

Natural Law

Natural law is a tradition that sees basic moral principles as objective, based on nature instead of convention, and knowable to all by natural human reason.



St Thomas Aquinas was the central figure in the natural-law tradition.

Aquinas's **moral theology**, which was based on his Christian faith, sees morality as part of God's governance of the world.



- Morality's purpose is to lead us to our final goal, which is eternal happiness with God.
- We have two ways to know the basic moral norms: human reason and the Bible.
- Morality is possible because of how God created us, as rational animals with an intellect and a will.



Aquinas's **moral philosophy** sees the basic moral norms (like the golden rule and the wrongness of stealing) as fixed and unchangeable, although they can be applied differently to different cultural situations.

Human laws are set up to promote the good and must accord with natural law.

The first precept of natural law is that good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided. We can know what is good by investigating our natural (rational) inclinations.



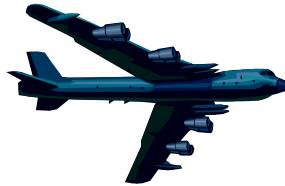
John Finnis, a follower of Aquinas, suggests that there are seven basic goods (for example, knowledge and life), that these cannot be measured on a common scale and totaled, and that it's always wrong to choose directly against a basic good (for example, by taking the life of an innocent person).

Natural law is more a pluralistic tradition of doing ethics than a precisely formulated ethical theory.

So thinkers in the natural-law tradition can take different sides in the debate over supernaturalism, naturalism, and intuitionism.

The **principle of double effect**, which is part of the natural law tradition, says roughly that under certain conditions it's permissible to do something with a morally good intended effect and a morally bad unintended side effect.

Perhaps OK: bombing a military target even though innocent civilians may unintentionally be killed in the process.



Totally wrong: killing innocent civilians intentionally in order to bring about a good result.

Natural-law thinkers usually defend a **conservative view** about sexual morality: genital sexual relations are morally proper only if they occur between husband and wife in a form of sexual intercourse that is open to the procreation of children.

- They typically say that any other use of sexual relations perverts the natural, biological purpose of sex organs.
- The contrasting **liberal view** rejects special sexual norms; sexual relations are to be guided only by ordinary moral norms, such as to keep promises and not to harm oneself or others.
- Some natural-law moderates propose instead that the basic sexual norm is to follow those rules about sexual relations that are required, in one's cultural situation, to promote the integrity of the family and the nurturing of children.