

An Introduction to Religion and Ethics Eduqas AS Knowledge Organiser:

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

Key concepts:

- Despite the focus on the Primary Precepts given over to Natural Law within the Roman Catholic tradition, virtues were crucial for Aquinas.
- The most important virtues were the three revealed virtues of faith, hope and love, of which love was the greatest and can be found in 1 Corinthians 13.
- These theological virtues superseded, and were the foundation of, all other virtues identified by Aristotle.
- The revealed theological virtues are a divine standard in line with the Beatific Vision and so cannot be achieved in this life; however, God's grace works through faith, hope and love to direct a human being towards perfection.
- Faith extends beyond intellectual understanding to assertive act of the will that assents to divine truth and is moved by God's grace. It requires a complete personal outpouring and deference to the divine.
- Hope is the constant, consistent trust that is driven by pure and inspired positive spiritual energy towards focused on the Beatific Vision, supporting active participation in other non-revealed virtues.
- Love actively directs all other virtues towards God, for without love, all other virtues are 'nothing', meaningless and empty. Love is the wisdom of practical reason in that understanding the goodness of God can help direct others towards the virtuous life. It is the superlative virtue and essence of all virtues.

- The Four Cardinal Virtues are 'natural' virtues to develop moral character. Identified by Plato, developed by Aristotle and adopted by Aquinas. They all reflect the ethical competency of the sophron.
- Prudence ensures ethical judgements are reliable and reasoned, applying 'wisdom concerning human affairs', or, 'right reason with respect to action'.

- Temperance ensures objectively reasoned, moderate, balanced and appropriate behaviour that is not swayed by sensual or emotional influences. Temperance means standing firm, showing sobriety and restraint, similar to Aristotle's doctrine of the mean knowing how to behave appropriately.
- Fortitude is moral character and courage in the face of difficulties. It requires discipline, patience and endurance (physical, moral or spiritual) to develop a noble character that is not reckless, irresponsible or rash.
- Justice involves the specific way in which matters are administered, in terms of goods and responsibilities, according to Aquinas, 'apportioned among people who stand in a social community' and in 'due proportion'.

- An action can be seen as external, evaluating the action itself.
- An action can also be understood internally, accounting for both action and intention behind the action (motive).
- Accordingly, a good action is only morally pure when performed with a genuinely good intention (motive) as in (2) above.
- Aquinas also distinguished between real goods and apparent goods which involved right and wrong reasoning.
- Sometimes the reasoning can be incorrectly directed or applied. A real good should always lead us to our goal of perfection (image of God).
- However, sometimes we can reason wrongly in pursuing an 'apparent' goods.

Key quotes:

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

"If I give all I possess to the poor... but do not have love, I gain nothing." (1 Cor.)

"Love is patient and kind. It does not envy, nor boast, it is not proud." (1 Cor.)

"Mercy without justice is the mother of dissolution." (Aquinas)

Issues for analysis and evaluation:

Key arguments/debates

Some philosophers see Natural Law as too dependent upon the ability to recognise justice according to the quality of reasoning applied.

Others would argue that the fact that cultures have different values means it is certainly not universal. Human nature also seems to change.

Key questions

Does the deontological nature of Natural Law contradict Christian love?

Does Natural Law promote social justice but personal injustice?

Key words:

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| Virtues | faith | hope | love | revealed |
| theological | direction | perfection | cardinal | prudence |
| temperance | fortitude | justice | sophron | external |
| internal | wrong reasoning | real | apparent | |