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Nature Lost, Nature Regained

Rethinking Nature Across Theology, Philosophy, and the Sciences

Rome, June 24-26, 2026
Pontifical University
of the Holy Cross



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Timetable

June 24

8.45 *Greetings*

9.00 **Keynote: P. Coda**
If the “Divine Nature” is Given in the “Perichoresis”

9.45 **A. Pabst**
*The Order of Love: Nature, Soul and Body Politic
in the tradition of Romantic Realism*

10.15 **Sr T. Obolevich**
*Nature and divine presence in Process philosophy
and Orthodox theology*

10.45 **E. Fiedler**
*Nature as a Way to Nature: On the Supernatural
Self-Reference of Natural Processes*

11.15 **Coffee break**

11.45 **Parallel sessions**

12.45 **Lunch**

14.30 **Keynote: Ph. Gonzales**
*On Being Fathered-Forth: Seeing Nature
through the Eyes of the Father*

15.15 J. Goodall
*«Nothing in all creation is so like God as stillness»:
but is that consonant or dissonant stillness?*

15.45 C. Cunningham
Reductionism Lost, Reduction Regained

16.15 Coffee break

16.45 Parallel sessions 2

17.45 M. Tabaczek
*The Art of Ascent - How Nature Transcends Itself:
A Thomistic Account of Instrumental Causation*

18.15 Sr Marie de l'Assomption
*La nature humaine chez saint Thomas d'Aquin:
quelle consistance et quelle autonomie?*

June 25

9.00 Keynote: W. Desmond
*Plus Quam Naturing, Theophany and God
beyond the Whole*

9.45 M. Edwards
What do we mean by 'participation'?

10.15 V. González-Hincapié
*Towards an Embodied and Relational Account
of Sexual Difference: A Critical Discernment
of Gender Across Nature, Relationality, and Freedom*

- 10.45** **A. Bellantone**
No Nature except through Architecture
- 11.15** **Coffee break**
- 11.45** **Parallel sessions 3**
- 12.45** **Lunch**
- 14.30** **Keynote: F. Hadjadj**
The nature of nature (and that of nurture)
- 15.15** **G. Maspero**
Relational Nature: from Universal to Catholic Salvation
- 15.45** **D. Bathrellos**
Rethinking Human Nature in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: A Theological Exploration and Defense of Human Uniqueness
- 16.15** **Coffee break**
- 16.45** **Parallel sessions 4**
- 17.45** **J. Sherman**
The Book of Nature: Language, Legibility, and Participation
- 18.15** **I. Vigorelli**
Received Identity or Freedom of Choice? Gregory of Nyssa's Theology of the Double Creation as a Hermeneutical Proposal for a Contemporary Dilemma

June 26

8.45 R. Wozniak
*Theology in Dialogue with Pierre Hadot's
Concept of Nature*

9.30 R. Haecker
*Angel-Oriented-Ontology: Angelic Physics
after Speculative Realism*

10.00 P. O'Callaghan
*Nature in the light of Robin G. Collingwood's
philosophy of history*

10.30 Coffee break

11.00 E. Grimi
*Nature as Meaningful Order:
Dietrich von Hildebrand, Natural Law,
and the Recovery of Nature*

11.30 Keynote: J. Milbank
Nature, Art and the Trinity

11.45 Conclusions

Lectures

Abstracts

Andrea Bellantone

No Nature except through Architecture

Nothing is less natural than access to Nature. It is even possible that to establish a relationship with φύσις-κόσμος-ορατός, we have no choice but to forge a special connection, without which we will lose sight of what should have always been self-evident. This is why we will propose the hypothesis that a genuine relationship with Nature always involves a certain Architecture. Of course, everything depends on how we interpret this gesture—or this participation—that we call architecture here. We will seek a model—to be critically examined—in the architectural work of Tadao Ando, in which modernism encounters the appeal of something that draws it back to a metaphysical experience of Nature. It is through this reflection that we will experience the fact that nature and history, far from opposing one another, call out to one another, ultimately revealing their shared point of convergence.

Demetrios Bathrellos

Rethinking Human Nature in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: A Theological Exploration and Defense of Human Uniqueness

Several recent Roman Catholic official documents, including Antiqua et Nova and Pope Leo XIV's encyclical Magnifica Humanitas, examine artificial intelligence alongside its potential benefits and inherent dangers. Parallel to this assessment is a profound exploration of theological anthropology, offering a comprehensive analysis of the intrinsic differences separating a human being from a machine. This paper analyzes and comments on these texts, demonstrating how they ultimately articulate human nature as a uniquely magnificent living image of God.

Piero Coda

If the "Divine Nature" is Given in the "Perichoresis"

The concept of perichoresis is a theological concept that, from the Church Fathers up to the Doctors of the Middle Ages, has undergone a distinct and significant historical development and an important trajectory of speculative exploration regarding its unprecedented ontological relevance. To the point of re-emerging today as crucially significant in expressing the generative novum of the revelation in Christ of God's being as Trinity and, in Christ, for the exercise of a performative intelligence of human beings in their identity and activity in the created world. And yet, the teaching today of its essential meaning and of its usable and careful analogical application in illustrating the sense of being in its manifold and interrelated expressions appears nascent, uncertain, and even inappropriate. Because the commitment to a formally ontological exploration remains largely unfulfilled. The contribution I propose aims to offer a heuristic contribution in promoting this commitment, which, moreover, characterizes the path of research fostered by the shared project of a Trinitarian ontology. The present occasion is propitious for attempting to answer this question, which is of crucial importance: how is the concept of "nature," in its original reference to God, to be theologically conceived in the light of revelation when interpreted ontologically in intrinsic relation to the concept of "perichoresis", and vice versa? I will outline just three lines of inquiry to proceed in this search for an answer, aware that they require diligent examination and rigorous verification. The first direction can be gleaned from a reconsideration of the historical trajectory traced in the use and interpretation of the concept of perichoresis, beginning with its use in the Christological context, and then proceeding to describe its progressive and increasingly precise use to express, in an ontologically pertinent form, the unity of the divine nature within the trinity of the divine Persons in which this unity is effectively given and as such is revealed in the incarnation of the Word/Son and in the "boundless" communication of the Holy Spirit. Hence a second line of inquiry: to determine with precision, in order to build upon the insights gained thus far and further explore their anthropological significance, the semantic and ultimately epistemic status of the concept of perichoresis. Thus, in a third line of

research, we may pertinently answer the question: what does the result entail today of a historically and speculatively rigorous analysis of the challenge posed to thought by the use of the concept of perichoresis, when by it we mean not only the proprium of God's Being, but the novum of the event of Christ and, in him, of the being "new creation", by grace, of and between creatures?

Conor Cunningham

Reductionism Lost, Reduction Regained

The larger project from which this paper is drawn challenges the governing image of modern thought: the dream of a final basis, source, or tribunal before which the actual must appear for judgement. What follows is a prolegomenon, a sketch of that project's governing argument: a compressed attempt to expose the image by tracing the entangled fates of reduction, emergence, and scale. Its point of departure is deliberately stark: reductionism begins with a conclusion. Reductionism is better understood as a governing imaginary for which arguments are later contrived: a learned habit, a neurosis even, of decomposition — seeking the basis beneath form, the source behind actuality, the cause more real than the caused, and the tribunal before which all things must appear.

That neurosis comes in four modalities: synchronic, diachronic, prospective, and modal. Synchronic reduction dissolves the whole into its parts: the person into mechanisms, the organism into components, the object into microphysical inventory. Diachronic reduction dissolves the actual into its past: Darwinian phylogeny, genetic history, childhood, origin, or causal antecedent are made to sit in judgement upon what presently is. Prospective reduction dissolves the present before its imagined successor: AI, optimisation, enhancement, or machinic efficiency become the tribunal before which the human is declared obsolete. Modal reduction dissolves this world before the tribunal of possible alternatives: multiverse, landscape, model-space, or counterfactual spread are allowed to demote actuality by the sheer proliferation of what might have been. In each case, the actual is displaced — beneath itself, behind itself, ahead of itself, or away from itself — and some more authoritative elsewhere is allowed to sit in judgement upon what is.

Yet the argument is not simply anti-reductionist. Emergentism, as commonly staged, is also a progeny of the same imaginary. Too often it is wrought in the image of its supposed enemy: it accepts the vertical architecture of levels, concedes the basement, and then seeks to protect the higher against the lower. It therefore repeats the drama of sovereignty under an inverted sign. Nor does fashionable flux escape the picture. The basement and the flux are not true opposites, but twin products of the same zero-sum imagination: one dreams of final foundation, the other of endless dispersal; one enthrones the tribunal, the other mistakes haemorrhage for liberation. The task, then, is not to choose between reduction and emergence, basement and flux, but to challenge the picture in toto: the layer-cake imaginary that made such oppositions seem necessary, or even possible, in the first place.

