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Like another Chouannerie

Brief note on “nature” and the “law of nature”

August 23, 2019 by Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur

Motivated by a recent spat, I felt the need to awaken from yet another impromptu hiatus to deliver this message on what “natural law” properly means. I am no expert in scholasticism or Aristotelianism by any stretch, but neither is it necessary to grok the basic point.

In NRx circles, there is that popular metaphor of “Gnon,” or “Nature’s God,” a.k.a. the “God of biomechanics” as I recall Heartiste putting it. It has much in common with the modern colloquial use of “nature.” The thesis goes that there are certain immutable laws of human sociability based on hereditary factors — these days almost entirely expressed in terms of evolutionary psychology — which, once violated, must inevitably trigger a civilizational downward spiral. Promiscuous sex, the homosexual lifestyle, racial diversity, etc. etc.

It’s actually somewhat difficult to figure out how an atheist envisions the channel by which Nature automatically enforces Her Law, and make no mistake the belief is that Gnon’s “natural law” is enforced with the same uniformity and regularity as physical law. An implication of this is that strictly speaking you don’t need anyone to explicitly elucidate or enforce precepts of natural law (why, that would be priestly meddling!), it just happens on its own because duh, Nature. Clearly the people using Gnon’s name do not actually envision intervention by some pantheistic goddess, but otherwise you have to deal with some very murky genetic and cybernetic theories that are vague and overdetermined.

The underlying fallacy of this approach is closely related to how the average person uses the word “nature.” In short, the term is inherently loaded in favor of primitivism. Man’s nature is held to be his nutritive or vegetative soul, the lowest in the Platonic triad of the human soul. This is simply wrong. Boethius defines the human person as an individual substance of a rational nature, and what is properly man’s nature is the rational soul, the capability by which he can grasp the underlying forms of things.

Indeed, Francisco Suarez in *De legibus* notes that (<https://www3.nd.edu/~afreddos/courses/301/suarezdelegii6.htm>). natural law emerges not only from God as first efficient cause but also as an actively proscribing lawgiver, nonetheless the prohibition or precept is not the whole reason for the goodness or badness found in obeying or transgressing the natural law. Free moral agents can deduce them.

Nature is not static, it is something that must be cultivated and perfected. Actually here we run into a big impasse: the problem is that a lot of anti-progressive discourse has hammered in the hasty and incomplete idea that belief in human perfectibility is an inherently, indeed *the* signature left-wing belief. But this interpretation again introduces the risk of primitivism. If man is governed by certain moral laws and possesses ontological moral freedom, the ability to choose good or evil, then there exist several pathways to development, and if there is development then it follows there is evolution in the orthogenetic and teleological sense.

The great French Catholic arch-reactionary and proto-sociologist Antoine Blanc de Saint-Bonnet in his work *L'unité spirituelle* (1845) made the distinction like so: "In the moral world, man possesses laws: he seeks the facts that must be deduced from them. In the physical world, man possesses the facts: he seeks the laws that must be induced."

The natural law exists much like a geometric axiom, irrespective of hereditary variation: "The climates are to the peoples exactly what the temperaments are to the individuals: they must not change more the laws and the conditions of the life of a people."

A purely positivistic approach does not work, as Saint-Bonnet bitingly states: "Theft, squandering, concubinage, abandonment, exposure, etc., are also facts; in the examination of the immediate causes which have produced these facts, we shall also find reciprocal needs; and these needs are indeed facts!" History shows what man *is*, but not what he will *be*. The natural law has a developmental element of becoming and not merely of static being. History can be used for instruction, but not for induction.

It is in the 18th century that the unclear idea of "natural rights" emerges; a sort of deification of positive law that rests on an anthropological error whereby certain legal rights enjoyed in commonwealths and kingdoms were made to be eternal essences that existed all the way back to a pre-social "natural state." It was employed in this sense by Jacobins like John Thelwall in England, and in a terroristic and eliminationist sense by Robespierre, who in his principles of political morality remarked: "We wish, in a word, to fulfill the intentions of nature and the destiny of man, realize the promises of philosophy, and acquit providence of a long reign of crime and tyranny. That France, once illustrious among enslaved nations, may, by eclipsing the glory of all free countries that ever existed, become a model to nations, a terror to oppressors, a consolation to the oppressed, an ornament of the universe and that, by sealing the work with our blood, we may at least witness the dawn of the bright day of universal happiness. This is our ambition, – this is the end of our efforts..."

