

Why We Obey the Law Positivism or Naturalism?

Posted on October 24, 2019

Thesis Statement:

As the role of naturalism is limited to morality, allowing people to escape it, positivism acts as a practical system restricting people from indulging in wrongful acts under the influence of punishment.

Introduction

The question of obeying the law depends on the choice between naturalism and positivism. The philosophy of jurisprudence represents two common models; one based on moral laws and the other one on legal laws. The choice between moral and legal laws illustrates the ideology of naturalism and positivism. To understand the concept of obeying laws, it is vital to analyze both models. Society obeys under the light of moral laws or legal laws. The present paper assesses the role of naturalism and positivism in defining laws and how these laws govern society. It highlights the differences between the two models and identifies the most suitable one. The comparison of the two types of laws helps in understanding the most realistic model that makes laws mandatory for people and communities. The concept of law depends on social and [political life](#), while jurisprudence emphasizes the themes of justice, equality, and fairness. The systems of naturalism and positivism are vital in studying the purpose of the legal systems. It is included in both the curriculum of [bar exam prep courses](#) and law schools, as it helps students understand the foundations of law and its impact on society. The jurisprudence answers the basic question of what is law and its purpose? The purpose of jurisprudence is to assess the theories of law and the legal system. It also emphasizes the ideology of law, justice, and the legal system. The paper considers the argument between natural law theory and legal positivism and determines the most effective system.

The analysis of general theoretical questions is also part of the jurisprudence. The concept of choosing between naturalism and positivism relies on the ideology of law, justice, and the legal system. A society that relies more on moral values will consider naturalism as an effective legal system for controlling the actions of people. The legal system presented by positivism represents laws that control wrongful actions and prevent them from illegal conduct. The law and legal system in the society emphasize the concepts of justice and morality. The ideology of obeying laws involves selection between natural law theory and legal positivism. Natural law theory focuses on the [moral standards](#) and laws that prohibit humans from engaging in wrongful acts. The theory of naturalism ignores the legal impacts of the law.

Natural law theory concentrates on the aspects of morality, politics, and theology. Theologians consider naturalism as a traditional and religious approach while positivism is a modern approach. The emphasis of positivism is on the practical and realistic impacts of the legal system. The paper discusses the agreement and disagreement between the two broader systems of naturalism and positivism. The application of the two systems in society leads to the question of choosing the most appropriate model. The selection between the two systems involves a debate on understanding boundary lines and how they work in reality. The two schools through represent different theories on the conception of laws and how they control society.

The current paper provides an in-depth view of the theories of naturalism and positivism with a focus on uncovering the purpose of law and how it relates to justice. The analysis of the theoretical questions helps in understanding the concepts of obeying laws. The theories are central in determining how they maintain law and order by eliminating evil from society. The paper explores the association of morality and the legal system with the duties of people. The purpose of the study is to analyze literature on naturalism and positivism that leads to the recognition of different aspects associated with law and order.

Research Questions

- Do people have a duty to obey laws?
- What causes people to obey the law?
- Is naturalism effective in restricting people from engaging in wrongful acts?
- Is positivism effective in eliminating wrongful conduct and evils from society?
- How do naturalism and positivism define the concepts of rights and duties?
- Which system provides the most powerful solutions in the practical world?
- What influences the people more, morality or legal laws?
- How do both systems work to maintain law and order?
- Why are morality and laws important for the people?

Objectives

- To uncover the factors that motivate people to follow laws.
- To determine why people obey laws and identify differences between naturalism and positivism.
- To understand the role of morality in restraining people from wrongful acts.
- To assess the role of two systems in defining the rights and duties of individuals in society.
- To study the impact of both systems on the maintenance of law and order.
- To study the importance of morality and laws in human life.

