

AS Buddhism

Buddhism is an ancient religion but also one with teachings that seem particularly relevant to the modern world. Beginning 2,500 years ago in South Asia it has arrived in the West relatively recently. However, the Buddha's ideas about meditation, mindfulness and the nature of human beings are becoming very influential in Western countries in fields such as therapy and philosophy.

At AS we study the life and teachings of the historical Buddha, a man born as Siddhartha Gautama into a wealthy family in what is now Nepal. We examine the importance of the Buddha to his followers and look critically at his teachings about suffering and how it can be overcome. We also examine Buddhist teachings about life after death and the practice of meditation. The aim of the course is both to understand the beliefs held by different kinds of Buddhists and to critically evaluate these beliefs.

Compulsory Tasks:

1. **Read the Buddha's life story and write a summary. It should be a paragraph on each of the following:**
 - The Buddha's birth and his early life
 - The Four Sights
 - The Buddha's renunciation
 - Practising meditation with two teachers
 - Practising asceticism
 - The Buddha's enlightenment
 - The Buddha's death

Information on the Buddha's life can be found in the books below. The following resource may also be useful:

<http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhism/lifebuddha/index.htm>

2. **Research the Buddha's most famous teaching: the four Noble Truths. Write a paragraph explaining each truth.**

Information on the four Noble Truths can be found in the books below. The following resource may also be useful:

<http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhism/bs-s02.htm>

Recommended Reading

Reading beyond class handouts and textbooks is essential to success at AS and A2 level.

So you should aim to read **AT LEAST one of the following books:**

1. *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction* by Damien Keown ISBN 0199663831
2. *Buddhism - An Introduction: Teach Yourself* by Clive Erricker ISBN 1444103490
3. *The Foundations of Buddhism* by Rupert Gethin ISBN 0192892231

Deadline: 1st lesson in September

AS Religious Ethics

Ethics is the part of philosophy that deals with good and evil. Ethics tries to answer questions like:

- What actions are good? What actions are evil?
- How can we tell the difference?
- Are good and evil the same for everyone?
- How do our actions affect others?

To be prepared for the study of ethics it is important to be able to distinguish between:

Deontological ethics – This is the branch of ethics concerned with **actions**. Here we should follow independent moral rules or duties. When we follow our duty, we are behaving morally. When we fail to follow our duty, we are behaving immorally.

Absolutist ethics – Some people think there are such universal rules that apply to everyone. This sort of thinking is called moral absolutism.

Teleological ethics – This is the branch of ethics concerned with **consequences**. Consequentialism teaches that people should do whatever produces the greatest amount of good consequences.

Relativist ethics – If you look at different cultures or different periods in history you'll find that they have different moral rules. So what is right or wrong depends on the situation.

Compulsory Tasks:

1. **Research** the **FOUR main categories** of **ethical theory** and **produce a summary of each**. You should include the names of particular philosophers.
2. **Read and summarise AT LEAST ONE** news article on one of the following areas of **Applied Ethics**:
 - a. Euthanasia
 - b. Business Ethics

You should include the main ethical issue(s) raised in the article, and explain the arguments **FOR** and **AGAINST** the issue(s) mentioned.

3. **Read and annotate the Natural Moral Law workbook provided. This is a summary of all of the main components of Natural Moral Law theory and needs to be understood in preparation for the course.**

Deadline: 1st lesson back in September

INTRODUCTION

When a child says “it’s not fair”, when you or I watch the film *Hotel Rwanda* or *Schindlers’ List* and think “this genocide is absolute evil” we are providing evidence that there *may* be such a thing as a “natural law”: a view of the world which all of us share by our very natures which informs our view of right and wrong.

C.S. Lewis (1964, photo) explained it this way:

“According to the religious view, what is behind the universe is more like a mind than anything else we know...it is conscious, and has purposes, and prefers one thing to another. And on this view it made the universe, partly for purposes we do not know, but partly in order to produce creatures like itself...having minds...There is a something which is directing the universe, and which appears to me as a law urging me to do right”. (Mere Christianity, pg16,19,3)



There are a number of features of natural law theory:

- **Deontological** because it produces *rules* and *duties* Strictly speaking, it's a *deontological* theory which comes out of a *teleological* worldview, the Greek view that everything has a purpose (*telos*) and the purpose of human beings is distinctive and rational.
- **Absolutist** because the natural law is absolute and unchanging, "a sharing in the eternal law by intelligent creatures" (Aquinas).
- **Normative** because natural law creates *norms* or values which are inherent in the natural order, accessed by our reason.

