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Psychology and the Natural Law of Reparation

Are there universal values of right and wrong, good and bad, shared by virtually every human? The tradition of the natural law argues that there are. Drawing on the work of psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, Alford adds an extra dimension to this argument: We know these truths because we have hated before we have loved, and wished to destroy before we have wanted to preserve. Natural law is built on the desire to make reparation for the goodness we have destroyed or have longed to destroy. Through reparation, we earn salvation from the most hateful part of ourselves: that part which would destroy what we truly know to be good.

C. Fred Alford is Professor of Government and Distinguished Scholar-Teacher at the University of Maryland, College Park. He is the author of a dozen books on moral psychology, including *Rethinking Freedom*, *What Evil Means to Us*, and *Think No Evil*. A recipient of three Fulbright fellowships, Alford is Executive Director of the Association for Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society and serves on the editorial boards of several professional journals.

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Preface

The idea that Melanie Klein might be a natural law theorist has been marinating with me for some time. That she might actually fulfill the requirements of traditional natural law thinking only came to me after reading and teaching the great Thomist of the twentieth century, Jacques Maritain. I cannot say for certain why, only that while Maritain is a deeply religious man, he locates natural law in a space different from where Aquinas locates the natural law. For Aquinas, natural law remains an aspect of Eternal Law. For Maritain (and some readers will think that I have already tipped my hand), natural law owes almost as much to the phenomenology of his early teacher, Henri Bergson, as it does to Catholic theology. This is so, even if this is not an aspect of the natural law that Maritain talked or wrote about in later years.

Nevertheless, neither Maritain nor any other natural law theorist has paid sufficient attention to natural evil. This is something I always wonder about when I go to conferences where people try hard to convince one another that the natural law exists. Or if it doesn't, then universals such as those written about by Kant or Rawls must. Or if not that, then at least the moral sentiments must exist, such as those written about by Adam Smith and David Hume. But if that's true, then why do people generally behave so badly? Why was the twentieth century the bloodiest in world history, more than one hundred million killed in warfare, more than one hundred sixty million if one includes genocide and "democide," as it is called, such as the mass murders of Stalin and Mao? Perhaps it makes more sense to begin with the sources of natural

evil, if I may call them that, and then go on to look for the sources and forces that may counteract the human pleasure in destruction. For that is what we are talking about when we talk about evil, at least in the roughly secular context that I am going to talk about good and evil.

Here is where Melanie Klein makes her great contribution, beginning with evil, assuming that we have hated before we have loved, that we have wished to destroy before we have wished to create. Of all the great figures in the history of the natural law, only Saint Augustine came close to her insight, and then only for a moment. For Klein, natural law grows out of a desire to make reparation for the world of hatred and destruction that lies within. That dimension of natural law has never been adequately addressed by those who would find the good in each of us, and the world we share together, the good that is the basis of the natural law.

Though my book is organized around this thesis, the path is winding. Chapter 2 is based on interviews with a number of young informants, as I call them, asking them how they would respond to someone who seemed to reject outright the most basic assumptions of the natural law, particularly as expressed in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

Other chapters consider the new natural law theorists, as they are called, such as John Finnis and Robert George, as well as the evolutionary natural law, as it is called. I take particular pains to show that Klein, and those who follow her, such as Wilfred Bion and D. W. Winnicott, truly work within the tradition established by Augustine, Aquinas, and particularly Maritain. Finally, I argue that while Hannah Arendt's study of the evil of men such as Adolf Eichmann would seem to be helpful in drawing the connection between Augustine and Klein, in the end Arendt fails to grasp evil. This is doubly disappointing, as Arendt's dissertation was devoted to Augustine, and she seems to have drawn her well-known concept of the "banality of evil" from Augustine's concept of evil as the privation of the good. That, it turns out, is precisely the problem. Evil is far more than the privation of the good: it is the willful destruction of the good because it is good, and not me or mine. Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost* is one of the few literary characters to know that dimension of evil. Only when we do, I argue, can we truly appreciate the natural law of reparation.

Two anonymous reviewers for Cambridge University Press were enormously helpful in seeing the value of my project, while pointing out where my argument fell short. I have not always met their objections, but their comments were never far from my mind.

My colleague, Jim Glass, read a next-to-last draft, pointing out where I was less than clear, while understanding my main point with special clarity. Once again I owe him more than words can express. Since I shared this project with him so late in the game, he is particularly blameless for my errors and omissions.

My wife, Elly, and my family have provided me endless opportunities to make reparation. Sometimes I think that this is what families are for.