As synecdoche for the wider project, I argue from contemporary physics at its limits. On one side lies the infrared: the movement towards arbitrarily low energies and long distances, where collective and large-scale order become legible. On the other lies the ultraviolet: the movement towards arbitrarily high energies and short distances, where reductionism expects to find source, basis, and final tribunal. The reductive imaginary treats these not merely as two limiting orientations of theory, but as metaphysical ranks: UV as sovereign source, IR as derivative residue. Yet the physics itself places this ranking under pressure from both ends.

Ground-state degeneracy interrupts the self-identity of the floor; gaplessness interrupts its closure; the spectral gap problem shows that exact local specification need not yield a universal decision procedure for global low-energy order; and what I call sky-state degeneracy interrupts the sovereignty of the ultraviolet by naming the possibility of non-unique admissible high-energy continuations compatible with the same accessible order. The floor is not simply one; the floor is not simply closed; the sky is not simply sovereign. The result is not an anti-reductive manifesto, nor a defence of emergence as reduction's rival, but a radical retrieval of both reduction and emergence beyond reductionism. In an older grammar, *reducere* names a leading-back: the recovery of one order in and through another, without simple elimination. *Educere* names a drawing-forth: the disclosure of formed novelty, without sheer rupture or magical excess. Reduction and emergence, so understood, are not rival sovereigns but reciprocal movements within an articulated

real. The governing image is therefore not basement, pyramid, or sovereign level, but tensegrity: a distributed order of reciprocal constraint, in which Atlas hangs on as much as he holds up.

Sr Marie de l'Assomption

La nature humaine chez saint Thomas d'Aquin : quelle consistance et quelle autonomie?

Le concept même de nature humaine est devenu problématique : philosophiquement, si l'on admet encore qu'elle existe, elle serait contradictoire avec la liberté, donc à dépasser quand il ne faut pas lui préférer la nature animale; théologiquement, elle est ou absolutisée de sorte que son rapport à la grâce relève d'une option de fait, qui la surélève mais sans lien intrinsèque avec elle, ou minimisée au point qu'elle est dissoute dans la grâce, sans consistance propre. Sur les plans éthique et juridique, elle n'est pas opératoire pour discerner ce qui est bon et juste pour l'homme, aussi bien sur le plan individuel que sur le plan social. Face à ces courants, dont on perçoit les conséquences déléteres, la conception de l'Aquinatense permet de dépasser non pas la nature, mais des oppositions factices. Il s'agit d'exposer les grandes lignes de sa doctrine sur la nature humaine, tant du point de vue philosophique que théologique.

William Desmond

Plus Quam Naturing, Theophany and God beyond the Whole

"Plus quam" recurs in Eriugena's Periphyseon (*de divisione naturae*) and it is his Latin wording of the Dionysian *huper*. I want to deploy this phrase as orienting us in exploring nature, theophany, and God beyond the whole.

A first step: I will first look at the contraction of the plus quam in the modern world-picture and its framing of nature. The framing leads to no divine origin, no whole, no creation, no cosmos.

A second step: I want to turn back to an older notion of *naturing*: this makes allowance for a reopening of the framing of nature in mechanistic terms, as well as holism construed only in immanent terms. They are not fully true to the plus quam happening of being as *naturing*.

A third step: How to rethink theophany relevantly? Response: proper consideration of theophany as double-edged: revealed and reserved; offering itself and being more than finitely offered; immanent and transcendent. In other language: Theophany as a plus quam betweening.

A fourth step: Can naturing be seen as calling us back to creating: being given to be, coming to be (not just becoming or self-becoming)? If what is given shows an endowed wholeness, qua given it also shows itself as an open wholeness. The theophany of the plus quam offers a way from creation as open whole to origin, and God beyond the whole. The immanent framing of the whole is to be opened by the crossing of the plus quam. I take the Celtic Cross as imaging this crossing of the opened whole.

Mark Edwards

What do we mean by 'participation'?

The concept of participation in God, often associated with deification and the standard translation of 2Peter 1.4 as “partakers (*koinônous*) of the divine nature” has become very fashionable in modern Anglophone theology. It is generally agreed to have Platonic roots, but from Origen onwards, Christian thought has seldom faced the objection raised by Plato and his successors, that one cannot participate in that which has no parts. As the Platonic theory of forms developed, unparticipated objects were postulated above those that admit of participation. Christians continued to assert that the Persons of the Godhead were simultaneously simple and participable, but the term “participation” (*methexis*) was used in two senses: a negative one, in which that which is divine by participation is contrasted with that which is divine by essence, and an positive one in which methexis is couple with and qualified by the noun *koinônia* (as at Hebrews 2.14). The modern tendency is to assimilate *koinônia* to *methexis* (as in the translation of 2Peter 1.4 above), but the philosophical difficulties might be avoided by assimilating *methexis* to *koinônia*, the latter term being understood (in terms suggested by the Russian scholar Ivan Popov) to signify a “non-philosophical” mode of participation (or communion) which has as its ground the exchange or communication of natures

in the Incarnation. If the word “participation” were replaced in some modern texts by the word “communion” – for which, of course, there is ample warrant in tradition” - the result would be a position which is at once philologically sounder and less exposed to philosophical criticism.

Eduard Fiedler

Nature as a Way to Nature: On the Supernatural Self-Reference of Natural Processes

Arguably one of the most influential philosophical attempts to understand the modern crisis of nature is Heidegger’s genealogy of the forgetting of the original ontological sense of nature (φύσις) in the Western metaphysical tradition. By analyzing Aristotle’s Physics in “Vom Wesen und Begriff der φύσις” (1939), Heidegger sought to show that, whereas the original Aristotelian self-referential determination of nature as “a way of nature to nature” (ὁδός φύσεως εἰς φύσιν) involved an abyssal unity of revealing and concealing, being and nothingness, the Western metaphysical tradition has “naturalized” nature (natura) as a purely positive, referential determination of being that becomes amenable to subsequent technological manipulation. In my contribution, I will argue that this genealogy is just as reductive as the position it criticizes. Both Heidegger’s relational account of natural self-reference and the principle of naturalistic or operational closure in contemporary, science-driven structural ontologies are strictly immanent, lacking the ability to articulate nature’s self-reference as simultaneously an active process of self-creation and a passive reception of itself as a gift from the other. Autopoietic theories of complex natural processes also confirm the self-referentiality of nature, but only in its immanent form (Maturana, Varela, Luhmann). And yet, do we not find within the Western metaphysical tradition a conception of nature (natura) in terms of genesis or birth (nativitas), understood as an image of the supernatural nature of the Holy Trinity and of eternal generation within its womb? Such a Trinitarian concept of the self-reference of nature, understood as birth (nativitas), as a path into nature, includes, on the one hand, self-creation and, on the other hand, as image, remains referential to the other. The Tri-

nitarian self-reference of natural processes transcends the oppositions of autonomous genotype and epigenetic endowment within phenotypic flourishing, of spontaneous evolution and creation, and of causality and teleology, in a new vision of nature involving the lilies of the field, the birds of the air, and the children of the Trinity, free as in play, necessary as images of eternal life.

Philip John Paul Gonzales

On Being Fathered-Forth: Seeing Nature through the Eyes of the Father

What happens to nature when it is metaphysically interpreted as that which is fathered-forth from out of the Father's creative love and what does it mean to see nature through eyes of the Father's loving recognition? This address argues that nature is regained when it is seen from this Trinitarian perspective. Here the whole of the universe is transubstantiated into a rhythmic logic of love wherein being and being seen are one and thus metaphysics and phenomenology are synthesized through the Father's all-embracing love of creation.

This address itself is part of my project of a Metaphysics of Patmos and its ensuing trilogy. Hence, this address presents some of the first words of volume 1 which treats our metaphysical response to the love of the fontal Father. It proceeds in three steps. First, it presents a whistle-stop-tour of the project of a metaphysics of Patmos. Second, it then presents a metaphysics of Patmos' speculative vision of the Trinity in relation to the Father. Third, it concludes with the creature's metaphysical response to being seen and seeing through the love of the fontal Father which in turn requires the creature to mediate the truth of fatherhood to our world of darkness and refusal in a threefold light. This threefold light of mediation of the Father's love reads: 1) the mediation of love to the world through a kenotic and radically singular love of neighbor and enemy alike; 2) this mediation of love must be lived and felt from within the very given and moving becoming of the universe and/or cosmos itself—for in the Father we love and move; 3) following from this, love is mediated through seeing being as an event of relational unity-in-difference wherein a poetic metaphysical em-

piricism is espoused over the abstractness of unity and disincarnate universals.

