Natural Law Sample Essay

**a. Explain Aquinas' view of Natural Law**

Aquinas is the main philosopher that teaches about Natural Law.  Aquinas believed that an action that takes you closer to God is right and an action that takes you away from God is wrong.  This is a fundamental principle.

 Natural law is a law that follows God and what is natural in the world.  Natural Law gives guidance over moral decisions by following the precepts and the virtues.

 Aquinas identified the primary and secondary precepts that enable us to know when to act and how to judge if an action is right or wrong.  The primary precepts are:

                           -to live

                           - to learn

                           - to order society

                          -  to reproduce

                          - to worship God

 The secondary precepts are an extension of the primary precepts ie the ten commandments.

 These precepts are the fundamental rules of life and determine if you are living a good life.  You can judge the moral goodness or badness of an act by referring back to the precepts.

 Aquinas also identified four virtues we should adopt in order to become closer to God. The closer we get to God and the more we follow these precepts, the more glorified God gets.

 Aquinas also identifies that we are all given a purpose or telos that we should satisfy.  If we all follow the purpose or telos then  we are doing good and acting towards God. We all had a purpose and our God-given purpose is to follow the primary precepts our eye is designed for seeing, its purpose is looking, if the eye sees and looks then it is fulfilling its purpose and therefore is doing good.

 Natural law can be seen as common sense or slightly linked to Christian Ethics as we are following the Bible if we are following the secondary precepts - the ten commandments.  Most people know it is wrong and sinful to murder and steal so in fact a lot of people are following the ten commandments already.  Natural law is directed at God as he si the one who judges us and gives us our purpose.  So without God natural law would crumble as God is necessary for this law to work.  Aquinas also identified interior and exterior acts.  The interior act being the intention and the exterior act the act itself.  They both must be in harmony for the act to be good.

 This essay wanders around a bit at the end, which is a pity.   It would have been even better had the writer spent a moment planning it on a piece of scrap paper, then stuck to the plan.  Never write your plan on the answer book as you'll spend the whole time turning over pages: ask for a piece of paper before the exam starts.

 It is still a very good answer and scored 21/25 for this section.  It shows a very high level of ability to select and deploy relevant information and an accurate use of technical terms like "primary and secondary precepts".  The answer is clearly structured and expressed (although if we are asking for perfection, the paragraph ordering might need to be changed to bring the ideas of the Greek teleological world view before the discussion of primary and secondary precepts).

**b. "Natural law leads to cruel decisions".  Discuss**.

 Some would agree with this statement as natural law can contradict itself.  It tells us of the precepts we must follow and it tells us of the purpose each thing has and if we fulfil this purpose we are doing right.  These two can conflict as a gun can be used to kill people or harm an animal, which clearly is going against the primary precepts and the ten commandments; yet a gun's purpose is to shoot things.  You cannot deprive a gun of its purpose but if it is shot that is going against natural law in terms of its precepts.  Either way you are doing wrong and therefore acting against God.

 The following of the purpose might lead to cruel deeds being done, as in the example of the gun.  If someone were to take the gun and shoot someone in the head, they could justify themselves by saying they were carrying out the gun's purpose, which is natural law theory.  So that act might not be considered wrong.

 Natural law is an absolute theory that requires the interior and exterior acts to be in harmony.  Both the act and the intention must be good.  This is unfair in certain circumstances but as an absolute theory it does not take circumstances or situations into account.  For example if a starving man steals from  a rich greedy man in order to feed his family, this may not be seen as wrong as the intention was good and the circumstances enabled him to do so.  Yet natural law theory states that the interior and exterior act must be in harmony, which means this man would be condemned.  This is an unfair and cruel decision.

 However, some would disagree with the statement as natural law is common sense and without these rules the society would be in a state of moral flux. The 10 commandments are already universal and absolute, and natural law theory is just saying people shouldn't sin.  Many Jews, Christians and other faiths believe this too.  Natural law is in place to create a structured and law-abiding society, not to condemn anyone.  People need to be punished when they do wrong, otherwise everyone would be sinning.

 I believe that Natural law is a good basic principle as it has strict laws that most people would follow anyway.  However natural law does not leave any room for interpretation as it is an absolute, so people will be misjudged as not everyone is perfect, everyone makes mistakes so should we all be condemned.  If natural law was fully obeyed we would all be sinners and there would be no frivolity.  Therefore natural law can lead to cruel decisions.

A brave attempt to put your own point of view, which is what good candidates must do in this evaluative section.  A good answer ends on a rather muddled note,but that doesn't stop this being an A grade attempt, as it makes some important points rather well.

Some successful and clear analysis, which puts more than one point of view.

8/10.