deny there was any such thing as a human nature. Indeed, human nature seems to change. For instance, the debate about homosexuality has raised questions about what is natural.

There is also the challenge that if there is a constant unchanging human nature and a Natural Law that stems from it, how is it that so many through the centuries have got human nature so wrong, for example slavery and apartheid were considered as natural.

As Natural Law is a major component of Roman Catholic doctrine, its legalism might seem to some to be in conflict with a Christian stance. It is action centred rather than people and consequence centred. This is particularly evidenced in Natural Law approaches to abortion and euthanasia.

The doctrine of double effect assumes that a sharp distinction can be drawn between directly intending a result and merely foreseeing it. If a result can be foreseen, then in performing the action the person must be intending the consequence. For instance, the acceptance of collateral damage from a bombing raid. If it is known that many innocent lives will be lost, then is the act moral? It also raises the issue that Natural Law itself raises about intentions and real and apparent goods.

In conclusion, just as with any system there are key strengths and weaknesses. Rather than judging the overall quality of Natural Law, it may be better to point out that, for many, there are consequentialist systems that are preferable to Natural Law simply because they are more flexible and suitable for today's world.

AO2 Activity Possible lines of argument

Listed below are some conclusions that could be drawn from the AO2 reasoning in the accompanying text:

1. The strengths of Natural Law can withstand criticisms as they have done throughout time.
2. The weaknesses with Natural Law are far too strong for it to remain a valuable ethical system today.
3. Since most of our laws are a reflection of Natural Law it is still valid today.
4. Natural Law will remain valid if it will focus more in application on virtues and goods in casuistry rather than on precepts.
5. Other ethical theories that are either more flexible or consequentialist are preferable to Natural Law.

Consider each of the conclusions drawn above and collect evidence and examples to support each argument from the AO1 and AO2 material studied in this section. Select one conclusion that you think is most convincing and explain why it is so. Now contrast this with the weakest conclusion in the list, justifying your argument with clear reasoning and evidence.

A consideration of whether Natural Law promotes injustice

We can see how this issue may be raised because on the one hand Natural Law fails to recognise that some acts, for example sex, can have more than one purpose. As a result this clearly discriminates against those who perform an act without fulfilling its purpose, for example pre-marital relationships and homosexuality.

As it is inflexible at times, Natural Law fails to move with the times and promotes what some would see as 'old-fashioned' and out of date ideals. For example, this can clearly be seen in the fact that divorce is viewed as wrong and yet is legal; likewise, abortion is legal but viewed as wrong by Natural Law.

Unlike relativistic theories such as Situation Ethics, Natural Law fails to consider the personal situation in which a person finds themselves. Some people argue it could be more loving to allow non-married couples to express their love for each other through sex. Moreover, it does not, in considering the context, reflect the true application of law, which always considers 'mitigating circumstances' for any crime committed. Natural Law simply applies universal principles almost like a 'one size fits all' theory. This is certainly inconsistent with modern justice. However, some would argue that there are clear ways in which Natural Law promotes justice by providing humans with a set of rules which they can live by and it promotes a sense of community. This is very important for social justice.

Specification content

A consideration of whether
Natural Law promotes injustice.

Natural Law also promotes universal and eternal laws: so human beings know, regardless of the century they live in or where they live, what is acceptable and what is not. People have the primary precepts as guidance. In this sense it both promotes and supersedes human justice, as it recognises that God punishes those who do wrong and sin as they move further away from reaching the goal of eternal life with God. This is a very significant aspect for those religious believers that follow Natural Law.

Finally, it promotes justice by advocating basic human rights such as the right to life, the right to education and the right live in an ordered society. No-one would disagree with these today.

In conclusion, it appears that although Natural Law does have its flaws when applied rigidly and has the potential to cause injustice, the fact that its very basis is to promote virtue, love and protection of the innocent through an ordered society means that it would be very harsh to agree and make a general statement that Natural Law promotes injustice.