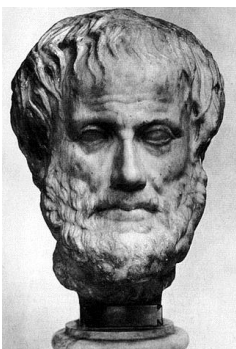
With all moral theories we need to be clear about:

- The historical context and development (Aristotle, Cicero, St Paul, Aquinas, Locke).
- The present interpretation (*Humanae Vitae* 1968, *Veritatis Splendor* 1995, two Papal Encyclicals (circulated letters) which you can find on this website).
- Examples in today's world (Human Rights legislation, Nuremberg trials, attitudes to sex).

Let's also be clear that many **Protestant** theologians do not accept the Natural Law theory (I shall quote some later, but Karl Barth and Roald Niebuhr are certainly two) because their key assumption is that all human beings "fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) and are born into sin.

The logic of Natural Law

1. We live in a purposive world, a world where rational creatures have ends. This Greek world view is teleological (*telos* = end or purpose).
2. God designed us this way, to exercise reason in the pursuit of ends. The eternal law exists in God, who exercises his reason in designing our world.
3. Each person shares in the eternal law by the natural law inscribed in our hearts by *synderesis* (point 4).



4. By nature we want "to do good and avoid evil". This is the *synderesis rule*, a key assumption.
5. Humans have freedom. So the natural law is our freedom conforming itself to reason. The natural inclination of humans to achieve their proper end through reason and free will is the natural law.
6. Our final end is to be with God. Part of this end is to flourish (the goal is happiness, flourishing or eudaimonia) by perfecting ourselves: this leads to human fulfilment.
7. When a person discovers by reason what the purpose (or final cause) of living is, he or she discover what his or her natural end is.

8. We can work out the primary goods by observing natural human tendencies, and then by following our reason and will.
9. There are five primary goods: acronym P.R.O.W.L. Preservation of life, reproduction, ordered society, worship of God and learning.
10. Using the virtue of *phronesis* or practical wisdom we can apply these primary goods in different situations. This gives us rules, or secondary precepts. But these may change as we reflect on how to fulfil our true purpose.
11. We want to do good but sometimes get it wrong. When we get it wrong we are following an apparent good, because it's impossible that we deliberately do evil. We may reasonably choose "some aspect of good" eg we eat cake because it's tasty (what's wrong with that?), forgetting that it's really fattening (so an evil) - which explains such things as euthanasia and abortion.
12. The perfection of our nature requires the virtues, justice, temperance, fortitude and prudence (*phronesis*, see point 10), and the theological virtues of faith, hope and love.

Historical context and development: Aristotle

The Greek view of the world was *teleological* in that everything has a purpose or *telos*. Aristotle begins his *Nicomachean Ethics* by arguing:

Every art and every investigation, every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good: and for this reason the good has rightly been declared as that to which all things aim”.

At first reading this seems a curious thing to argue. If I am aiming to make a lot of money, or have sexual relations with many different people, these things are clearly reasonable aims for many people today, but are they *good*? Doesn't Aristotle beg the very question he is trying to answer (namely, what exactly *should* we be aiming at)? Let's unpack his ideas more closely:

- Every plant or animal has a distinct *purpose* and we are all interconnected (in the words of the Lion King) “in the great circle of life”. Bees pollinate flowers; fish are food for other fish; animals depend on one another for survival, and humans?
- Human beings have a special potential: to use their *reason* (**phronesis** or practical wisdom) to *flourish*. By a process of observation of the natural world humans can *understand* the composition and workings of this world, but also, to understand what we mean by “the good”.
- There is an *ultimate purpose*, which is flourishing or happiness, translated from the Greek word **eudaimonia**. This word implies an organic process of growth of character which continues throughout our lives. It is a very different idea from the secular concept of happiness today. (See John Naish's article on this site)
- *Character* is crucial to discovering this end or *telos*. In the formation of character we need to concentrate on the *virtues* and particularly the *mean* between the vice of deficiency (those things that stop us realising our potential) and the vice of *excess*. This prudential mean is the key to the moral life (so courage is a mean virtue between cowardice and rashness).

So Aristotle lists some activities, we can identify an *intermediate good*, and a *final good*. This reflects Aristotle's view that there is an efficient and final cause: an artist works on his work (*efficient cause*), in order to produce a painting (*final cause*).

