

# Acton University

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## **Course: *The Good of the Natural Environment in Relation to the Human Person***

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### **Précis**

Positing radical discontinuity between the human person and nature, modern environmental theories present a dilemma for Christians: either nature has no essential value and may be used and dominated in an unrestricted manner incompatible with Christian stewardship **or** it has an unqualified value and its preservation may come at the cost of human flourishing. This lecture presents a *Thomistic-Aristotelian model* of environmental philosophy, refuting this false dilemma. By treating the meaning of (1) *nature* in connection with (2) the *human person*, (3) the *human good and dignity*, (4) *the ethical community*, and (5) God, the lecture will show that nature has intrinsic, extrinsic, and theological value obligating respect *and* that nature is ethically objectified for human flourishing. As the human person is continuous with the chain of natural being but also transcendent, a stewardship of prudence, justice, and temperance is needed, where the person is *imago dei*, co-perfector of nature.

### **Course Outline**

- I. The Human Person as *imago dei* & Co-Perfector of Nature.
  - i. The Biblical Account: *Genesis*, 1-2
- II. The Natural Environment & the Modern Dilemma: Domination or Over-Valuation
  - i. The Domination Thesis or Radical Anthropocentrism: Nature as Valueless for the sake Human Use and Domination Alone (Bacon & Descartes)
  - ii. Eco-Centrism: Nature as Unqualifiedly Valuable even to the Detriment of Human Flourishing (Muir & Leopold)
- II. Nature: The Aristotelian-Thomistic & Christian Model
  - i. Logical Methodology
  - ii. Hylomorphism
  - iii. The General Definition of Nature
  - iv. The Four Cause Model
  - v. On the Necessity of Nature are Teleological: The Normativity Argument
  - vi. On the Value or the Good & Evil of Nature in General

## II. Philosophical Anthropology

- i. The Chain of Being
- ii. Definition of the Human Person

## III. Human Dignity

- i. The Human Act: Intention, Deliberation, Choice, Execution
- ii. The Rational Animal as the Nature that Natures Transcending Nature
- iii. The Personalistic Norm

## IV. The Ethical Community & Environmental Ethics

- i. Justice: Unqualified with Respect to Human Beings
- ii. The Moral Obligations of Humans in Relation to Nature: Intrinsic, Extrinsic, and in Relation to God
- iii. Prudence, Stewardship, and the Ethical Objectification of the Natural Environment by Human Beings

### **Some Recommended (Not Necessary) Readings**

*Genesis*, 1-2

Aristotle: *Physics*, I-II, and VI-VIII; *De Anima* I.1-2 and II.1-4; *Nicomachean Ethics* I-VI.

St. Thomas Aquinas: *De Principiis Naturae* or *On the Principles of Nature*; *Commentaries* on the *Physics*, *De Anima*, & *Ethics* of Aristotle; *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 3; *Summa Theologiae* I-II, qq. 1-6 and 12-14.

Francis Bacon: *Novum Organum*, *De Augmentis Scientiarum*.

René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, VI.

William A. Wallace, *The Modeling of Nature: Philosophy of Science and Philosophy of Nature in Synthesis* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996).

John Muir, "Man's Place in the Universe," from *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf*, ed. by William Frederic Badè (New York, N.Y.: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1916).

Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic," in part III of *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1949)

Kathleen Dean Moore, "Leaping Lizards!: What Might It Mean to Recognize the Rights of Nature?," in *Minding Nature*, 7.2.

Mariusz Ciszek, "Environmental Ethics from a Thomistic-Personalistic Perspective: Implications for the Sustainable Development Concept," in *Problems of Sustainable Development*, 2014, Vol. 9, no. 1, 97-106.