Jurisprudence

Understanding society without the conception of law and legal doctrine is not possible. It explains the laws necessary for the existence of society, as without laws or a legal system, the survival of societies is impossible. Bix (2000) explains jurisprudence as “the existence of law is one thing; its merit or demerit is another. Whether it be or be not is one inquiry; whether it be or be not conformable to an assumed standard is a different inquiry. A law, which exists, is a law, though we happen to dislike it, or though it varies from the text, by which we regulate our approbation and disapprobation” (Bix, 2000). The jurisprudence involves the laws that are essential for the regulation of society and the people. Without laws, the chances of neglecting duties are more. The laws define the standards that motivate people to fulfill their duties and responsibilities. Laws set the limits that define the probated and allowed actions. Jurisprudence is also effective in maintaining the ideology of right and wrong. The concepts of equality and justice are also relevant to jurisprudence as they impact the socio-political aspects. Without laws, people are more likely to act beyond limits, which also confers the idea of disobedience.

Legal and political theories involve a description of facts also, they postulate ideas about aspirations. Jurisprudence is significant for understanding the legal theory. It focuses on providing answers to the questions of laws, legal concepts, and political ideologies. The descriptive legal theory also shows a connection with jurisprudence as it highlights the concepts related to political philosophy. Normative theory acts to establish [strict liability](#) that society ought to adopt to protect the citizens. Choice of legal laws and enforcing them also involve complex components of society. Jurisprudence emphasizes the spurious legitimacy that endows the legal system and laws. D’Amato (2012) states, “One of the main jurisprudential ideas, though not amounting to a “school” in itself, is the insistence that law is something that is backed up by sanctions. Though the idea stems from Austin, it has been most consistently applied to international law by Hans Kelsen” (D’Amato, 2012).

It works to explain the validity of the laws and legal systems that act to set boundaries and define the rights and duties of individuals. It emphasizes understanding laws and how they function in particular settings. The validity of the law depends on the sanctions that back it. D’Amato (2011) explains the law “is nothing but a set of tools—admittedly complex and intellectually engaging. But we should not get so caught up in the intellectual interest of law that we forget that law in itself cannot solve human problems. Like any other tool, the law may facilitate the solution of a given problem” (D’Amato, 2011). The argument presented by D’Amato shows that law has the strong correlation with justice.

The reason for the existence of law is to justice, which also remains a prominent element of legal and political philosophy. Another definition of the law states that it involves a set of rules working to direct the actions of people enforced by states through concepts of penalties and punishments. The application of laws is only possible under the influence of the state. The existence of the state remains the central criterion for people to follow them. The non-existence of states results in the invalidity of laws as their application becomes impossible. Laws are effective in defining the rights

and duties of the people living in society thus instructing them to follow certain standards and values. The common law fits within the notion of promulgated laws that works to maintain social order. Without social order, the survival of the societies is not possible (D'Amato, 2011).

Political obligation

The theory of law deals with the history of political obligations as to what factors encourage people to perform their duties. The debate on political obligation involves two arguments, its prevalence and non-existence. Political obligation is also a matter of why humans indulge them in certain actions and provide the reasoning behind restrictive roles. The problem of political obligation is that it involves debate regarding skepticism and providing a solution. The concept of political philosophy emerged in the seventeenth century when Thomas Hobbes and John Locke discussed the roles of the state and the purpose of the existence of law and order. They viewed the troublesome nature of political theory.

The purpose of political philosophy intriguing the philosophers was to uncover the true grounds for obedience to the law. Socrates identifies political obligation as the agreement and commitment of an individual with the society that sets the boundaries for him and prevents him from hurting a friend or acting in the wrong manner. His argument also explains that humans are unable to escape their political obligation as it causes them to follow the laws of society. The factors that influence humans to fulfill their commitments involve nature, birth, education, and the good of others. Nature is the primary forces that bind them to the concepts of obedience. Socrates considered disobedience as an essential element that is capable of destroying the city. The concept of law explains what ought to be and what ought not to be. It restricts humans from engaging themselves in actions that are unjust. The political philosophy leads to the comparison of the natural law system and the legal law system. Identifying the most practical and appropriate system involves debate. The discussion on political philosophy considers (Richard & Lefkowitz, 2012).