War -----> well-trained troops (**intermediate good**) -----> victory (**final good or purpose**)

Medicine -----> inoculation -----> health

Economics -----> low inflation -----> growth

Take sex, for example. With sex the efficient cause is a statement of fact or a description. If we ask why people have sex, we might talk about physical attraction, psychological needs or bodily pleasure. The final cause or end is a matter of intent - what was God's purpose behind sex? The final cause assumes a rational mind behind creation, and as such moves from descriptive ethics (saying what is there) to normative ethics (statements about what should or should not be the case). These final causes (or goods or purposes) Aquinas calls **objects of the will** (think of objectives).

Take the example of a soldier who shoots someone. Was he a "good shot"? The efficient cause deals with the set of events around the shooting - did he aim well, was the shot accurate, did the target die? These are descriptive points, and clearly don't tell us about the morality of the shooting. When we look into this area - was it right to kill? - we are evaluating his

intent, and are asking about the final cause, the end or object of the action. We can then look at whether that cause is consistent with God's design for human beings. We may decide that killing innocent people goes against God's design for us, so it is always wrong to kill innocent people, or that in time of war or for reasons of self-defence, killing is justified. It's for this reason that Ralph McInery comments in his excellent introduction to Aquinas:

"It is because the ultimate end is implicit in every human action that Thomas can hold that natural law is valid for all men at all times" Ralph McInery pg 47

But here we encounter a problem: we might all differ not just in the list of **activities which lead to the ultimate good** (victory, health, growth), but also **what the intermediate good might be** (trained troops, inoculation, low inflation). For example, some might argue that nuclear bombs, diet and low unemployment were more appropriate intermediate goods.

Take sex, for example. As an activity is its final good (what it aims at) procreation, or is it bonding, or is it both?

Sex ----?-----> right time in the cycle ----- ?-----> babies?

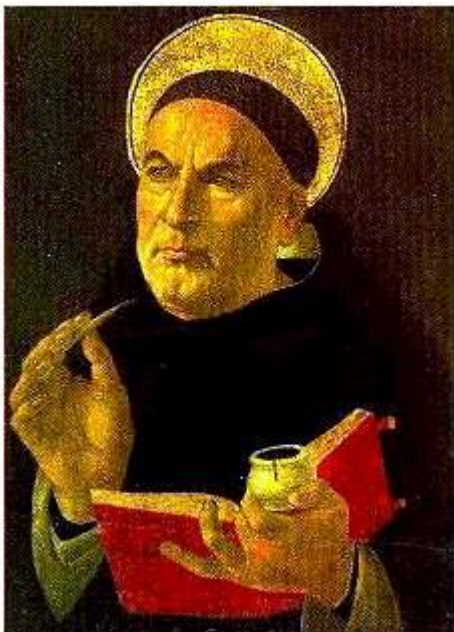
Sex ----? -----> fun and often -----?-----> bonding?

And there's a second problem: just because every road stops somewhere (every activity has an end), it doesn't follow that every road ends up in the same place (not every activity ends up in causing us to flourish as human beings). Put another way, there's good sex and bad sex (even if the end is babies; sex can be exploitative, or violent or selfish).

Has Aristotle in fact ended up on a roundabout, producing a classic **circular argument**: every activity aims at some good; I am aiming at something now; therefore what I'm aiming at must be something good.

Aquinas and the Natural Law

Paul as a Natural Law theorist



Let's note in passing that Paul seems to be a Natural Law theorist. In a famous passage in Romans he argues:

"When Gentiles, who do not have the Law, do by nature things required by the Law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the Law, since they show the requirements of the Law are written on their hearts, their consciences bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now excusing them" (Romans 2:14,15).

What is Paul saying here?

- For "Law" (capital L, line 1) read "the Torah or Jewish Law".
- Everyone has this Natural Law *innately* "written on their hearts".
- We can't help feeling guilty, because our consciences tell us (eg sex outside marriage is wrong, stealing is wrong, lying is wrong etc. of course, we can do these things, we just won't feel great doing them! Indeed we will be held accountable for them one day by the great mind who designed us like this).

(Notice in this passage how the phrase "you're a law unto yourself" has changed meaning in English, from the Pauline "everyone has the Natural Law and can't escape it" to the present meaning "you do exactly what you want and don't seem to give a d**n".)

Aquinas and Natural Law

Does Aquinas take the same line as Paul (and Aristotle)?