The "Gnon" approach to natural law breaks down most obviously when it comes to sexual morality. Take polygamy. It is true that polygamy is inferior and suboptimal (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3260845/>), in terms of maintaining social stability. But it is by no means catastrophically unsustainable, either. Indeed, many vulgar evopsych models ("eggs are dear, sperm is cheap") concur that polygamy is the "natural" (primordial) state. And this is true, if we treat the matter incompletely and only toward procreation. A polygamous society won't have Nature smite it down in sulfur, and so it would appear that as far as evolutionary naturalism goes, it is alright.

I am now going to quote Duns Scotus on the question of Hebrew polygamy (Ordinatio IV, d.33, q.1, "Was plural marriage ever licit?"):

8 The first thing we need to investigate here is what is required for strict commutative justice in the marriage contract on the part of the contracting parties, and what, beyond that, is added for complete justice in such a contract on the part of a superior. The second is what in a given case suffices for justice as far as the topic of this question is concerned, and how such a contract becomes sufficient and completely just.

9 On the first topic I say that in every exchange, as far as the parties to the exchange and what they exchange are concerned, strict justice requires that what they exchange be of equal value, to the extent possible, for the end on account of which the exchange is made.

10 Now the exchange in the marriage contract is made for two purposes: the procreation of children and the avoidance of fornication.

11 A man's body is of greater value than a woman's for the first purpose, since in a given period of time one man can impregnate many women, but one woman cannot conceive by as many men. So as far as this end is concerned, plural marriage — such that a man exchanges his body for the bodies of as many women as he can impregnate, in such a way as a man can impregnate them — is evidently in accord with strict justice. Yet there would not have been plural marriage in the state of innocence, when marriage was strictly for the purpose [of procreation], since there was no necessity then that a man should exchange his body with many women for the sake of procreating, since there would have been sufficient procreation through the simple exchange of one man and one woman, since neither man nor woman would have been sterile then.

12 With respect to the second end, that of avoiding fornication, which applies only in the state of fallen nature, a man's and a woman's body are of equal value.

13 And therefore, in the state of fallen nature, strict justice in the marriage contract as considered in relation to both ends requires the exchange of one body for one body.

14 I add that there is no completion of justice in this exchange apart from the authority of a superior who institutes or approves such and such an exchange. For even if inferiors have ownership of certain things, it is the lawgiver who licitly determines whether such and such an exchange is just, and all the more so in the present case as regards the mutual exchange of bodies with reference to the lawgiver who is God. Now in both the state of innocence and the state of fallen nature God instituted the rule that this exchange of bodies should be of one body for one body, and so complete justice consists in that.

15 On the second topic I say that a dispensation is a clarification of a law or a revocation of a law. For God could clarify his law concerning this exchange or revoke it in a given case — and reasonably so in a case in which revoking the law produces a greater good than observing it.

16 Now at a time when it was necessary that the human race be increased, either unqualifiedly or for the sake of the worship of God — because there were few worshipers of God, so it was necessary that the worshipers of God have as many children as possible, since faith and the worship of God endured only in them and their posterity — it was reasonable for God to make a dispensation and allow one man to exchange his body for the bodies of more than one woman so that there might be a greater increase in worshipers of God, and such an increase would not take place without such a dispensation. And in fact he did make such a dispensation, as we presume in the cases of Abraham and certain other patriarchs.

17 As for how justice in the marriage contract on the part of the contracting parties was preserved under this dispensation, I explain that as follows. When something is ordered toward two ends, a primary end and a secondary end, it is reasonable to make use of that thing in a way that is more conducive to the primary end even if that detracts somewhat from the secondary end. For example,

food is efficacious for both pleasure, which is secondary, and nutrition, which is primary. According to right reason one should make use of food in a way that is more efficacious for nutrition, even if that is less efficacious for pleasure.

18 Now the marriage contract is both for repaying the marriage debt, so that one avoids fornication, as its secondary end, and for the good of offspring, as its primary end. Therefore, according to right reason those who enter into the marriage contract ought to make this exchange in a way that is more efficacious for procreation, even if it is less efficacious for repaying the marriage debt. And this is done by exchanging the body of one man for the bodies of more than one woman. And as this is absolutely to be done, so in a case of necessity—when, that is, the primary end is extremely urgent—it is to be done necessarily; and in such a case the secondary end should be more or less disregarded.

