

Becky Clay  
Dr. Doug Deaver  
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### **Naturalness Argument**

When evaluating the Naturalness Argument, also known as the “Naturalness Fallacy”, it is necessary to consider the basics of the “Natural Law” and discuss the justification for what it considers to be “natural” and what it regards to be “unnatural”. There is also some confusion as to what the different perceptions of “nature” and “natural” are, as often times the two are not distinguished from each other. Then Naturalness Argument argues that in order to be moral, one must act in accordance with nature, but in order for the Naturalness Argument to ever work, one would need to provide a distinct connection between naturalness and morality, which can be difficult to do.

The positive approach to the Naturalness argument is as follows: 1) Act X is natural, 2) All natural acts are right, 3) Thus, Act X is right. Before examining these statements, we must come to agree on what the definition of natural is. Natural, according to the dictionary, is defined as “existing in or caused by nature; not made or caused by humankind.” By this definition, one could interpret messages such as “take nature as a model for imitation”, “follow your nature”, or “use organs only for their natural function (as they are in nature)”.

Now a question arises, what is the connection between being natural and being “good” or “moral”? It is fairly safe to assume that if we cannot make that connection, then there is little or no reason to live and act naturally. “In Christian thought, God is still the creator of the world and the enforcer of morality. God created the world in such a way that its laws are adapted to the conditions of human life. These make up the ‘natural law.’ Natural law does not merely

describe how nature works (the modern meaning of 'law of nature') but it also gives us guidance as to how we should conduct ourselves in the world that God created. People are imbued, for example, with natural benevolence, and to act benevolently is to act 'in accord with nature' (with natural law).”<sup>1</sup>

With God as a creator, everything in the universe is imbued with a purpose- God's purpose. “Eyes are for seeing, legs are for walking; eyes that can't see and legs that can't walk are unnatural, contrary to the purpose of these organs or human parts.”<sup>2</sup> So from the perception of the believer in God, it is much more likely to follow the positive outlook of the Naturalness Argument, because God has stated what makes things unnatural (things that are not in accordance with nature), and whatever God commands is right by definition.

On the contrary, proving that the Naturalness Argument has a connection with morality without using the presence of a theological backdrop is near impossible. The negative argument outlined as: 1) Act Y is unnatural, 2) All unnatural acts are wrong, 3) Act Y is wrong.

Using one of the implied messages derived from the definition of “natural”, a person could argue that “follow your nature” is not always in accordance with nature because everyone's nature is different- for example murderers, thieves, etc. If my nature was to steal, I would be following my nature but that does not by any means make stealing a moral act. The same goes for murder, adultery, and so on.

In the example “use organs only for their natural function”, an argument could be made that hands are for moving objects and to assist in eating, etc., but does that mean that holding hands with a partner or playing basketball with friends is immoral? How about being straight versus homosexuality? Is the purpose of sex really just for the purpose of procreation, or is there a more complicated

explanation? Does masturbation fall into this category? Unless you can prove that all human parts serve only specific purposes, then you don't have valid justification to claim any of their uses as unnatural.

The same can be argued for the last case in point, "take nature as a model for imitation." Think about when animals eat their young, or when a herd rejects a member who has become weak or born with some type of defect, would it be moral for humans to behave like this? And what about the aggressive animals that kill when they are frightened/startled, etc.? Would this be acceptable behavior for all humans to live by? Most would argue not.

When analyzing both the positive and negative sides of the Naturalness Argument, it is clear that without the presence of a creator, making the connection between "nature" and "morality" is near impossible. Although nature is perfectly balanced and can function without the reason that humans have, the human ability to rationalize situations puts us at an intelligence level that is above what "acting according to nature" can offer us. But simply because we are not acting "natural", does that mean that we can never know morality?

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1. John Hospers, Human Conduct: Problems of Ethics (p.83)
  2. John Hospers, Human Conduct: Problems of Ethics (p.84)