Viviana González Hincapié

Towards an Embodied and Relational Account of Sexual Difference: A Critical Discernment of Gender Across Nature, Relationality, and Freedom

None of us could be here without our body; this body allows us to perceive the world and to appear before others. Our existence as embodied beings is not neutral. Our bodies bear the traces of sexual difference at various levels from the very beginning and throughout the development of our lives. Yet we are also social-relational beings, whose awakening as man or woman cannot be achieved in isolation, but only within the relational context of a family embedded in a social and cultural environment that manifests sexual difference in a variety of ways. Finally, in order to be man or woman in the full sense, we must achieve our sexuated nature in freedom. Our existence as living, embodied, relational beings is a personal one that implicates us in a dynamic process of integration aimed at realizing our personhood as this man or this woman, endowed with a particular mission.

The relationship among the natural-embodied, social-relational, and subjective dimensions of the person is at stake in the actualization of sexual difference as an organic unity. Yet the development of the concept of gender—one of the most prominent and contentious notions in contemporary philosophy and the social and human sciences—seems to have led to a certain disintegration of this unity. In its evolution from a constructivist to an identitarian conception, the notion of gender has been marked by a dialectical relationship among nature, society, and freedom: having deprived nature of any intrinsic significance, theorists have emphasized either the socio-cultural factors that shape our personal existence as man or woman, or, more recently, a subjective self-identification that seeks to transform nature at will and challenges the social and relational dimensions of human life wherever these reflect natural bonds or forms of nature-based normativity. Ironically, the attempt to uncouple the social-relational and the subjective dimensions

from the natural-embodied one empties and flattens all three, thereby giving rise to further problems.

Adopting a philosophically oriented and interdisciplinary approach, this contribution explores the interplay among nature, relationality, and freedom in the configuration of the embodied and relational subjectivities that constitute sexual difference, as well as in the evolution of the concept of gender. The aim of this exploration is both to diagnose some of the main impasses in the development of gender theory and to retrieve the concept of gender in a way that does justice to the relational-social and subjective dimensions highlighted by mainstream theorists, by integrating them with our natural sexuated embodiment.

Jonathan Goodall

«Nothing in all creation is so like God as stillness»: but is that consonant or dissonant stillness?

On first consideration, Meister Eckhart might expect to find support for his famous comment in the language of music — “the language of the spheres”, in the medieval tradition he inhabited. The “iconization” of nature and the cosmos by and in music is frequently expounded (by non-musicians and musicians alike) in terms of stillness — meaning consonance, harmony, perfection of relations and resonance. But the emergence of a revolutionary response to dissonance — its preparation, control, repetition, sustenance, and (occasionally) resolution — in the two centuries that followed, especially in the Latin sacred tradition, would have given him and us a more absorbing, illuminating — and Christological — vision of creation: its dysphoria, tragedy, transformation, even deification. «Nothing in all creation is, perhaps, so like God as stillness in dissonance».

Elisa Grimi

Nature as Meaningful Order: Dietrich von Hildebrand, Natural Law, and the Recovery of Nature

The contemporary crisis of nature appears to be shaped by a false alternative. On the one hand, reductive naturalism identifies nature

with a neutral substrate governed by causal mechanisms; on the other, constructivist accounts regard nature as a fluid product of interpretation, social negotiation, or technological intervention. In both cases, nature ceases to function as a source of intelligibility and normativity. The result is a growing difficulty in accounting for the meaning of embodiment, the dignity of the person, and the objective grounding of moral claims. Perhaps nature has not disappeared; rather, we have lost the capacity to see it as meaningful. This paper argues that Dietrich von Hildebrand's phenomenological realism offers an original path toward recovering a robust concept of nature. Against both mechanistic reductionism and voluntarist subjectivism, Hildebrand understands reality as intrinsically meaningful and value-laden. His account of value-response, intentionality, and the irreducibility of the person reveals dimensions of being that cannot be exhausted by functional or biological explanations. Nature, therefore, is not merely a collection of empirical facts but an intelligible order that discloses normative significance. Particular attention will be devoted to the implications of this approach for contemporary debates on natural law. Rather than deriving moral norms from biological regularities, Hildebrand's perspective allows natural law to be understood as rooted in the objective structure and value-content of human nature itself. In this sense, the "ought" emerges neither as an arbitrary imposition nor as a deduction from brute facts, but from an adequate response to what the person truly is. The paper will further place Hildebrand in dialogue with Robert Spaemann's teleological understanding of nature and personhood. Both thinkers challenge the modern separation of fact and value and resist the reduction of the human being to function, preference, or self-construction. Their convergence suggests that recovering nature today means recovering a vision of reality in which freedom presupposes intelligibility rather than negates it. By retrieving the phenomenological depth of nature as meaningful order, this contribution proposes a way beyond the contemporary opposition between naturalism and constructivism. Nature can once again be understood as the horizon within which human flourishing, moral truth, and personal dignity become thinkable. Recovering nature ultimately means recovering the person as someone whose dignity is neither self-produced nor externally conferred, but belongs to the meaningful order of reality and calls for recognition and an adequate value-response (Wertantwort).

Fabrice Hadjadj

The nature of nature (and that of nurture)

To put it bluntly, for us humans and throughout history, Nature has changed its nature several times. Each era in the West can be characterized by this fundamental shift: “Mother” in the primitive age, Nature became “Motor” in Antiquity, “Matter” during Modernity, and “Mortal” in our postmodern epoch. This last metamorphosis stands in stark contrast to the first: what had been called Nature, that is to say, framed as a future participle, “what will be born”, now appears to us rather as “Moriture”, that is to say “what will be dead”. — Meanwhile, another idea crosses our minds, less conceived than revealed: the idea of creation, and of a creature fatally wounded and gracefully saved.

To reflect on this weakness in the concept of nature and the requirement to turn, from now on, to the idea of an injured and redeemed creation, we will attempt to think about the most basic act of life: nutrition. We shall try to see how the simple act of eating already leads us into the deepest mystery (as the sacrament of the Eucharist, moreover, points out to us).

Ryan Haecker

Angel-Oriented-Ontology: Angelic Physics after Speculative Realism

Before Nature, the angels were created on the ‘First Day’ of creation. As messengers of God, the angels (ἄγγελοι) have, since Philo and Origen of Alexandria, been classically regarded as ontological intermediaries, who, by aiding in the subsequent ‘Days’ of creation, uphold the deep structure of being. Following, however, the Latin Scholastic reduction of angels to subsistent forms (e.g. Aquinas), and the Nominalist collapse of universal forms to either concepts or things (e.g. Ockham), mechanical ‘nature’ could be evacuated of formal causality (e.g. Newton), and held in a fixed correlation of the ‘subjectivity’ of conceptual thinking to the ‘objectivity’ of real things (e.g. Kant). As early, however, as F.W.J. Schelling’s ‘Freedom Essay’, G.W.F. Hegel’s ‘absolute identity’ of Nature eternally sublated as the externality of Logic was first exploded by a

metaphysical positivism that demanded a higher principle of divine and personal freedom (e.g. Kierkegaard), before the ground of all positive elements were subverted by a metaphysical negativism, which, from Heidegger to Derrida, carried out the nihilistic subversion of identity into difference, and being into nothing. In its most acute form, Alain Badiou's subtractive mathematical ontology has released the 'multiple' of calculative situations to be reified by 'Speculative Realism' as a subject-less manifold of objects: first, in Quentin Meillasoux's hyperchaos of ancestral objects, then in Graham Harman's 'Object-Oriented-Ontology', but, most recently, in new Speculative Realist philosophies of nature, including Iain Hamilton Grant, Timothy Morton, Ben Woodard, Eugene Thacker, and Reza Negarestani. Following Tyler Tritten, the common mistake of all these Speculative Realist philosophies of nature is, I contend, the Badiouian subtraction of Schelling's personal freedom of substances into subjectless-objects. To recover a more free and felicitous vision of visible Nature, this lecture will seek to develop a Neo-Origenian critique of recent Speculative Realist philosophies of nature, and propose an angelic physics, in which the angels uphold the holy middle of all things.

Giulio Maspero

Relational Nature: from Universal to Catholic Salvation

The paper explores how Christian thought has transcended the limits of classical Greek metaphysics through a new relational ontology. Starting with the Church Fathers, the author explains that the nature of God is not a static unity but a "syntax" of relations among the Persons of the Trinity. This divine "syntax" is reflected in the human being, whose identity is not defined by belonging to a universal species, but by concrete bonds with Christ and with one's neighbor. Salvation is thus reinterpreted as a "wonderful exchange" that redeems history and personal relationships, transforming human nature into a living pleroma. The conclusion is that the recovery of this syntactic dimension is essential for understanding catholicity as relational fullness as opposed to an abstract universalism, that cannot be Trinitarian, as it opposes the many to the one.