Naturalism

The supporters of naturalism view it as a law defining the activity of purpose. It works to resolve disputes and protects the legitimate rights of the people that function to maintain law and order in society. Legal naturalists consider the system as the genuine law that eliminates the issues of injustice and inequality. The ideology of human obligation started with the theory of divine command that emphasized the role of nature. The theory explains that people are obedient because nature sets limitations and laws that they are unable to avoid. God ordains individuals to stay on the right path and restrains them from what is wrong. It is a natural force, 'morality,' that plays a vital role in defining human roles and duties in society. The divine command theory explains that no force is more powerful than nature which could eliminate the concepts of evil and sins (Richard & Lefkowitz, 2012).

The natural law theory relies on the elements of the universe, human nature, and morality. The natural law theory emphasizes moral obligations explaining that laws are good legislation for making

people of good society citizens. Every individual has a moral obligation to obey laws and perform their role as a good citizen. Fuller (1969) defines naturalism as “legal naturalism is consistent with either the view that legal status depends on moral standards external to the law (the more familiar “natural law” version of the doctrine), or the view that the moral standards that define legal status are to be found within the nature of law itself” (Fuller, 1969). Natural theorists agree with moral realism as they consider nature’s law as the strongest force motivating people to fulfill moral obligations.

Moral realism, according to the theorists, is important for agreeing and disagreeing, to which the tradition requires significant commitments. Naturalism also focuses on meta-ethical beliefs showing a close connection with morality. The schools of thought build relevance between law and morality. However, there are limitations to the natural law theory as it states that the claim is limited to the moral truth. It further suggests that the truth must be evaluated by the political and legal institutions (Wacks, 2005).

The theory of naturalism focuses on the natural duty that people acquire through birth. The conception of natural duty states that no entity works to set boundaries and keep people on the right path. It is only through nature that they learn to adopt moral values that restrict them from wrongful acts. Theory depicts, “natural duties are understood to be ones people have simply in virtue of their status as moral agents; they need do nothing to acquire them, nor does their bearing such duties depend on their occupying some role in a socially salient relationship.

Natural duties are also universal in scope; they are owed to all members of a class defined regarding possession of some feature, such as sentience or rationality” (Richard & Lefkowitz, 2012). The ideology of natural duty also shows relevance with virtue as the reality of virtue and motivates them to stay on the right path. Virtue acts as moral agents that people acquire through birth or are taught by society due to the existing good to fulfill their duties and take roles that confine them to their responsibilities. The theory of justice requires people to fulfill their social and moral obligation. The ubiquity of ethical problems justifies the role of natural laws as it is the central force allowing people to decide between right and wrong. Kant supports the concept of natural laws as they function to provide justice and equality.

Natural law theory emphasizes the concept of nature as nothing in the world is man-made. Similarly, the universe created laws that become most visible in the form of ethics and moral values. Moral values act as the strongest force that eliminates evil or injustice from society. Natural law theory explains that the purpose of good is nature, and the concept of happiness is also linked to nature. Nature develops the moral values and ability in individuals to avoid engaging in negative actions. Natural law involves a set of truths that society holds for attaining justice. It further states that “immoral behavior is “unnatural” (in the sense of “contrary to our function,” not “nowhere to be found in the natural world”), whereas virtuous behavior is natural” (Richard & Lefkowitz, 2012). Considering immoral behavior as unnatural puts the responsibility for wrongful action entirely on the human. However, the absence of a legal system for controlling the acts eliminates the conception of penalties (Wacks, 2005).

The natural laws rely on the divine theory as it explains that God explained through scriptures about the morality and conception of right and wrong. Natural laws are capable of motivating individuals to identify right and wrong. Nature allows individuals to act morally as it eliminates immoral behaviors and unethical conduct. Naturalism promotes the ideology of God's existence and his emphasis on maintaining justice. Philosophers associate divine laws with natural laws, as it confirms the prevalence of traditional theism. Human laws are genuine laws when they do not act against divine laws or nature. Plato relates natural laws with absolute values that define the responsibilities of people and confines them to fulfill their duties. Aquinas supported the natural law and identified it as a source of divine providence. The concept of naturalism considers absolute values as powerful enough to control human beings. The notion neglects the need for man-made laws or society's constructs. Aquinas further associates the concept of naturalism with natural guidance. God's guidance and scripture are sufficient for setting boundaries for human beings (Bix, 2000).