Most pertinently, on plural marriage today:

20 You might object that in modern times this would be illicit plural marriage. I reply that even if it is illicit because the Lawgiver has not given such dispensation for the present time—indeed, Christ has restored the natural law, “They will be two in one flesh,” in Matthew 19:5–6—nonetheless, if we are speaking of justice on the part of the contracting parties and on the part of the contract itself, the reason it is not licit now is that the primary end is not now urgent, since many believers engage in procreation, and their children are directed to the worship of God and are brought up religiously. And for that reason the faith is multiplied without any such contract. So, given that there is no longer any need to detract from the secondary end because of the urgency of the primary end, the marriage contract ought to be carried out in such a way that justice is observed in terms of both ends; and this is done best when one husband has one wife.

(On the other hand, it would appear that with secularism and collapsing fertility rates, there may well be a dispensation to resume plural marriage. Scotus actually suggests as much in the cases of war, famine or plague where a massive sex ratio imbalance takes place. But since the biological sex ratio is not the primary bottleneck in our current time, the idea of knocking up as many broads as you can in the name of the faith sadly appears out of reach.)

We have here the resort to analytical tools like hierarchies of value, equity, teleology and final causes, exegesis of divine law, etc. etc. (Ordinatio II, d.7 features a discussion of the levels of goodness, for instance) There is no formula or shortcut. But the important thing is to analyze man not just as another animal out of many, but on terms of what uniquely belongs to him. Passions and vices are not man’s “nature” since man’s substantial nature does not terminate with his appetites at the apex, but rather there are still higher ontological faculties available to him.

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9 thoughts on “Brief note on “nature” and the “law of nature””

1. Pingback: [Brief note on “nature” and the “law of nature” | Reaction Times](#)

2. Michael Rothblatt says:

August 24, 2019 at 9:20 am

>But since the biological sex ratio is not the primary bottleneck in our current time, the idea of knocking up as many broads as you can in the name of the faith sadly appears out of reach.

Indeed, the problem in contemporary era is knocking up even one LICITLY. Since contemporary degenerate idea of 'dating' presupposes sodomic (conception-blocking) pre-marital sexual relations, good luck keeping a girl long enough to marry her, without fucking her regularly. Well, to be sure, you may be able to keep her 'officially' but she'll fuck around while you're playing anachorite. Someone more pragmatic than me may not have a problem with that, but for a logical apriorist scholastic autiste like myself it seems as if the end is nigh, and God wishes for Christians to disappear before the times of tribulation (not that I was ever a big fan of the Book of Revelation, but it is what it is).

... when the Son of Man cometh, shall he find Faith on the Earth?

Reply.

- Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur says:

August 24, 2019 at 10:04 am

Good to see you again, and agreed.

Reply.

3. ffwawak says:

August 25, 2019 at 7:43 pm

The part "sadly appears out of reach" made me laugh. Though, it is all not that funny for reasons mentioned by MR above.

The Duns Scotus quotation is very interesting and probably answers questions I had about some 8th century clerics supposedly having more than one wife as mentioned in a book I read on early history of Bohemia.

Besides, I noticed you added a lot of monarchist's websites to your blogroll, including Koruna česká. Thanks for that though most of these guys just want to replace president with king and keep rest of the liberal order intact. Most of them would regard you as highly eccentric, I guess.

Reply.

4. Rodin says:

August 28, 2019 at 12:35 am

"If you would make a man happy, study not to augment his goods; but to diminish his wants. One of the greatest services Christianity has rendered the world has been its consecration of poverty, and its elevation of labor to the dignity of a moral duty."

-Orestes Brownson

Reply.

5. Daniel Gomes says:

August 28, 2019 at 10:16 am

As a linguistic curiosity of Portuguese, "natural law" translates as "direito natural" instead of "lei natural", while "scientific law" is "lei científica", and in fact it has the "natural rights" (which would be "direitos naturais") connotation, and it sounds decisively different from "lei da natureza" (law of nature). There are analogs in Romance languages in general.