John Milbank

Nature, Art and the Trinity

Spirit can be alternatively seen as emergent from material nature or as descending from a transcendent spiritual realm of pure thought. But 'emergence' leaves a mystery, while 'idealism' seems to deny the priority of reality and the reality of freedom beyond the sway of the comprehending understanding. A Trinitarian ontology can offer a different and neo-Romantic perspective: God himself is the eternal and timeless passage from unconscious nature to free thought understood as expressive art, generating its own unique and yet not random teleology. The finite world participates successively in this instantaneous process. In this way, a Trinitarian Ontology can save the appearances of the emergence from/descent upon an always thought-exceeding nature of the conscious thought and practical action of human spirit.

Sr Teresa Obolevitch

Nature and divine presence in Process philosophy and Orthodox theology

The relationship between nature and divine presence remains one of the most challenging intersections of theology and philosophy. This paper explores how the philosophy of process and Orthodox theology — particularly the patristic doctrine of divine energies — offer complementary frameworks for understanding God's immanence and transcendence within the cosmos. Drawing on Alfred North Whitehead's concept of the twofold nature of God (primordial and consequent) and the Eastern Christian distinction between *ousia* and *energeiai*, the study examines how both perspectives articulate a dynamic, relational model of divine action that preserves God's transcendence while affirming His real presence in creation. Special attention is given to the panentheistic implications of both approaches and their potential to integrate contemporary scientific cosmology with theological reflection. The paper argues that the dialogue between process thought and Orthodox theology can illuminate a sacramental and participatory vision of nature as transparent to divine activity — revealing the

world not as a closed system, but as a living medium of God's continuous creative presence.

Paul O'Callaghan

Nature in the light of Robin G. Collingwood's philosophy of history

The English philosopher Robin Collingwood is well known for this work on the philosophy of history, of change, as found in his posthumous work "The Idea of History" (1946). The presentation considers another, less well-known work, "The Idea of Nature", which considers three different ways in which "nature" has been understood over the centuries. First, the Greek view, based on the principle that the world of nature is saturated by mind. Second, the Renaissance view of nature based on the denial that world of nature is an organism and is devoid of intelligence and life, for nature is controlled by an intelligence exteriorly to the world deriving from the divine creator and ruler of nature. And third, the modern view of nature which is drawn from the vicissitudes of human affairs as studied by historians. Nature is thus linked up with change and development, within an evolving purposeful process. What had always been unchanging is in reality subject to change, and requires in the first place historical study. Several elements of Collingwood's reflection have been critiqued, among them: his subordination of science to history; an inadequate metaphysics that obviates objective ontological inquiry and the possibility of affirming truth (A.J. Ayer).

Adrian Pabst

The Order of Love: Nature, Soul and Body Politic in the tradition of Romantic Realism

In much of modern theology, philosophy and the sciences, order is grounded either in transcendental divine volition and political absolutism, or else in the immanence of human will that underpins power, law, money or technology. Either way, modernity views order as unmediated and artificial, ontologically separate from nature which is considered to be external to the life of individuals

and society. Drawing on the tradition of Romantic Realism developed by St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas, this paper discusses the uniquely Christian vision of relational personalism, the embodied soul and peacefully interacting associative bodies which are at the heart of human civilisation. This humanistic vision finds expression in St Augustine, who, elaborating on Cicero, spoke of the *ordo amoris* — a political order founded on love which advances in concentric circles from the local and intimate to universal bonds of human association between persons, and between humanity and nature. The order of love embodies the rule of the person over the impersonal forces of coercion, upholding the sanctity of our own interpersonal life. If realism is the new pivot in contemporary thought, Romantic realism is the road yet not taken on the path of building what Pope Leo XIV, citing Saint Paul VI, calls the “civilisation of love”.

Jacob Sherman

The Book of Nature: Language, Legibility, and Participation

At the heart of the premodern book of nature traditions lies the claim that the world is not only intelligible but legible — communicable, that is, under the right conditions. For Christian thinkers from Origen and Maximus the Confessor to Hugh of Saint Victor and Bonaventure, the *liber naturae* was not a system of inert signs awaiting decipherment from without, but a living address — a *signum rei sacrae* — whose inexhaustible depths were available only to readers willing to be transformed in the act of reading. As Augustine already understood, the legibility conditions were more cardinal than intellectual. The relative eclipse of these traditions in late medieval and early modern thought meant not only a metaphysical and theological loss, but the eclipse of an entire way of comporting oneself to the articulacy of the world.

Is this loss final? This paper argues that this putative eclipse has never been total nor need it be permanent, but that any creative retrieval of the *liber naturae* today faces a distinct challenge, namely, that prevailing philosophies of language today treat such claims as impossible from the outset. The dominant philosophies of language Charles Taylor traces from Hobbes, Locke, and Con-

dillac through to more recent analytic philosophy presents a picture of language as fundamentally designative: a system of signs pointing to semantically inert realities from the outside. On such an account, the robust claims of the book of nature traditions can only appear as projection or fantasy. By contrast, this paper argues that a neglected counter-tradition in the philosophy of language — a more radical linguistic turn — provides resources for reading nature such that communicability belongs to the ontological structure of things as such. Read alongside Patristic and Scholastic resources, this counter-tradition suggests that the book of nature is neither a stable text to be decoded nor a pre-critical fiction to be abandoned, but a living address whose legibility requires not merely better concepts but something more like participation: an ongoing transformation inseparable from the act of reading itself.

Mariusz Tabaczek

The Art of Ascent ~ How Nature Transcends Itself: A Thomistic Account of Instrumental Causation

The emergence of biological novelty poses a significant challenge to the Principle of Proportionate Causation (PPC), a cornerstone of Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics which dictates that an effect cannot exceed the perfection of its cause. If a descendant species (S2) possesses a higher ontological perfection than its ancestor (S1), the transition appears to be a metaphysical impossibility — an attempt to get “more” out of “less”. This presentation addresses this “causal gap” by moving beyond a narrow, univocal interpretation of causality to a more robust model of instrumental agency. I argue that speciation is best understood through a “causal matrix” in which biological lineages act as natural instruments. While these lineages provide the dispositive preparation of matter through reproduction and mutation, they are elevated by the communication of *virtus fluens* (flowing power) from God as the Principal Cause. By distinguishing between Universal Metaphysical Instrumentality and Natural Instrumentality, I demonstrate how nature participates in the “dignity of causing” to bring about taxonomic novelty without the need for Supernatural Instrumentality (miracles or direct interventions). Ultimately, evolution is reframed as a mode of

Divine Governance (*gubernatio*) rather than creation (*creatio*), manifesting the “Art of God” through the integrity and autonomy of the natural order.

Ilaria Vigorelli

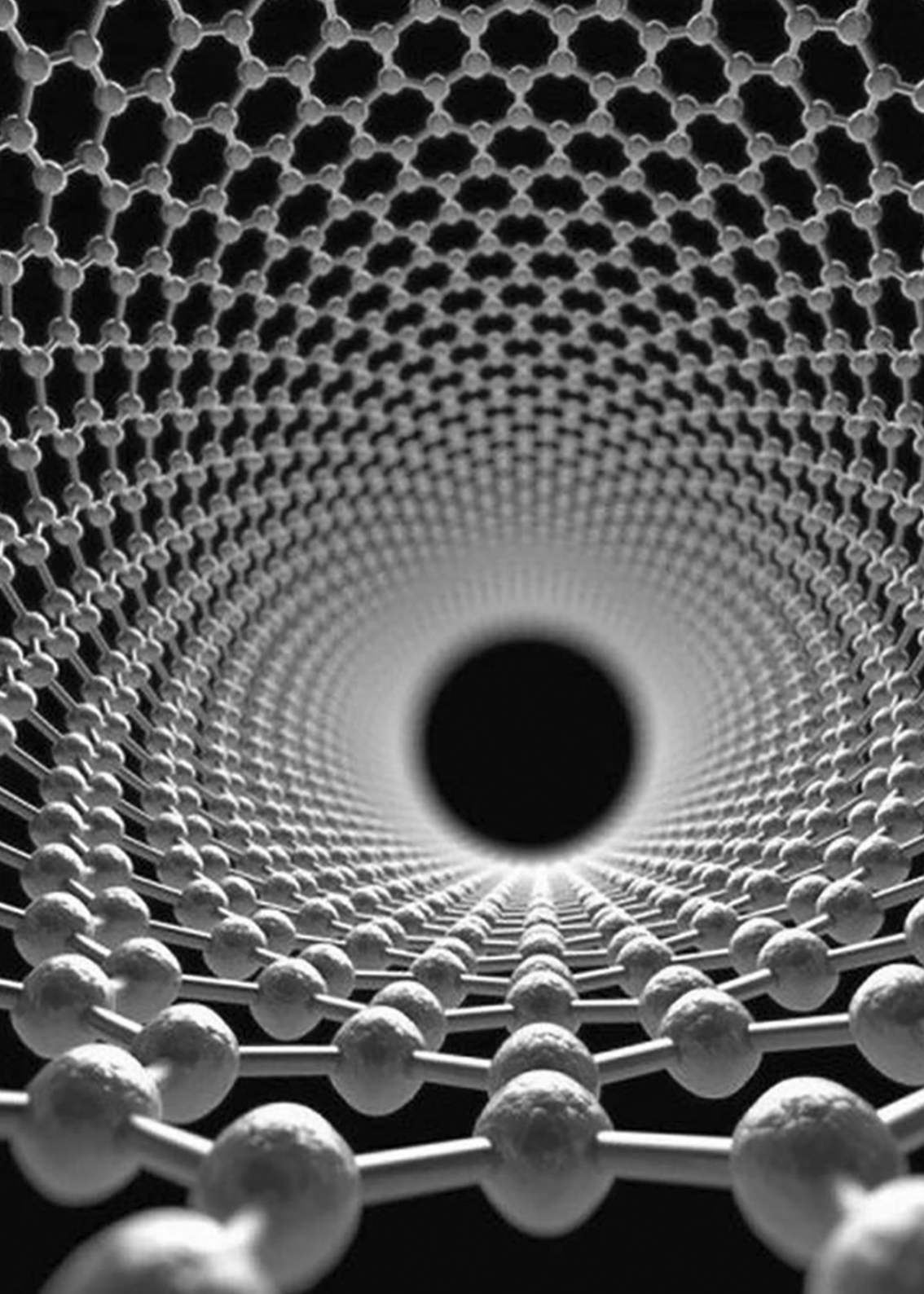
Received Identity or Freedom of Choice? Gregory of Nyssa’s Theology of the Double Creation as a Hermeneutical Proposal for a Contemporary Dilemma