Positivism

Legal positivism provides an idea that is different from naturalism and morality. The legal positivism focuses on the merits and demerits of laws. The law exists irrespective of the fact we like or dislike. Laws work in the same fashion for every individual of the society. Human positive laws remained the subjective consideration for the political theorist [Thomas Aquinas](#). Positive laws are also crucial in attaining the common good, which need the deployment of a state of power. Legal positivism represents opposing views to naturalism as the focus of objectivism is on objective moral truths. It argues that naturalism lacks subjectivity thus, it fails to work in realistic settings. Legal positivism stresses determining if the rule is law or not. The creation of legal obligations depends on valid laws that are capable of restricting individuals from engaging in wrongful conduct. Having a legal right to do a certain thing entails having a moral right. Laws of society define the legal rights and their impacts on the members of society. While in the case of moral rights, one needs to distinguish between right and wrong.

Jeremy Bentham and John Austin are prominent supporters of legal positivism. Positivism states, "it is nothing but a prediction that if a man does or omits certain things, he will be made to suffer in this or that way by judgment of the court" (Richard & Lefkowitz, 2012). The role of penal laws and judgment of the court becomes more effective in controlling wrongful acts of the people. The courts as they exist in society, make it difficult for people to escape legal laws. Punishments and penalties are the primary motivators restricting them from illegal conduct. The claim that positivism differentiates between legal and illegal acts leads to the social order.

Comparison between naturalism and positivism

The central argument of the paper claims that positivism is an effective approach to maintaining social order, as naturalism depicts few ontological commitments. Regarding realistic law, theory

positivism provides the more strong solution to control unjust behaviors of the people. The argument states that the role of naturalism is limited, as it does not engage in immediate punishments or evaluations. The application of naturalism in realistic settings is less significant as people are unable to make moral decisions when they don't fear immediate outcomes. The concept of immediate outcomes depicts the element of punishment that eliminates the possibility of negative actions or human behaviors. Natural law explains the differences between right and wrong, while positivism creates distinctions between legal and illegal. Legal positivism confers the claims that naturalism is false because morality cannot restrict them from engaging in wrongful actions.

Positivism claims that naturalism is untrue as it considers immoral behavior as unnatural. The fact that naturalism is limited to moral behavior exhibits shortcomings of the theory. Compared to naturalism, positivism focuses on the common good that prevails in society. It denies the ideology of moral obligation and replaces it with legal obligation. Aquinas, Augustine, and [King Martin Luther](#) supported a positive legal approach. Lon Fuller states there exists an overlap between legality and justice. Political superiors take an active role in commanding laws and imposing them on inferiors. The concept of sovereigns exhibits relevance with positivism, as they are the people who create laws and impose them on society. The laws control the inferior people of the society who have the responsibility of obeying them. Positive laws act as general commands that apply to the followers and not the lawmakers. The concept of positivism is more realistic as it explains the reasons behind the social order. Sovereigns take the authoritative role as they have the power to control society and maintain justice. It supports the notion that sovereigns are above the law. The authoritative personnel plays a vital role in maintaining order as they confine the role of people according to their rights and duties.

Though both naturalism and positivism emphasize finding the answers to what and what ought not to be positivism presents a valid justification for legal laws.

The factor of penalties associated with the law makes positivism more valid in real settings. The role of naturalism is limited in real life as it lacks immediate response. God-made laws control the actions of those individuals who accept religion and nature as the central force behind the creation of the universe. People devoid of religious or moral values are unable to act rightly. The theory explains, "If acts of the class were done, or forborne or omitted, what would be the probable effect on the general happiness or good?" When the effects would be "pernicious, we must conclude that [God] enjoins or forbids them, and by a rule which probably is inflexible" (Austin, 1832). It further explains that the single entity responsible for judging the acts of humans is nature and God. This eliminates the fear, as people know that they will not encounter immediate punishments. The notion of delayed punishments and rewards restricts the people with weak moral values to fulfill obligations. On the contrary, the law binds superior and inferior in the positive laws. The penal laws impose the duties on the followers that act as the central element for the maintenance of law and order in the society (Wacks, 2005).