- God in his **providence** has designed us (and everything) in a certain way. There is rational order with values and purposes built into the very nature of things. *"Our ultimate end is unrelated good, namely God, who alone can fill our will to the brim because of infinite goodness"* (Aquinas).

"Granted that the world is ruled by divine providence...that the whole community of the universe is governed by divine reason..the very idea of the government of things in God the Ruler of the Universe has the nature of law. And since the divine reason's idea of things is not subject to time but is eternal...therefore this kind of law must be called eternal..because it is ordained by God to the government of things foreknown by him".

Thomas Aquinas

The starting point: the synderesis rule

The word synderesis is thought to be a corruption of the Greek word syneidesis meaning 'knowledge within' or 'knowledge together'. In Aquinas' thought it is one of two words he uses for conscience, with the meaning "innate conscience".

Aquinas takes as his starting point a self-evident truth, that human beings by nature want to do good and avoid evil. The name given for this is the synderesis rule.

Notice this is something Aquinas doesn't prove as much as assume. Protestant authors like Niebuhr criticise Aquinas at this first step, because they argue that humans are by nature sinful, not good, and need to be redeemed by Christ. The argument demeans Christ, argues Niebuhr. In the United States the Manhattan Declaration by Evangelical Christians states : "the natural law forgets sin and thus depreciates the necessity of Christ and the supremacy of Scripture":

Aquinas calls synderesis a "natural habit".

"The first natural principles, given to us by nature, belong to a special habit, which we call "synderesis". So "synderesis" incites to good and murmurs at evil" (ST I Q79 A12).

Good, argues Aquinas, is the first thing practical reason grasps "since every acts for an end under some aspect of good" (ST 1-11 Q94 A2). Rational agents the good naturally, because that is how God has designed us. This allows to conclude that "whatever practical reason understands as man's good (or evil) to the precepts of the natural law as something to be done or avoided".



agent
pursue
Aquinas
belongs
general,

Synderesis can also be seen as another word for conscience. Synderesis is the God-given, innate (inborn) tendency to pursue good ends. Of course, Aquinas acknowledges people sometimes fail to pursue good ends, but the underlying tendency is necessary if we are to admit that goodness is something natural to human beings as rational moral agents.

Phronesis or practical wisdom as the key moral virtue

If synderesis is the first principle and can be seen as a general desire to pursue good ends, shared by rational human beings, then *phronesis* or practical wisdom is the key virtue for making moral choices.



Following Aristotle, Aquinas argues there are two types of reason: speculative intellect and practical intellect. The pursuit of scientific truth, for example is part of the speculative reason.

"In speculative matters the truth is the same in all men...but in matters of action, truth and moral rightness it is not the same for all as to matters of detail but only as to general principles". (I-II Q94 A2)

Phronesis is the virtue which moralises the appetites. According to Aquinas we have three general kinds of appetite and inclination, those we share with creation generally, those we share with animals, and those unique to humans. It's our reason that makes us unique.

"It happens sometimes that the universal principle is destroyed by a passion: thus to someone swayed by sex, when overcome thereby, the object of the desire seems good, although opposed to the universal judgement of reason...so in order that he be rightly disposed of the ends, he needs to be perfected by certain habits...this is done by moral virtue, consequently, the right reason about things to be done, *phronesis*, requires man to have moral virtue" (I-II Q58 A5)

Primary precepts derived from natural inclinations

Aquinas discusses the derivation of the primary precepts in 1-11 Q94 A2. The logic of his argument can be expressed diagrammatically.

SYNDERESIS -----> *INCLINATIONS*-----> *PRIMARY PRECEPTS*

Man is a rational agent who seeks goods he believes perfect his nature. So the starting point is the synderesis rule: do good and avoid evil. The ends of man are of three sorts, argues Aquinas, which together we can form into the acronym **PROWL** (preservation, reproduction, ordered society, worship of God, and learning).