AO2 Activity Possible lines of argument

Listed below are some conclusions that could be drawn from the AO2 reasoning in the accompanying text:

1. The statement cannot be true because one of the virtues, and indeed a purpose of Natural Law, is to see that justice is served.
2. The inflexible nature of Natural Law leads to injustice in practice.
3. Overall, Natural Law does not promote injustice but there are potential problems with it in application.
4. If Natural Law were followed, it would clearly promote injustices and there are several examples of this.
5. If applied carefully, sensitively and with good reasoning in a Christian manner, Natural Law could never promote injustice.

Consider each of the conclusions drawn above and collect evidence and examples to support each argument from the AO1 and AO2 material studied in this section. Select one conclusion that you think is most convincing and explain why it is so. Now contrast this with the weakest conclusion in the list, justifying your argument with clear reasoning and evidence.

AO2 Developing skills

It is now time to reflect upon the information that has been covered so far. It is also important to consider how what you have learned can be focused and used for examination-style answers by practising the skills associated with AO2.

Assessment objective 2 (AO2) involves 'analysis' and 'evaluation'. The terms may be obvious but it is crucial to be familiar with how certain skills demonstrate these terms, and also, how the performance of these skills is measured (see generic band descriptors Band 5 for AS AO2).

Obviously an answer is placed within an appropriate band descriptor depending upon how well the answer performs, ranging from excellent, good, satisfactory, basic/limited to very limited.

- **Your task is this:** below is a strong answer that has been written in response to a question requiring evaluation of Natural Law as a good basis for making moral decisions. Using the band level descriptors you can compare this with the relevant higher bands and the descriptions inside those bands. It is obviously a strong answer and so would not be in bands 1–3. In order to do this it will be useful to consider what is good about the answer and what is accurate. The accompanying analysis gives you clues and prompts to assist you. In analysing the answer's strengths, in a group, think of five things that make this answer a good one. You may have more than five observations and indeed suggestions to make it a perfect answer!

Answer

For many believers across the world Natural Law does provide an excellent basis for making moral decisions. Its absolutist approach determines that some actions are always right or always wrong. This provides people with clear cut consistent rules. Natural Law echoes the Ten Commandments in the Bible such as 'do not kill'. ¹ Natural Law is still used by the Roman Catholic Church, the largest Christian denomination in the world. It must therefore provide an excellent basis for making moral decisions as it is still used by many as part of their faith. The Pope criticised relativist theories as 'moving towards a dictatorship of relativism' where the individual only looks out for themselves. In contrast, Natural Law is based on goodness for all humanity. It promotes precepts such as 'an ordered society'. It also promotes the Golden Rule of Christianity – 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you' through cardinal virtues such as justice. ²

However, many have criticised Natural Law's absolutist approach. For example, some philosophers have observed that what is 'good' or acceptable varies within different cultures and believed that there is no such thing as a universal human nature. ³ The idea that all of humanity is given the gift of reason also seems unrealistic as not everyone has the ability to reason. Reformist Protestants such as Martin Luther have also criticised Natural Law and Roman Catholic theology for the emphasis they place on human reason, as he believed that the Bible was the highest form of authority. ⁴

Many also believe that Natural Law is outdated in its views on abortion and euthanasia and the strict rules it applies prevent people from doing what they believe to be right. It was a firm belief in Natural Law that led to the Pope condemning the widespread use of contraception in poverty-stricken African countries when surely allowing this would be the most loving answer to providing a better quality of life? ⁵

Key skills

Analysis involves identifying issues raised by the materials in the AO1, together with those identified in the AO2 section, and presents sustained and clear views, either of scholars or from a personal perspective ready for evaluation.

This means that it picks out key things to debate and the lines of argument presented by others or a personal point of view.

Evaluation involves considering the various implications of the issues raised based upon the evidence gleaned from analysis and provides an extensive detailed argument with a clear conclusion.

This means that the answer weighs up the various and different lines of argument analysed through individual commentary and response and arrives at a conclusion through a clear process of reasoning.