To call humanity back to a respect for its identity, or to a knowledge of its own nature, is widely taken to amount to waging war on freedom of choice and the right to self-determination. In the fourth century, Gregory of Nyssa championed the principle of self-determination precisely on the basis of the relational attributes of human essence, while also identifying the limits that the individual imposes upon his own self-determination when acting according to a principle of imitation (*mimēō*) that mistakes self-determination for error. A study of the theology of the double creation of the human being allows us to grasp the power of freedom within the unfolding of the original relationality of human nature, and may today serve to reinterpret the solipsistic and violent drift fostered by the absolutist logic of self-determination — a logic that cannot, paradoxically, dispense with renewed appeals to forms of social control.

Robert Wozniak

Theology in Dialogue with Pierre Hadot’s Concept of Nature

The lecture explores the intersection between Christian theology and the philosophical legacy of Pierre Hadot, specifically focusing on his historical analysis of *Phusis* (Nature). It investigates how Hadot’s distinction between technological mastery and poetic contemplation can enrich contemporary theological understandings of creation, ecological ethics, and divine mystery.



Parallel Sessions

Panels

Panel 1 - Nottingham

25 June morning Minor

J. Irwin

A Living World: The Cosmic Vision of Christopher Alexander

C. Stephenson

Lifting of the Cloud: Architectonics Reveals Augustinian Memory and Nature to be Less Enigmatic and Provides Neoteric Insights to Augustine's Theology of Memoria.

S. Cunningham

The Manifestation of Essence: Resolving the Nature of the World of Michel Henry

25 June afternoon Minor

J. Terry

The Marian Cipher of Creatureliness: Nature, Analogy, and the Recovery of the Creaturely Interval

K. Evans

The Organism Strikes Back: Regaining Natures Once Lost

*Panel 2 - Giving Voice to Nature:
Art and the Renewal of Creation*

25 June morning A306

M. Calabretto

Cinema as a Way of Listening to Nature: Terrence Malick and the Ecotheology

A. Ballatore

The image as threshold: Nature between abstraction and figuration

M. Frongillo

On Making and Being Made: What Nature Lends to Art

**Panel 3 - Recognizing Nature.
Processes of Becoming Human**

25 June morning Senato

F. Brutti

From Ecology to Ecosophy: Rethinking the Relationship between God, Humanity and Nature in Light of Raimon Panikkar's Cosmotheandric Intuition

M. Fiorilli

Nature, Body, Recognition: Judith Butler on Hegel and the Other

M. Vicentini

Practices of Recognition and Knowledge of Nature. The Role of Objects starting from Paul Ricoeur

25 June afternoon Senato

L. Masia

The Recognition Between Humans and Nature: Fragility and Beauty in Simone Weil

M. Fiorletta

A Poetic Recognition of Nature? Friedrich Hölderlin and the Language of Wilderness

*Panel 4 - Thomistic Perspectives
on Human Nature
in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*

25 June morning A301

C. Cavallin

Artificial Intelligence as Art

M. Wahlberg

General Artificial Intelligence as a Challenge to Thomistic Anthropology

25 June afternoon A301

A. Ek

Intellect and Will in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: An Augustinian Reading of Aquinas

A. Wahlberg

Meaning, LLMs, and the Nature of Human Thought

Parallel Sessions

Abstracts

Panel 1 - Nottingham

Simon Cunningham

The Manifestation of Essence: Resolving the Nature of the World of Michel Henry

Michel Henry (1922-2002) is widely celebrated for producing some of the most profound phenomenology of the late 20th century, for example in how Jacques Derrida judged it to have “rare power and depth”. Yet Henry’s profundity is concurrently understood to possess a real problem of monism, resulting in Derrida simultaneously judging it as “totally pointless.” How can a philosophy be both so tremendous and immobile at the same time? The answer is that, while Henry’s project is fundamentally a triumph, its capacity to actively move beyond its foundations is incomplete, miring his living subject in passive auto-affective self-referentiality. This presentation will share the conclusions of a doctoral program that successfully resolved Henry’s monism by establishing an interplay between the living self (i.e.: Henryan life) and the other while preserving his project’s essential philosophy. This is accomplished through identifying the two biggest moments in Henry’s life. The first was the publication of his 1963 magnum opus *The Essence of Manifestation*, a text that established his tremendous phenomenology, but which does not account for the world beyond the self as also given in life. The second major moment was his late-life Christian renewal and the publication of his 1996 text *I Am the Truth*, showing him breaking with his monism through adding welcome difference to his concept of God (which was previously a mere unity). However, his entire project does not holistically undergo the adjustment that this foundational change demands, and he dies six years later. The nature of the world of Henry remains ambiguous. This is because, as I will demonstrate

in my presentation, Henry failed to properly execute the phenomenological reduction towards exteriority (what is given at life's limits). If Henry had conceived of the reduction more radically, he would have understood that the exteriority of my living self (my objective body) precedes the exteriority and objectivity of anything other. When distanced objects define exteriority a posteriori, then the world is characterized by emptiness and unreality. Henry's project thus remains ambiguous about whether anything sensible or ideal is real. But when exteriority begins with the a priori object of my living subjectivity, then everything other is given as my life is given, as an exteriority founded by a more fundamental interiority. The nature of Creation is realized as a milieu of alter-interiorities, all founded in the Life of God, and having relation through exteriority as a medium. The world unfurls into what Henry always knew it was: a "cosmos vivant" (a living cosmos).

Kieran Evans

The Organism Strikes Back: Regaining Natures Once Lost

This paper returns to the ancient question, 'what is life?', and more particularly, 'what is an organism?'. I argue that the atomising language that defines organisms in terms of genetic code-scripts is fundamentally, both philosophically and biologically, flawed.

Portraying organisms as structural constructions — typically of atomised genomic building blocks that appear synchronic and mathematically rigid — this language conflates the respective phase spaces of biology and physics, despite their fundamental differences. However, we quickly realise, when organisms are atomised into genes, which themselves are not alive, life is irrevocably discarded, leading to the erasure of life from the life sciences. To offer a correcting language, I adopt the apophatic logic of an indirect ontology. By shifting away from this atomistic paradigm, the common misnomer of genotype as organism-whole is exposed — one that restricts biology to flawed theories and epiphenomenal coagulations. Rather, to avoid this faux temptation, we must expand our organism language to account for its strict historicity that transcends the sterilising transliteration of the 'gene eye view' — a true return of the organism.

To achieve this, I will first describe the radical compression of biological systems into pre-statable phase spaces, in light of its borrowed logic from physics. However, quickly, I will move to reframe the narrative, introducing several results from theoretical biology that problematise this overly simplistic conclusion that all is gene. This mechanical language manifests an erroneous coopting from physics, wherein the respective objects of study are too radically distinct to justify transference. For instance, upon examining spin in the ferromagnetic phase of iron, the phase spaces of physics are pre-statable where any new observable is already implicit in the model. However, biological spaces are incompressible as the biological object is in a state of extended criticality; ubiquitous critical points within biological systems are directly opposite to the pointwise criticality of physical systems.