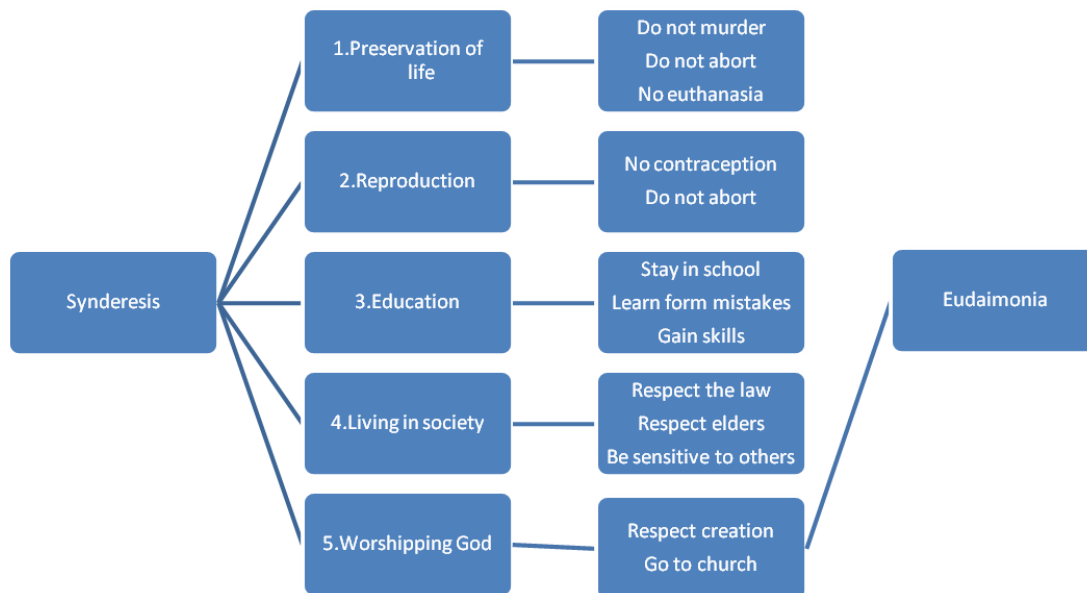
1. Those we share with all creation (the desire to preserve our life).
2. Those we share with animals (reproduction and the teaching of our offspring).
3. Those that are uniquely human (living in society and worshipping God).

But the inclinations are only good in so far as they are subject to reason; they need to be humanised, made moral, pursued with deliberation, judgement, responsibility. So the primary precepts give us general ends which we need to apply to our real world circumstances using the virtue of practical wisdom, in order that we (and society) should flourish and grow. Through reason we bring together the general desire to do good (synderesis) with the natural inclinations we as humans possess and experience. And then we match them up against the eternal law of God, the measure of objective goodness which is also revealed in the natural world.

Veritatis Spondor (1995 Papal encyclical) expresses the natural law in this way, and has changed "worship of God" to "contemplation of beauty". Notice that the Catholic Church has also added a pledge to "refine and develop the riches of the material world", which might be interpreted as a pledge of responsible stewardship.

"Precisely because of this "truth" the natural law involves universality. Inasmuch as it is inscribed in the rational nature of the person, it makes itself felt to all beings endowed with reason and living in history. In order to perfect himself in his specific order, the person must do good and avoid evil, be concerned for the transmission and preservation of life, refine and develop the riches of the material world, cultivate social life, seek truth, practise good and contemplate beauty. (VS 51)

A



diagrammatic summary of Aquinas' natural law

Try drawing your own diagram starting with synderesis (our natural tendency to "do good and avoid evil" or understand and follow "first principles" or primary precepts) on the left hand side, then primary precepts, secondary precepts (with examples corresponding to primary precepts), then eudaimonia and Godlikeness. Make sure you bring out *rationality* then decorate your mini poster with quotes. Technical language: *phronesis, synderesis, eudaimonia*.



THE NATURAL LAW IS NOT QUITE AS UNCHANGING AS YOU THINK

Although Natural Law may appear to be **absolute**, it is not necessarily **unchanging**. This is because our rationality is continually exploring the world and nature, and our findings may lead to a **development** of the natural law. God, after all, did not reveal all his thoughts (for example on the design of the universe) at once. To say that the natural world is “good” is not to imply we know everything about this world...yet. The **primary precepts** may be unchanging, but:

"In its secondary principles, which, as we have said are certain detailed proximate conclusions drawn from the first principles...it may be changed..through some special causes hindering the observance of such precepts". (Aquinas)

Humans can make:

- **An error in reasoning or observation**
- **The human condition may change**, for example, Aquinas himself felt that under some circumstances *polygamy* (many wives) may be permitted.

There are modern Natural Law theorists whose list of primary goods is a bit different from Aquinas'. Grisez (1973) adds self-integration, authenticity, playfulness and appreciation of beauty, and Finnis (1980 or 1996) changes “procreation” to “marital good” which can include having fun with one’s sexual partner. Incidentally, it could be argued that Aquinas, following Augustine, misunderstands what the Bible teaches about sex and ignores the erotic love-play contained in the Song of Songs.