Whilst many favour the rules-based approach given by Natural Law and the way it allows them to have a clear moral stance on many issues, I think it is fundamentally flawed as people's perception of what is a rational decision will vary according to their cultural background – what is considered rational and right in one culture may not be in another. ⁶

Hints

- 1 Focus.
- 2 Understanding.
- 3 Examples.
- 4 Role of authority.
- 5 Develop.
- 6 Link.

Completed hints

- 1 The answer has clearly focused on the question and has made a valid point on the benefits of Natural Law's absolutist approach.
- 2 The second half of the paragraph displays clear understanding of one of the core principles of Natural Law and of one of the virtues.
- 3 Some good examples of evaluation are given here pointing out two of the major weaknesses of Natural Law. The fact that not everyone has the ability to reason could be developed further with an example.
- 4 The reference to Martin Luther shows a mature understanding of the issue of the importance of scriptural authority over Natural Law.
- 5 Whilst the points raised here are perfectly valid, they could be developed – what are Natural Law's views on abortion and euthanasia and why are these views held? Why according to Natural Law would contraception not be allowed?
- 6 An appropriate conclusion has been drawn that clearly links to the arguments presented above. Perhaps an example could have been used to illustrate the point made? But still, overall very good.



Natural Law is still used by the Roman Catholic Church

C: Aquinas' Natural Law: application of the theory

The issues arising from abortion

An abortion can be defined as the termination of a pregnancy before 24 weeks. Abortions are available on the National Health Service (NHS) but women seeking them must be referred by a doctor. According to the Brook Advisory Service '... although the normal legal limit for abortion is 24 weeks, it is usually easiest to get an abortion on the NHS if a woman is under 12 weeks pregnant'.

There are two classifications of abortion: medical and surgical. The first, achieved by means of an abortion pill (mifepristone) and a tablet (prostaglandin) inserted into the vagina 36 to 48 hours later, is a **medical abortion**. It involves no surgery and, in effect, is like heavy menstruation; however, it is not available in all areas.

The second type involves surgery and is called a **surgical abortion**. Most commonly, it is achieved through vacuum aspiration or suction and is available up to the week 13 of pregnancy. Women usually recover within a few hours and can go home the same day. In later stages of pregnancy, a process of dilation and evacuation is used, which involves opening the cervix and entering the womb, then removing the contents by means of surgical instruments as well as suction.

One of the important issues surrounds the question of exactly the moment of the beginning of 'humanness'. The beginning of 'humanness' is debated in philosophical, ethical and legal circles but, biologically speaking, the beginning is at conception. In its broadest terms, the development, that is, the actualisation of the potentiality to become fully human, takes the following course:

1. conception
2. **zygote** (pre-embryo, 0–5 days)
3. **blastocyst** (a group of multiplying cells, pre-embryo, 5–14 days)
4. **embryo** (14 days to 8 weeks)
5. **foetus** (8 weeks onwards)
6. new born (birth, usually between 38 and 42 weeks).

It is interesting that the stage of pregnancy is calculated from the first day of the woman's last period. Despite such accuracy of science and technology, even the stage of conception is arguably vague and the timings given above assume normal growth rates.



This section covers AO1 content and skills

Specification content

Aquinas' Natural Law: application of the theory. The application of Aquinas' Natural Law to the issue of: abortion.

Key terms

Blastocyst: a group of multiplying cells

Embryo: an animal in the early stage of development before birth; in humans, the embryo stage is the first three months after conception

Foetus: the unborn baby from the end of the eighth week after conception (when the major structures have formed) until birth

Medical abortion: abortion by means of the abortion pill

Surgical abortion: abortion by means of the suction method

Zygote: a cell formed by the union of a male sex cell (a sperm) and a female sex cell (an ovum), which develops into the embryo according to information encoded in its genetic material

quickfire

2.10 What is the legal timeframe for an abortion?

Key quote

Personhood may be one thing and human life another; hence it is possible to argue that, while the zygote may not be a person, there is no logical alternative to regarding it as the first stage in human life. (Mason and Laurie)

Key quote

The basic argument against abortion, on which all others build, is that the unborn child is already a human being, a person, a bearer of rights, and that abortion is therefore murder. (Mackie)