That would entail that all the mechanistic or pseudo-biological theorization that we usually encounter in these circles sounds really off grammatically speaking. Arguing upright sexual mores are related to an inexorable "lei da natureza" is genuinely funny, to me at least, and already suggests a very strong refutation. In this manner, the main thesis of your post is exemplified very timidly, and in fact your explicit conclusions can be greatly strengthened without any difficulties. It is boilerplate evolutionary biology the idea that evolution doesn't seek improvement, which would mean that only physical survival matters. The empirical evidence would suggest then that populations persist through any level of civilization decay and debauchery in general, perhaps at times with some cultural transmutation. Although we can imagine preservation as a broader concept, there is not a indication of loss of social and behavioral quirks, or of practical technique, or of dominant doctrinal points, which means that for a social scientist, there is a "culture" surviving right there. All these things can be maintained together with significant amount of cultivation of materially self-destructive behavior, in the "most primitive" sense, let alone any kind of aberration or depravity.

All that would be left to do is to stealthily smuggle a higher concept of good for judgment purposes or a less stupid metaphysics in these evaluations, which defeats the whole purpose of these kind of theories. I think this last point is something you should have pointed out.

Reply

6. Pingback: [IRL Political Fanfic Month Continues: Moldbug/Calloway Crossover Special Edition - Radio Free Thulcandra](#)

7. Pingback: [Against Moldbugism | Mere Orthodoxy](#)

8. Aldon says:

[February 11, 2021 at 1:34 pm](#)

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2768686?seq=1>

<https://apotheism.com/2020/11/12/need-of-a-europa-catholica/>

<https://archive.org/details/NestaHWebsterTheFrenchRevolution>

<https://gumroad.com/stoneageherbalist>

Alexander Iulianus

@Apotheiite



We truly need to bring a distinction between science the religion, which is purposed to affirm modern institutions, and science the search, which collates what is true of the universe.

To draw a worldview from science, to say "I believe in science", is an aberration of science.

twitter.com/NigGermantr/st...

2:20 AM · Feb 10, 2021



6



Reply



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In time, hyperdiffusionism will be proven about as "pseudo-scientific" as H***kost denial and race realism.

[Watch on Twitter](#)**Christ Myth Theorist Account**

@Ketamazon

The idea that innovation, advanced culture, and thereby civilization sprouted equally all across the world is a post-war academic lie. It is meant to justify the ruling elite's narrative of "equity and relativism," which is used to justify their current power holdings.

10:16 PM · Feb 8, 2021



6 Reply Share

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@Paracelsus1092



Paul Chase @PaulRChase

Replying to @vrarda1 @Bernard_Flesh and @ContrarianQuinn

I just see it as a simple economic exchange - sex for money - I make no moral judgement provided we're talking about adults who r not controlled by a third party who adds no value to the exchange, eg a pimp or ppl trafficker.

8:41 AM · Feb 8, 2021



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Edward Dutton

@jollyheretic



If you want to understand Multiculturalism, then join me at The Jolly Heretic 55 minutes hence - 7pm UK, 2pm NY - where Paul Gottfried will tell you all you need to know.
[youtube.com/watch?v=9O746b...](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9O746b...)

1:05 PM · Feb 4, 2021



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Stone Age Herbalist

@Paracelsus1092



1/ Humans aren't the only animal to practice farming and domestication. Fish, insects and microbes have also evolved to form mutual domestication pacts, so some examples...

2:52 AM · Feb 10, 2021



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♡ 97 💬 Reply ↗ Share

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many such hypocrisies... they also claim China liberating female Uyghurs with enforced feminism is a form of genocide lol

— SP fan account (@thuletide) February 11, 2021

Stone Age Herbalist

@Paracelsus1092



Fermentation should be thought of as a form of domestication. Dogs increase hunting power and horses increase mobility, microbes increase the nutrition and longevity of food, even v simple foods. It's a mutually beneficial pact between humans, animals and microorganisms.

3:12 PM · Feb 9, 2021



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Stone Age Herbalist

@Paracelsus1092



"One of the earliest known archaeological cases of large scale violence is Jebel Sahaba... over 60 individuals were recovered... the presence of healed bone tissue suggested that these people were no strangers to violence"

My latest writing

stoneageherbalist.gumroad.com

The Morality of War and its Ancient Roots

Short essay on the prehistoric origins of warfare and its transition from a part of reality to a highly moralised activity.

3:14 PM · Feb 2, 2021



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Rauðgrani RINDYRRIH

@GraniRau



The idea of equality or "aequitas" has never impressed me because it is apparent that people are not equal. Nor does the world reward you for being stupid, weak, and willfully ignorant. And no one, not even the Christians, ever got anywhere by cultivating those traits.

Raiden @SeekerRaiden

The origin of libtardism

12:00 AM · Feb 9, 2021

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21



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