Real and apparent goods

How do we explain sin in Aquinas' theory if everyone wants by nature to do good? The answer comes by distinguishing real from apparent goods.

Like Aristotle, Aquinas did not believe that a human being could deliberately do evil. Aquinas believed that people chose either real or apparent goods. A real good is something that is good according to natural law, an apparent good is a mistake, you wanted to do good but you ended up not doing so. According to Aquinas Hitler would be aiming for an apparent good in his policy of mass murder.

Aquinas argued that people "seek whatever they seek under the formality of goodness" (I-II Q16 Ac). Everyone desires to achieve their own perfection - pursues eudaimonia - but not everyone agrees about how this may be realized. Let's call this individual judgment desire¹. Some are led astray by passions, others by false reasoning, but all believe they are pursuing the good. The "formality of goodness" is the logical result of everyone believing they are pursuing the best (even though some are mistaken). In this way although people may not deliberately do evil, they can pursue apparent goods and so be guilty of sin or of an "evil will", because in the end there is an objective morality given by natural law. The objective morality we can call desire², or what is called the objective or formal idea of goodness. **Only when desire 1 (what I want) = desire 2 (what natural law says we should want) do we flourish.**

A summary of Aquinas' argument so far

- There is an "ideal" human nature that we all have potential to live up to or fall away from.
- A human may think that what he is doing is good, (e.g. pleasure of adultery, excessive drinking). It is only an apparent good because it diminishes his human nature.
- "The theory of natural law is the claim that there are a number of non-negotiable principles whose application to the circumstances of action is what is going on in the moral decision" (McInery p38).

• Sin disobeys and separates you from God. For the relationship to be restored, you have to ask for forgiveness. It falls short of what God intended humans to be. Aquinas concludes:

"No one seeks evil for itself; they fall into evil because they are trying to achieve apparent goods."

• Sin is acting against reason. Aquinas says by using your will and reason, humans are able to make deliberate moral choices. He calls these human acts. Human reason must be used correctly, and he called this the right use of reason. Although there are genuine differences of opinion of what is right, if we use our reason correctly to determine what is right, and then wills to do this, we have achieved free choice.

• Aquinas distinguished between interior acts, that is taking your moral decision and exterior acts. You may do a good act like giving to charity but for the wrong reasons, such as to get praise. The motive is important.

• The will aims to an ultimate end, and for Christians, that end is God (for Aristotle it is *eudaimonia* or flourishing). Final happiness is only achieved in the bliss of heaven. The purpose of life is not just related to what happens to a Christian after death, as people have a purpose in this life to use their talents and abilities.

• Human laws are the result of communal reflection on what is appropriate in a society of rational men and women.

Aristotle and the 17th century philosopher, Hugo Grotius claimed that even without God, Natural Law was valid. If God did not implant Natural Law in humans, why should anyone not religious follow it?

Intellect, will and object

Another way of schematising Aquinas is to link intellect, will and object.

INTELLECT + WILL + OBJECT = RATIONAL GOOD

The intellect has an important moral function. It has an understanding or perception of particular goods that it presents to the will; this is the way the intellect "moves" the will. Since this perception is not necessarily correct, the will may pursue particular goods that it ought not to pursue. So the perfection of our moral sense, or practical intellect, our phronesis, is one of the key goals of natural law and virtue ethics, so we pursue real, not apparent, goods.

Intellect interacts with the first principle of action, called the will. It is internal to a rational agent and closely associated with intention, deliberation, and choice. Aquinas calls it "rational desire" (Q1, A2), or "rational appetite" (Q6, A3, r. 1), it is not necessarily correct and can freely choose wrong ends. The "proper object" of will is the end, but one can will (aim at or choose) a means with reference to an end. The will is also active in relation to sense appetite. It is perfected by the moral virtue of justice (Q59 A4; Q61 A2). So the choosing of an *apparent* good can be an act of will by the rational agent due to faulty knowledge, lack of wisdom, or the influence of sub rational appetites.

As an example, when discussing the devil's role in temptation to sin, Aquinas says that temptations may arise through:

"He that persuades the will that the object proposed has an aspect of good, because he also, in a fashion, offers the will its proper object, which is a real or apparent good of reason" (ST I-II Q80 A1).