Moore argues that natural laws are ineffective in controlling society as they are procedural and weak in providing substantive justice to the people. Also, complying with the natural laws leads to further

confusion, making them less significant in real settings. He further explains that moral facts are part of legal constructs, and without the legal system, their application poses challenges. The theorists argue that natural laws involve fallacies, resulting in their incompetencies for dealing with the social issues of equality and justice. John Finnis and Robert George deny the effectiveness of the natural laws as they emphasize on possible ends of actions. Moore presented the naturalistic fallacy, uncovering the limitations of the theory. He demonstrates the error of defining goodness according to natural property and under the influence of happiness and pleasure. Naturalistic fallacy highlights the absence of the logic rule in defining the factors that maintain social order. Weakness is apparent in theory as “the fact that natural law theory might be vulnerable to the naturalistic fallacy insofar as it claims to derive ethical norms from a purely theoretical or descriptive account of human nature” (Grant, 2004). According to the philosophers regarding practicality, natural law lacks reality. When one reflects on possible ends, the notion of naturalism becomes less significant. Basic goods are self-evident that focus on the role of ethics. It is difficult to justify the effectiveness of natural laws, also that it does not lead to valid conclusions (Trapani, 2004).

The argument against naturalism explains the conventional criticism against justice and injustice. It involved the explanation of the choice between right and wrong under the influence of the social complexes. The reality of natural laws relies on the role of conscious and subconscious. Plato mentions, “although people who respect traditional norms and standards of evaluating human conduct may well regard these not merely as a social fact but as having directive force for them, and thus a kind of moral truth, nonetheless this attitude of theirs is often indeed, characteristically-marked by its uncritical marginalizing of the question of truth” (Finnis, 2012). The argument explains that social existence is impossible without the controlling authority. The significant weakness of natural laws includes the unidentified authority, as the concept of goodness and morality relies on nature. Natural laws also exhibit freedom of choosing between right and wrong which makes the notion of ethical conduct least important. The social contracts may be ineffective in restricting people from harming others. The choice under naturalism relies on the individual’s thoughts. Platonic critique uncovers the error in moral reasonableness. To gain benefit, an individual is more likely to harm others when the legal system is non-existent. Deriving personal gains becomes easier under naturalism as without the concept of penalties, people will use the opportunity in their best interest (Trapani, 2004).

The positive legal theory provides supporting the claim by using the concept of punishment. The positivist school of thought considers punishment as an important tool for eliminating injustices and unfairness from society. The theory is vital in setting legal limitations and restricting people from indulging in illegal acts. Through punishments, the state manages to remove vengeance and crimes. The idea that penalties create inner fear among citizens will restrain them from harming others. To avoid punishment, they make a rational choice. The rational choice in the case of naturalism becomes less important as it would encourage human beings towards personal gains, thus promoting injustice.

Positivism, on the other hand, eliminates the conception of personal gain due to the legal system and regulations that monitor the actions of people (Richard & Lefkowitz, 2012). Another claim that

supports the effectiveness of positivism involves the notion of peace. The approach is useful in attaining peace and welfare in the society. Jeremy Bentham is a famous philosopher who defended positivism: “Men are possessed of free will. They are calculating animals and base their action on pleasure and pain. Men will be discouraged from criminal activity if threatened with punishments that outweigh any gain resulting from their actions. The individual is responsible for his actions, and punishment must be proportional to the interest violated by the crime” (Faqr, 2015). Bentham stresses the need for creating a legal system as the concept of justice is vague without it. People have free will that influences their decision of choosing between right and wrong.

They can neglect righteousness when they fail to see the outcomes. The legal system sets the outcomes that limit people’s engagement in wrongful acts. Bentham further claims that people are more likely to violate law and order when the controlling authority is missing. The claims presented in the theory of Bentham justify the reasons for punishment and its impacts on promoting justice. The theory also suggests that human activities have relevance to human choices, and they choose to become rational actors. They calculate pleasure and satisfaction before choosing any course of action. The emotions of fear will act as a strong indicator influencing the actions of people. He relates the principle of gradation of punishment with positivism making the laws more real for the people. The rational choice depends on the comparison between penalty and advantage. Bentham argues that when the penalty increases the advantage minimizes for the individual that will restrict him from harming others. The conception is also important as it allows people to value the greater good.