This result is negative, and yet fruitful. Extended criticality displays the biological space as deeply developmental — everchanging and undetermined. In doing so, these results motivate a departure from the sterilising language of the gene-eye view. Biology is shown to not be a relentlessly reductionist endeavour, but rather a perpetual nearing in knowing through experiment, one that is yet to achieve comprehension of its subject — unknowingly mirroring Nyssa's duality within epektasis. The journey towards truth is not yet satisfied, as with good experimental biology: not purely negative, but the removal of false positives. Again, mirroring the continuous reorganisation that renders biological objects unable to possess the stable symmetries of physical objects.

However, this conclusion raises the question: if we can no longer use the gene alone to define organisms, how are we to speak of them? This is the core question I hope this talk will answer; using the apophatic language of Merleau-Ponty's indirect ontology, we must radically shift toward an apophatic method of description, enabling us to account for the silence interior to the organism's phase space. Rather than restricting biology to atomic language, our biology should be comfortable beside an incomplete phase space. To reflect this non-givenness, therefore, biology should embrace apophatic language to faithfully represent its object of study — the organism strikes back, not as mere genetic artifacts, but as co-evolving and diachronic individuals backgrounded in a field of enablements.

Jay Irwin

A Living World: The Cosmic Vision of Christopher Alexander

In 1967, Christopher Alexander published *A Pattern Language*, a book of architectural and design theory that would quickly become canonical in the field. For Alexander, architecture had fallen into the mechanical attitude of the modern blueprint, a model premised on profit, efficiency, and risk adversity. The book offered 253 vernacular design patterns meant to puncture the spirit of the blueprint while reminding builders—whether architects or laymen—of a “timeless way of building.” “Promenade” (31), “Looped local roads” (49), “Pools and streams” (64), “Holy ground” (66), “Row Houses” (38), “Outdoor room” (163), “Window place” (180), “Corner grocery” (89), “Traveller’s inn” (91), “Sleeping in public” (94), etc. But it did not take long for the patterns to be misconstrued, abstracted from their vernacular life, and treated as blueprints of their own. Alexander’s response to this was a four-volume, twenty-five year study, *The Nature of Order*, his opus and the work that frames this discussion. In it, Alexander connects the vernacular craft to a metaphysical ground, going behind modern presuppositions of mechanism to propose a world not dead but fully alive. For Alexander, something soul-like, even self-like, abides in the formal coherence of all materiality, corresponding to a reciprocal unfolding (or reciprocal *awakening*) in physical nature and the human person contemplatively disposed toward it. Vernacular approaches, Alexander argues, assume a sensitivity to the “generative transformation” of this living or soul-like ground, in a gentle empirical procedure seated within a criteria of what he calls “the measure of the self” (comparable to Platonic anamnesis). Ultimately, Alexander winnows down what had been 253 patterns in his earlier project to a form language of fifteen properties (“boundaries”, “echoes”, “local symmetry”, “the void”, et al.) which describe the structure and generative capacity of nature’s order present in every living form. In this paper, I will deepen as well as add to these themes while also noting, against his critics, that Alexander does not succumb to nostalgia, but like great architects before him seeks the *juste milieu* of old and new, offering us another voice in a steadily growing canon of visions for an alternative modernity.

Christine F. Stephenson

Lifting of the Cloud: Architectonics Reveals Augustinian Memory and Nature to be Less Enigmatic and Provides Neoteric Insights to Augustine's Theology of Memoria

Augustine recognized memory to be pivotal in his journey to know and understand God, and to understanding his own nature. He believed that within his soul there was a remembrance of God (*memoria Dei*). Augustine therefore wanted to understand how he remembered God, how memory within *memoria* was the gateway to the Divine, how memory worked in this process, and how he could achieve the *beata vita*. He knew memory was central to his nature, his understanding of his own being (*memoria sui*), and the metaphysical foundation of his soul. Augustine knew that the nature of his self could only be understood in relation to God. In fact, his striving to achieve the *beata vita* was a constant struggle between the physical and metaphysical realities of memory. Consequently, Augustine embarked on a purpose-driven pursuit of interrogating memory within his practice of interiority and as he journeyed with God towards fulfilment of the *beata vita*.

This paper discusses architectonics as an innovative methodology to investigate and decipher Augustinian memory. This approach has led to neoteric insights resulting in a less enigmatic, but not purely functionalist, blueprint of Augustine's theology of *memoria*. These insights pertain to the role of memory in remembering God, the role and action of memory in *memoria*, mind, soul, and Augustine's own nature. First, a specific architectonic structure and sequence to memory (*ordo*; cf. *ordo of creation ex nihilo*) identified eight symphonic forms and fundamental affordances as found in *Conf. X* and his earlier writings. Second, memory was investigated using genetics (*scientia*). A unique memory gene called Arc (*physical realm of nature and memory*) revealed novel findings that further defined the physical structure and mode of action of memory, and its action as a connector between the physical and the metaphysical. Arc so intricately intertwines and undergirds Augustine's own interrogation of memory. Augustine's theology of creation *ex nihilo* informs both the *scientia* behind the genetics and his theology of *memoria*. This is exemplified in *Conf. XIII* which views memory through the lens of creation and recapitulates Augustine's theology

of *memoria* from *Conf.* I-XII. Third, memory and time are intricately intertwined. A model was developed describing the simultaneity of the three cardinal “moments” of time (creation, incarnation, eternity) with temporal time (past, present, future) and physical time illustrated by the Arc gene. This architectonic study of memory revealed in greater depth Augustine’s logical and deeply personal approach to his interrogation of memory and provided insight into his relationship with memory, *memoria*, the Divine, time, and his understanding of his own nature in his journey towards fulfilment of the *beata vita*.

Joseph Terry

The Marian Cipher of Creatureliness: Nature, Analogy, and the Recovery of the Creaturely Interval

It is decisive to note that the underlying crisis of nature, which galvanizes many contemporary issues both philosophically and otherwise, is inseparable from the deeper crisis in the intelligibility of creaturely existence as such. The architectonic assumptions of modernity and postmodernity continually presuppose varying interpretive perspectives on nature as a quasi-mechanistic process, or as manipulable “material” subject to technological reappropriation and transformation. With this, metaphysical depth is evacuated, flattened via reductionistic accounts, or cloaked over with a suspicious gaze that is beholden to a form of agnosticism. Thus, the *anthropos*, the crowning manifestation of nature, becomes unintelligible, reduced to an undefinable something usable either for transhumanistic or posthumanistic ends. The result is a form of anthropological nihilism in which nature appears ultimately mute. However, what if the key to a recovery of nature properly understood, in all its depths and fecundity, lies precisely within the locus of a theo-philosophical anthropology that is both given and revealed?

This paper argues that an authentic recovery of nature requires a renewed account of creatureliness grounded in analogical metaphysics, of which Mary, the (mere) creature who becomes Mother of the Uncreated Logos, is the privileged hermeneutical key. She could be understood as the cipher of creatureliness, a concrete hi-

storical manifestation in which the deepest structure of creaturely nature becomes discernible and legible.

Two Marian moments illuminate this structure: the Immaculate Conception, which articulates creaturely nature under the light of its authentic origin and orientation, ordered toward divine life, manifesting the intrinsic openness of creation to grace; another moment is given in Our Lady's *fiat*, which discloses the properly creaturely form of freedom: a receptive participation in the divine initiative that neither negates nor overwhelms nature but fulfills it, thus the overcoming of the grammar of nihilism which is rooted in a self-enclosure mediated via a "no" to the transcendent. In this sense the Marian *fiat* may be understood as the existential enactment of the *analogia entis* itself: a creaturely freedom that receives and participates in divine initiative without collapsing the analogical interval. These two moments illumine creatureliness as receptive intelligibility that unfolds within the analogical interval between Creator and creature.


Seen in this light, Mary becomes the interpretive key for nature. Her existence unveils the creatureliness of nature as the home of intelligibility, an order whose deepest vocation is to become the dwelling place of the Uncreated. Against the nihilistic reduction of nature to mechanism or technological substrate, Marian existence discloses the analogical structure of creaturehood, and specifically the *anthropos* as such, as a dynamic openness to the infinite that grounds both the dignity and the destiny of the human person. Therefore, by retrieving Mary as the iconic cipher of creatureliness, this paper proposes a renewed analogical humanism capable of responding to contemporary debates about technology, embodiment, and the meaning of nature.