Even an ordered person may be mistaken about an apparent good of reason-and after succumbing to this temptation, may come to desire the sin even while knowing what it truly is. Applying the above scheme to a devilish temptation we can see how a deficiency in understanding produces an evil will and so succumbs to an apparent good of sex before marriage:

"Sex before marriage is okay" (intellect) + "I want to sleep with you" (will) + "you are here now and agree" (object of the will) = apparent good of having sex

Professor Richard Snell asks whether Natural law is invalidated by a doctrine of original sin which implies we want evil not good. "There is no cheery optimism in Aquinas with respect to reason. The human is disordered;, one might even say we suffer a totality of depravity since not a single human capacity or function remains in the state of original justice. Yes, humans are utterly messed up, but they are still human beings, and as human beings, as rational animals, they still possess the natural law, for to lose the natural law would be a loss of humanity, actually to become a beast. Not, that is, to act bestially-humans do so-but to be a beast. And this has not happened, since original sin does not change our essence-nor could it. The basic human goods remain the same basic human goods for Adam and for Hitler, and the flourishing of human persons has not changed. But sin does change our willingness to function as we ought, as we can all attest."

<http://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2010/02/08/aquinas-and-the-manhattan-declaration/>

There is, then, no contradiction between the natural law and original sin, at least as understood by Thomas Aquinas.

Aquinas' four concepts of law: defining right and wrong

In Aquinas' natural law theory goodness is intrinsic to the act, as defined by purpose and by the eternal law of God. In an ideal world all four ideas of law would harmonise: God's purpose, and our human laws, for example, would agree. For a clear discussion of the four concepts of law by Professor Richard Jacobs go to:

<http://www83.homepage.villanova.edu/richard.jacobs/index.html>

Aquinas is arguing that the end or purpose of an action defines whether it is right or wrong, and that this end or purpose is revealed by the divine law and confirmed by the natural law.

"Reason and revelation communicate God's commands, and so human beings should conform their wills to the divine commands of both" (Richard Regan, Introduction to Law, Morality, Politics xxi).

So every will acting contrary to reason (even if the reason is in error) is evil, and some acts of will which stem from reason may be evil if the will is in error, so an act can be *wrong* if:

- The **object** is evil (eg killing an innocent human being) ST I-II Q 18, A2
- The **intrinsic purpose of the act** is frustrated (eg lying frustrates the purpose of communication, promiscuity frustrates the purpose of reproduction) ST II -II Q110, A1
- A **voluntary choice** is made which breaks the natural law (Aquinas distinguishes between "voluntary" and "involuntary" acts. There is a difference between deliberately choosing to sleep with someone else's wife, and sleeping with them believing she's really your wife!)
- We can be **led astray** by emotions, customs, or bad opinions. ST I-II Q 16, A94

Wrong actions therefore *break the law*, and law to Aquinas has four meanings:

- **Eternal Law** is God's plan for creation.
- **Divine Law** is revealed in the Bible, and alters between the Old and New Testaments.
- **Natural Law** is discoverable by the use of right reason, observing natural ends and purposes. It includes primary and secondary precepts.
- **Human Law** is passed by governments (Aquinas uses the word "promulgated") and corresponds to the natural law, so that "a human law diverging in any way from the natural law will be a perversion of law and no longer a law" ST I-II, Q95

Right actions should conform to all four meanings of law, but ultimately it is our reason which confirms again whether law is "just" and "right".

An Analogy might help

Imagine you receive a new BMW mini for your birthday. You find that the owner's manual is missing, so you decide to ask a mechanic friend, who's wise with cars, to come round and sort out for you what everything does. What does he do? He looks under the bonnet, tries the various switches, tests the brakes and then shows you how the car works. *By observation he has worked out what's would be in the manual.* The more skilled he is as a mechanic the better his observations will be.

The Eternal Law is the car manual (existing in God's mind).

The Divine Law is like an old, incomplete manual (The Bible has gaps and errors in it).

The Natural Law is what the mechanic both observes and knows innately (so we work out what the instructions are, and the more skilled we are, the better the manual from observation will be. But the natural law in the **synderesis rule** is also innate).

The Roman Catholic Church and the Natural Law

*The article by [Alan Suggate](#) on this site discusses modern catholic thinking on natural law. *Gaudem et Spes* seems to strike a more liberal line, but then in 1995 the publication of *Veritas Splendor* returned to conservative natural law thinking (see*

extract from *Veritatis Splendor* on the site). For papal encyclicals (literally, "circulated letters") click on this link: <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/>

Catholic theologians continue to argue that Natural Law is a morality of reason based on the Bible and our understanding of the natural world, which can be grasped by all reasonable people irrespective of whether they believe in God.

