

Tekst 4



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From the lecture given at Gresham College, London, by Mary Warnock, moral philosopher and Visiting Professor in Rhetoric

- 1 When Prince Charles, in his Reith lecture last year, rebuked biologists for drawing society into areas which “belonged to God and God alone”, urging them to try if they wished to understand nature, but not to change it, he drew an impressive response from many confused and vaguely frightened people.
- 2 The new biotechnology seems to have opened up possibilities of changing the genes of plants and animals in a way which nature, or God as the Creator, never intended. Because such an appeal to the laws of nature is often used in arguments about genetically modified crops, transgenic animals, which may cross species boundaries, cloning, either reproductive or therapeutic, indeed about any aspect of what may seem like dramatic interventionism, it is worth revisiting the question of what we mean by nature, and how we value it, as a matter of some practical urgency.
- 3 What validity has the appeal to what is or is not natural? Prince Charles is no fool. He did not need his father or sister to point out, as they did, that human beings had been interfering with nature as long as they had sown crops or bred cattle. It cannot be intervention as such that is held to be against nature. Prince Charles allowed, as he had to, that agriculture itself was in one sense not “natural”. But he contrasted producing genetically modified crops with “traditional methods of agriculture which have stood the test of time, because they are working with the grain of nature”. What is, and is not, to “work with the grain of nature”? Which way does nature’s grain lead us?
- 4 Our attitude towards nature is complex and has a history. The word has resonances strongly influenced both by the attitude of respectful observation of nature and that of the romantic searching of nature for our own proper dwelling, for where we feel we most deeply belong. Both attitudes derive from the change in sensibility that came about roughly at the time of the French Revolution, the end of the Age of Enlightenment. It would be impossible for us to free ourselves from such attitudes, if only because of the immense influence on us exercised by European and American art of the period. Nor do I suppose that many of us would want to be rid of them, since for many they afford the greatest pleasures in life.
- 5 But we are also subject to the influence of Darwinian biology, and the new way in which we have been taught to think of nature as one organism, whose “building blocks” are genes. We are confronted not only by science, which has discovered and will discover more about how these genes work, with one another and with their environment, but also by more sophisticated technology, needed both for the discoveries themselves and for any interventions which agriculturists or doctors may decide to undertake.
- 6 It is doubtless prudent to be fairly cautious in what interventions there should be. But a modest conservatism does not entail that nothing new should ever be tried. Nor do I believe that the resonance and emotive force contained in the word “nature” should have any power to influence the decisions of society as to what is or is not an acceptable intervention.
- 7 If it can be shown, as I believe it can, that the genetic modification of rice to make it more tolerant of adverse weather would make a great difference to the level of nutrition in countries where rice is the most important element of diet, then such modified rice should be made accessible on the grounds of common humanity. If it can be shown that nuclear-cell transplant (and thus the transplant of genes) can effectively restore someone’s damaged liver, brain or spinal cord, the common humanitarian concerns which have always been the concerns of medicine should be permitted to develop the technology. That it is perhaps “against the grain of nature” is no more relevant an argument against it than it would be to claim that a replacement hip joint is against the grain of nature.

■ Tekst 4 From the lecture...

- “... in a way which nature, or God as the Creator, never intended” (paragraph 2)
- 1p **4 ■** Who would agree with this?
1 “biologists” (paragraph 1)
2 “many confused and vaguely frightened people” (paragraph 1)
3 Mary Warnock
4 Prince Charles
- A** 1 and 2
B 1 and 4
C 2 and 3
D 2 and 4
E 3 and 4
- 1p **5 ■** With which of the following could “He did ... cattle.” (paragraph 3) also begin?
A Besides, he did not...
B Even so, he did not...
C Indeed, he did not...
- “agriculture itself was in one sense not ‘natural’” (alinea 3)
- 1p **6 □** Leg uit wat hiermee bedoeld wordt.
NB! Een letterlijke vertaling van het citaat levert geen punten op.
- 1p **7 ■** Which of the following points relating to nature does Mary Warnock focus on in paragraph 4?
A What has shaped our ideas about our relationship with nature.
B What is natural and what is not.
C Why most people prefer nature to civilised life.
D Why we feel uncomfortable about our concept of nature.
- 1p **8 ■** How does paragraph 5 relate to paragraph 4?
A It continues the line of thought started in paragraph 4.
B It criticises the attitude described in paragraph 4.
C It describes the consequences of what is stated in paragraph 4.
D It explains the argument of paragraph 4 in scientific terms.
- 1p **9 ■** What is the point made about “the resonance ... ‘nature’” in paragraph 6?
A They help us strike the right balance between giving science a free hand and hindering scientific progress.
B They remind us of what will happen when we indulge in uncontrolled scientific experiments.
C They should not prevent us from thinking about the boundaries of science and technology.
- 1p **10 □** Welk criterium hanteert Mary Warnock uiteindelijk om te beslissen of bepaalde interventies door wetenschappers toelaatbaar zijn?
Benoem dit criterium door middel van een kort citaat.