Panel 2 - Giving Voice to Nature: Art and the Renewal of Creation

Anna Ballatore

The image as threshold: Nature between abstraction and figuration

The relationship between human beings and nature rests on the



premise that humans are not foreign to the natural world but belong to it as part of creation itself. This bond constitutes one of the fundamental sources of religious consciousness: throughout history, natural phenomena have been interpreted and narrated through myth, giving rise to symbolic and poetic forms through which humanity seeks to understand its place within the cosmos. The earliest symbolic expressions thus emerge from humanity's encounter with a world that appears at once visible and mysterious, a world that seems to guard an intelligibility capable of sustaining the very meaning of human experience. Within this horizon, the human *conatus* toward participation in the creative order of being can be understood through artistic practice, which, from prehistoric cave paintings to contemporary forms of expression, seeks to give voice to a nature that is at once nurturing and hostile, reflecting a shared condition of finitude while remaining oriented toward redemption and revelation. From this perspective, the artistic representation of nature cannot be understood merely as a reproduction. Rather, it becomes a presentation: an act through which nature manifests its intelligibility through the creative intervention of the artist. In this framework, the article investigates how art mediates the relationship between the visible and the invisible, exploring the tension between the visible dimension of nature and the invisible that inhabits and exceeds it through the dialectic of figuration and abstraction. The history of art reveals a gradual transformation in the ways nature is approached and represented: beginning with movements such as Impressionism, artists progressively loosen the solidity of form, dissolving the stability of objects in favor of light, atmosphere, and perceptual experience, a process that contributes to the emergence of abstraction. In contemporary philosophical discourse, particularly within recent developments in French phenomenology, abstraction has often been interpreted as possessing a distinctive revelatory capacity, insofar as it seeks to free perception from the constraints of representation in order to allow the invisible dimension of reality to appear. Yet this perspective raises a fundamental question: is abstraction the only artistic language capable of expressing the invisible and pathic dimension of nature? Within the history of Christian art, the tradition of the *icon* offers a significant perspective on this issue. By examining the interplay between figuration, abstraction, and symbolic imagination, the study argues that the tension between the

visible and the invisible does not necessarily require the abandonment of figuration; rather, the image can remain a space in which the visible world becomes a threshold to the invisible, allowing nature to be perceived as a *locus* of meaning.

Maria Calabretto

Cinema as a Way of Listening to Nature: Terrence Malick and the Ecotheology

Cinema is often conceived as a machine — an instrument designed to analyze and capture reality, especially movement — rather than as a medium capable of listening to it. However, Terrence Malick presents himself as a director who uses the cinematic medium precisely as a way of listening: listening to nature, and to the finitude of human life. From this perspective, one can speak of an *ecotheology* — an attempt to allow the images themselves to resonate with the idea of divine creation. Life is not presented as a mechanical cycle of existence, but rather as an inseparable part of creation, giving rise to a space of communion between God and his creatures.

“Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? [...] What supports its foundations, and who laid its cornerstone, as the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?” (Job 38:4-7). *The Tree of Life* (2011) centers on the question of seeking God in every corner of life and nature, and on the place of every living being, including human life, within creation and human history. Similar themes appear in *A Hidden Life* (2019) and *The Thin Red Line* (1998), which explore landscapes scarred by war and the coexistence of grace and violence within nature.

This dimension emerges both in the themes represented in Malick’s films and in the cinematographic techniques he employs — such as music, montage, and frame composition — which celebrate cinema as a means of exploring the many dimensions and vital expressions of nature. In his films, nature is not merely inert matter, but rather a vast “Church”, a space in which we may experience ourselves as a part of something greater. Malick does not convey a doctrine or address a religious subject; instead, through the rhythms of his images, he offers a profoundly spiritual encounter.

Martina Frongillo

On Making and Being Made: What Nature Lends to Art

Christian theology has long understood nature as the fruit of divine creation – the medium through which God expresses himself and can be known (Rom 1:20). This is a relationship that tradition has often sought to understand on the model of that between an artist and his work. The implications of this analogy, and the history of its consequences, are at the heart of Jean-Louis Chrétien’s essay *From God the Artist to Man the Creator*, collected in *Hand to Hand. Listening to the Work of Art*. Chrétien shows how a movement that had first “made God an artist” in order to clarify his relationship with creation ended, by way of that very analogy, in divinizing the human maker. By claiming to penetrate the secrets of divine workmanship and bend them to his own ends, man elevated himself above nature, replacing the relationship between God and creation with that between himself and technique, and reducing nature to an object of mastery.

Whether every act of human making necessarily carries within it this idolatrous risk is the question this paper wishes to raise. Indeed, there is one form of human endeavour that has persistently claimed a different relationship with nature — one of attentiveness rather than domination, closer to a restoration of voice than an imposition of form — and that is the work of art itself. Whether this claim can bear scrutiny, however, depends on a distinction that the analogy has tended to obscure: the human maker is not the begotten Son through whom creation comes into being, but is himself a creature. It is worth asking whether this creaturely condition — fashioned nonetheless in the image and likeness of its Creator — might offer a way of thinking about artistic making that modernity’s absolutization of technique has foreclosed: a making that knows itself to be derivative, and finds in that very dependence the possibility of testimony. Can the work of art genuinely extend nature’s revelatory power and point beyond itself toward its divine maker — or does the very act of becoming a “work” already foreclose that possibility?

Panel 3 - Recognizing Nature. Processes of Becoming Human

The ecological crisis can be understood not only as a crisis of nature but also as a crisis of the human. Modern frameworks have often opposed “nature” to “culture,” portraying nature either as a mechanistic system to be mastered or as a nostalgic realm to which humans must return. This panel proposes a different approach: to recognize nature as a field of formative processes within which the human is both constituted and active.

Starting from debates surrounding the Anthropocene, we investigate how recognition operates in two directions. On the one hand, humans are participants within natural processes — organismic, ecological, and cosmological — and cannot be understood apart from them. On the other hand, human practices and institutions inevitably shape and transform nature. The question is therefore not simply how humans affect nature, but how attending to nature’s own generative processes can reshape our understanding of what it means to be human.

Recognition is thus reciprocal. To recognize nature is simultaneously to recognize the human as a participant in a shared field of life, one whose freedom is not defined by domination but by forms of embodied participation. Our panel begins from the conviction that such questions require a dialogue between philosophy and theology through an interdisciplinary encounter that allows us to explore whether an ecologically oriented ontology and theology can inform practices capable of fostering ecologically-attuned forms of coexistence.

Within this framework, beauty and fragility emerge not as merely aesthetic themes but as criteria for reflection and action. Recognizing the fragility of natural systems entails acknowledging human fragility as well: vulnerability, dependence, and the need for formation within orders that precede and exceed human control. Ecological crisis reveals the limits of modern imaginaries that either reduce nature to mechanism or to romantic nostalgia.

Panel 4 - Thomistic Perspectives on Human Nature in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

Clemens Cavallin

Artificial Intelligence as Art

The rise of increasingly sophisticated simulations of human reasoning, creativity, and language presents many challenges to individuals, institutions, and societies. For religious and spiritual traditions navigating the tension between adoption and rejection, AI revitalizes long-standing debates on human nature, the relationship between science and faith, and the natural and supernatural. Simultaneously, it fuels both secular and religious radical forms of techno-criticism against the industrialization and rationalization of culture. Within the Catholic tradition specifically, AI is often met with skepticism, as computational processes are seen to lack human qualities such as consciousness, emotion, and understanding, a stance exemplified by the Vatican document *Antiqua et Nova*. While many current Christian responses to AI development focus on the ethical, environmental, and social risks of large-scale AI adoption, this paper investigates whether a Thomist framework can offer an alternative evaluation that avoids a binary antagonism between humanism and automation. In a discussion with Edward Feser's critique of AI in *Immortal Souls* (2024), the paper argues for understanding AI through the lens of art (*ars*) rather than mere mechanics. As biotechnology further blurs the boundary between the organic and the mechanical, a theology of creation and art may better balance human nature in relation to artificial simulations than a humanism based on the privilege of inferiority. This paper suggests that Thomism provides intellectual resources helpful for developing such a perspective.

Anders Ek

Intellect and Will in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: An Augustinian Reading of Aquinas

The rapid development of artificial intelligence raises renewed questions about the nature of human cognition and agency. This paper argues that an Augustinian reading of Thomas Aquinas's account of the intellect and the will can provide a basis for articulating the difference between artificial and human intelligence. When interpreting Aquinas's anthropology (for instance, as it is presented in ST I q. 82 and I-II q. 9), it is easy to read his thought through the later medieval debate between intellectualism and voluntarism. From that perspective, Aquinas's insistence on the primacy of the intellect tends to be treated as the central feature of his account of human cognition. If Aquinas is read in continuity with Augustine, however, a more dynamic and integrated anthropology emerges. The paper demonstrates how Aquinas explicitly draws on Augustine's psychological analysis in *De Trinitate*, and how the Augustinian account of the will, both as an appetite for a known good and as the locus of human agency, is preserved in Aquinas's account. This Augustinian-Thomist perspective allows us to reconsider what is distinctive about human intelligence. The uniqueness of human intellect can hardly be located in rational capacities alone, since the ability to reason coherently (to make rational deductions and to perform rational tasks) is increasingly shared by artificial intelligences. A strictly rationalistic account of human thought must therefore give way to a more dynamic anthropology in which the will, together with the intellect, is constitutive of cognition.

