Natural Law Theory Essay, Research Paper

Natural Law Theory

The natural law theory is a theory that dates back to the time of the Greeks

and great thinkers like Plato and Aristotle. Defined as the law which states

that human are inborn with certain laws preordained into them which let them

determine what is right and what is wrong.(Bainton 174) This theory was them

adapted by religious philosophers to fit the Christian religion.(Berkhof 114)

This, however was not exactly the same as the original. The classical thinkers

were the first to define the natural law. Heraclitus, in the sixth century BC,

specified one the components by saying, \*for all human laws are nourished by one,

the divine.\* This meant that a divine power determined a logic and gave to all

humans. (Microsoft Encarta) This definition put this law into direct conflict

with positive laws. Aristotle elaborated on the word natural in relation to law.

He said that a natural law was one that had the same validity for every one and

situation.(Berkhof 268) An example of this would be that a man contemplating

murder would see that it was wrong by his nature. His reason would tell him

that to kill another was unnatural, and therefore wrong. Cicero tries to

determine what the actual law encompassed and he came up with the theory of

Stoicism. Stoicism is an interpretation of the natural law which states that

every, single person is a part of the universe that was created and is ruled by

a divine power rationally. To live rationally and with virtue, according to the

Stoics, was to follow one\*s nature and reason. Thus, they deemed emotion and

passion irrational, and therefore unnatural. For Stoics, the wise would be

those who excluded emotion and passion from their decision making

process.(Bainton 21-22) The great Christian philosophers came upon this theory

and realized that it was compatible to their religion. Probably the most famous

of them was St. Thomas Aquinas. He stated in his Summa Theologiae that God

gave man the ability to determine the difference of right from wrong by the

\*Eternal Law.\* This law gave all beings a tendency to do what was proper or

natural. He went on to say that by doing what was right, each being was in fact

using divine reason. The natural law, according to Aquinas, was the

participation in the Eternal Law, doing what was right.(Comptons) Marriage and

the procreation of children, for example, are natural to all beings. The desire

to marry and make offspring is an inborn instinct given by God. The natural law,

in both Christian and secular views, state that all humans act or should act in

certain ways and abide by certain rules, and that these were predestined by a

divine power. The Christian thinkers, led by St. Thomas Aquinas, only added

that the divine power was God and that by doing what was right, one was using

divine reason. The natural law is the essence of the word natural. It just

means anything normal or feels normal is right. I do agree with most of the

natural law. I very much believe that God gave man the ability to reason right

from wrong and that sometimes we just have a feel for what is right and wrong.

I don agree, however, with the Stoics\* viewpoint that emotion and passion are

unnatural. They must be natural because they are found in every person. Also,

the emotion of passion is a very desirable trait in the Bible. I think emotions

are one way God tries to tell us what is just.

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