He explains that punishments are influential as they allow people to attain reformative interests. The state’s engagement in punishment and reward have a significant impact on controlling the actions. Punishments such as fines and imprisonment impose high costs on the people that motivate them to follow laws and rules (Wacks, 2005). Bentham also illustrates that the rational choice of people relies on the notions of maximizing happiness and minimization of pain. The increase in the intensity of pain results in the disadvantage of the wrongdoer. The assessment of the outcomes and ends depends on the duration, punishment, and costs (Grant, 2004).

Paul Fuerebach identifies the strengths of positivism and its practical role in the world. To uncover the importance of positivism he states, “forbidden almost everywhere, countries in the codification tradition are, generally speaking, much stricter on this subject than are common law countries” (Faqr, 2015). The notions further elaborated by neoclassical theorists also focus on the negative role of free will. Free will does not explain individual differences that result in the ineffectiveness of naturalism. Neo-classical schools used a rational choice approach to capture the impacts of two models, naturalism and positivism, on society and people (Faqr, 2015).

The positive school emphasizes the punishments and the prevalence of the legal system as it contributes to law and order. The concept of positivism is also vital, “though the human law is artifact and artifice, and not a conclusion from moral premises, both its posting and the recognition of its positivity (by judges, professionals, citizens, and thence by descriptive and critical scholars)” (Bix, 2000). The prevalence of the legal system distributes power to the few people who set laws for the

people. The authoritative personnel are capable of maintaining justice by controlling actions. The citizens, according to positivism, are more inclined to stick to their roles defined by the legal system. After considerable thinking and skepticism, they make choices for choosing conduct. Bix (2000) states that the objectivity of naturalism does reflect its weakness as it fails to work in realistic settings. Positive legal laws, on the other hand, are effective in identifying possible conduct.

Naturalism provides leniency to the people, and according to rational choice, they seek pleasure in hurting others. The common examples state that causing harm to others, such as theft or robbery, allows individuals to become well-off. Rational choice in naturalism will provoke them to exhibit the wrongful attitude and gain the advantage. Theories argue that the absence of central authority encourages people to choose the option that leads to the maximization of welfare. Positivism, on the contrary, works oppositely as it permits individuals to assess outcomes. The concept of benefits stresses escaping punishments and penalties (Grant, 2004). The theory of positivism also explains that the reason people obey laws is to attain benefit. The recognition that avoidance of the law makes them worse off makes the naturalism approach ineffective and unrealistic. Reasons for obeying laws are unclear in naturalism, as the only force stopping people from engaging in wrongful acts is morality. The moral philosophy is not sufficient to justify obeying the law. Positivism, on the other hand, plays a crucial role in eliminating misconduct and evil from society (Wacks, 2005).

Conclusion

Naturalism exhibits limitations due to its inherent weaknesses, thus proposing positivism as a powerful model for promoting justice and fairness. When society discusses political philosophy, the factors controlling the actions of people have a dominant role. The comparison of the legal systems depicts that positivism provides a practical solution to influence the behaviors of people. The concept of punishments and penalties makes a positive theory more vital compared to naturalism. Nature laws provide free will to the people, while the central authority responsible for imposing laws is also missing. Naturalism states that moral laws are defined by God that people explore through scriptures. Objectivity of naturalism is its weakness, as it fails to work in realistic settings. Positive legal laws, on the other hand, are effective in identifying possible conduct. The compassion between the two schools of thought exhibits the strengths of positivism overpowers naturalism. The theory of rational choice explains the behavior of humans and the reasons behind making a choice. The rational choice of people relies on the notions of maximizing happiness and minimization of pain. The central claim states that without penalties, it is not possible to control the behaviors or eliminate possibilities of wrongful conduct. The fear of punishment and penalties results in the disadvantage of the people that encourage them to avoid harming others. Positivism is also significant in controlling the emotions of the people.

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