Natural Law Theory of Ethics

Principal Proponents: Aristotle (383-321 b.c.e.) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 c.e.)

Moral values and standards are grounded in nature - and especially human nature

A significant aspect of human beings is that they are *physical beings*

A significant aspect of human beings is that they are *rational beings*

A significant aspect of human beings is that they are *social / political beings*

Existing things have *'purposes'* (final cause) that grounds their *essence* (formal cause)

Reason has the power

       to recognize essences and purposes

       to <u>determine conduct that accords / is discordant</u> with the essence / purpose of a thing

To <u>act in accord</u> with the purpose / essence of a thing is <u>morally right</u> action

         = rational / 'natural'

To <u>act in discord</u> with the purpose / essence of a thing is <u>morally wrong</u> action

         = irrational /'unnatural'

God is the Creator of nature and human beings, therefore God has established the

      essences / purposes of things

To <u>act in accordance</u> with the essence of a thing is to <u>obey God's will</u>

To <u>act in discord</u> with the essence / purpose of a thing is to <u>disobey God's will</u>