This Natural Law is interpreted by the Magisterium, the Pope and Cardinals meeting together for reasonable debate which ends up with the declaration of their mind in Papal Encyclicals, like *Humanae Vitae* (1968) or *Veritatis Splendor* (1995). In this practice they claim to be following in the footsteps of Peter and the first apostles, who were appointed as guardians and interpreters of both divine law (ie the Bible) and the natural moral law.

Following Aquinas and St Paul, the Catholic view is that our **reason** and our **passions** are in conflict (see Romans 7). We need to exercise responsible moral choices in order to follow the objective moral order established by God. On sexual relations the Catholic view is well represented by this quote from *Humanae Vitae*.

"Every marital act must of necessity retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life....this is a result of laws written into the actual nature of man and woman..our contemporaries are particularly capable of seeing this teaching is in harmony with human reason....it is never lawful, even for the gravest reasons, to do evil that good may come of it".

On the use of contraception *Humanae Vitae* argues that we must consider "how easily this course of action could open the way for marital infidelity and a general lowering of moral standards..and man may forget the reverence due to a woman...and reduce her to a mere instrument for the satisfaction of his own desires".

Notice how *Humanae Vitae* slips into **consequentialism**. But in listing the consequences of promiscuity, selfishness, and lowering moral standards, the document leaves out the consequences of overpopulation, sexually transmitted diseases, sexual frustration or the inability of women to take control of their destiny (and indeed their bodies).

All these could be seen as **bad consequences** of the supposedly rational Natural Law position of the Catholic church.

Evaluation

Key quotes on Natural Law:

"Natural law is the sharing in the eternal law by intelligent creatures". Aquinas

"The good has rightly been declared as that to which all things aim". Aristotle

'The law is right reason in agreement with nature' . Cicero De Republica III xxii

"Whatever is contrary to the order of reason is contrary to the order of human beings....the good of the human being is to be in accordance with reason." Aquinas

"The very idea of the government of things in God the Ruler of the Universe has the nature of law." Aquinas

"Synderesis is the habitual knowledge of first principles" - Aquinas

Something to think about: *Veritatis Splendor* 1995

"Precisely because of this "truth" the natural law involves universality. Inasmuch as it is inscribed in the rational nature of the person, it makes itself felt to all beings endowed with reason and living in history. In order to perfect himself in his specific order, the person must do good and avoid evil, be concerned for the transmission and preservation of life, refine and develop the riches of the material world, cultivate social life, seek truth, practise good and contemplate beauty. (VS 51)

What are we to make of this theory which has been so influential in shaping the modern mind on ethical issues?

- Niebuhr (1940) has argued that Natural law theory is uncritical of its **cultural captivity**. Aquinas' view of justice, for example, "is filled with specific details drawn from the realities of a feudal order...they are "rationalizations" of a feudal aristocracy's dominant social position".

- McGrath (2001) makes a related point, that if we base a theory on **observation** we cannot avoid the issue that we see what we are conditioned (or want) to see. "Far from being a "given", the idea that 'nature' is shaped by the prior assumptions of the observer. One does not 'observe' nature; one constructs it".
- The Natural Law view seems to drive a wedge between reason and **emotion**. Modern psychiatry warns us against doing this: we need to integrate reason and feelings and to be open about what we really feel (even if it may appear to be wrong or be causing us guilt).
- Aquinas seems to imply there is a **fixed human nature**. This doesn't change between people or over time. If so then homosexuality becomes a 'disorder' and something to be treated. But suppose human nature itself develops and changes (for example, through the scientific world-view making us less fearful of a mysterious present or terrible future), or suppose homosexuality is **genetic** and hence quite natural?
- If the Natural Law view is so **reasonable** why don't more of us accept it? Even Catholics practice birth control and have abortions. Isn't it quite reasonable (as *Humanae Vitae* itself does, to look at *consequences* and ask if they are good or bad? In asking the question are we not implying **goodness** and **badness** is not something intrinsic to the thing itself, but lies in its context, in something **extrinsic** (such as pleasure produced, relationship formed and strengthened etc).
- Is Natural Law theory dependent ultimately on accepting whether there is a God? Aquinas seemed to think so, because he spent a lot of time through his **five ways** trying to establish that it was reasonable to believe in God.
- The way the Catholic church interprets Natural Law doesn't seem to place a high value on **human reason** because it concentrates power in the hands of a few elderly and celibate men. Shouldn't the debate be wider (that is if we accept the starting point that reason is the key).