Åke Wahlberg

Meaning, LLMs, and the Nature of Human Thought

The ability to produce meaningful utterances and entertain meaningful thoughts arguably sets human cognition apart from artificial intelligence based on Large Language Models (LLMs). While it is undisputed that LLMs produce meaningful sentences, for example in responding to questions asked by humans, this meaningfulness is standardly taken to be of a derived kind. LLMs can

refer to things, and mean things, because they operate on linguistic symbols semantically imbued by people. Yet they are incapable of meaning in a non-derived sense. Since they lack a proper embedding in a non-linguistic environment they exhibit no genuine semantic grounding. Hence, in this regard, human uniqueness remains untouched by progress in AI engineering.

However, a growing number of philosophers argue that LLMs indeed do display genuine semantic grounding and meaning in a non-derived sense and are capable — at least potentially — of thought comparable to human thought in relevant regards. They point out that LLMs are properly embedded in a non-linguistic environment in virtue of applying words standing in causal relations to non-linguistic objects, much like humans do.

This paper considers this discussion through the prism of the Medieval dispute between Ockham's nominalism and Aristotelian-Thomistic positions regarding semantic content. It suggests that arguments to the effect that LLMs can achieve genuine semantic grounding presuppose a nominalist metasemantics where the semantic relation between a representation and a represented object is a mere matter of causation and the subject's recognitional capacities. This is contrasted with a Thomistic account of mental content according to which the formal identity of thought and the object of thought provides an essential tie between the metaphysical structure of reality and the representational capacities of humans. This allows for an attractive and precise characterization of the nature and exceptionality of human thought in distinction to the tacit nominalism presupposed by defenders of genuine semantic grounding for LLMs.

Mats Wahlberg

General Artificial Intelligence as a Challenge to Thomistic Anthropology

This paper addresses the challenge that the prospective emergence of general artificial intelligence might pose for Thomistic versions of Roman Catholic anthropology, according to which the immaterial an important aspect of human nature. The Thomistic tradition contends that the intellect's immaterial nature can be known phi-

losophically by reference to the intellect's powers, and especially the power to cognize universal essences. This kind of cognition presupposes that the intellect is able to receive the substantial forms of the things cognized without becoming those very things. Thomists hold that such "intentional" assimilation of forms is metaphysically incompatible with materiality.

Now, to the extent that AI agents will become able to outperform humans intellectually in all or most domains, it will be increasingly difficult to maintain that AI agents lack the ability to cognize universals. Assuming, for example, that AI models will at some point be capable of producing philosophical texts that human philosophers take to be indicative of great philosophical insight (a kind of philosophical Turing test), any claim to the effect that humans have philosophical capacities that AI-agents necessarily must lack will have to rest entirely on introspective experience and theoretical assumptions. In this scenario, the Thomistic position is vulnerable to Wittgensteinian objections based on the logical relationship between mental phenomena and behavior (e.g. the private language argument). In light of the Thomistic tradition's emphasis on the harmony between faith and reason, moreover, it would be problematic for Thomists to adopt a purely fideistic stance to the existence of an immaterial soul. This paper will discuss what intellectual options Thomists might have if AI-agents were to pass a philosophical Turing-test of the most advanced kind, and what the implications of such a scenario could be for Thomistic anthropology.

Legend

- *Senato and Minor: First floor*
- *A201: Second floor*
- *A501, A505, A506, A508: Third floor*

Parallel Sessions

Communications

24 June morning

Medieval Visions of Nature - Senato

L.J. Garcia Lomas

Lo sguardo sulla natura nel pensiero del XII secolo: dalla sostanza alla relazione

L. Kuchukidze

Nature and Humanity: Interconnection and Alienation in Twelfth-Century Allegories — Bernardus Silvestris and Alain de Lille

P. Choucino Brindis

Joseph Ratzinger's concept of nature in his reading of Bonaventure

Schelling and German Idealism - A306

A. Karpinsky

F.W.J. Schelling's Double Challenge to Mechanistic Reductionism: Towards a Theology of Nature

E. Schirò

Philosophy of Nature after Schelling: Baudrillard Reconsidered

T. Holley

Reason's Religious Excess: French Spiritualism, Schelling, and the Return of Metaphysics

24 June morning

The Modern Crisis - A301

A. de Vita

From World-Image to Nature: Rethinking Descartes and the Modern Crisis of Nature

A. Grupillo

Nature as Limit: Hegel and the Medieval Reception of Roman Law

A.K. Winters - V. Mccorgray

Catastrophic Metacritique and the Paradox of Nature

**Patristic and Orthodox
Theology of Nature - Minor**

J. Avilés

Nature as Created Order: Origen on Providential Concurrence, Creaturely Causality, and the Recoverability of Nature

R. Buffo

Nature as Revelation in the Ontology of Creation of Sergei Bulgakov

D. O'Byrne

Zizioulas's «Remembering the Future»: Nature Lost and Regained in a Maximian Key

24 June morning

Philosophy of Science and Nature - A308

V. Ascheri

Philosophy of Nature and Modern Science: A Prismatic Vision

S. Pimentel

Digital Microcosms: Climate Modelling and the Intelligibility of Nature

D. Puleio - S. Furlan

On the Shores of the Cosmic Ocean: Rethinking Life and Nature Through Wheeler's Participatory Universe

Mimesis and Exemplarism - A201

T. Hoonhout

The Pondus of Mimesis: An Augustinian-Girardian Synthesis

S. Palmer

Science, Nature, and Relation: Evaluating the Scientific Claims of Mimetic Theory and its Implications towards a Relational Philosophy of Nature

G. Zuccaro

Physical Laws Between Exemplarism and Process: A Historical Arc from Franciscan Scholasticism to Contemporary Philosophy of Nature

24 June afternoon

Aquinas - Senato

P. Rojek

Relational Being: Aquinas and Analytic Ontology of Relation

C. Vial

By knowing and loving the rational creature attains to God Himself. Divinization in Aquinas

P. Friddle

Aquinas on the Kingdom of Creation and the Kingdom of God: Divine Governance and Divine Kingship

Grace and the Supernatural - A308

O. Juurikkala

Nature, Grace, and the Readable World: The Book of Nature Tradition Revisited

A. Crook

Radical Orthodoxy, and the creation of a new relationship between nature and super-nature

J.J. Steinmann

The Poetry of Grace

24 June afternoon

Eschatology and Theosis - A306

G.G. Gjermundsen

God-Man and Gaianthropos: Human Nature, Theosis and Planetary Consciousness at the Second Axial Threshold

P. Benvenuti

The eschatological vocation of the evolving reality

P. Popiolek

Theosis and Transhumanism: Nature, Grace, and Limits of Technological Eschatology

Nature and the Subject - A301

D. Reyburn

A fairy-tale phenomenology of nature

G. Luise - I. Colagè

Evolutionary Convergences and Forms of Knowledge of Nature

M. de la Tour

Nature, Vulnerability, and the Relational Constitution of Subjectivity in Robert Spaemann

24 June afternoon

Ontology and Science - A201

M.A. Castaldi

Relog: a relational ontology of the human embryo in the age of artificial and synthetic embryo technologies

C. Robson

Trinitarian Ontology and the Bohm-Hiley interpretation of Quantum Mechanics

R. Marsland

What can the Bible teach us about Biology? Order and agency in early Christian cosmology

25 June morning

Limits of Rationalism - A305

J.L. Pappas

Nature, Person, and Intertwining: Retrieving Merleau-Ponty's l'être sauvage as a Submerged Christology

E. Kjork

Essence as Nothingness? Ferdinand Ulrich's Reframing of Nature

M. Malimpensa

Human History in the Light of Nature: Myth as Unconscious Revelation in Schelling's Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology

Literature - A201

E. Fevagan

COSMOPOIESIS: Charles Péguy's Vitalist Poetics of Nature

J. Bullock

«The Earth Hath Bubbles»: The Unnatural, the Natural, and the Supernatural in Shakespeare's Tragic Vision

T. McKinney

Yielding Before Nature's Indifference: Annie Dillard, Heidegger, and Relational Intelligibility

25 June afternoon

Classical Tradition - A201

A. Momah

Towards a shared and common nature

R. Mona

The Naturalistic Foundation of Value: An Aristotelian-Thomistic Approach

P. de Simone

The Universality of Nature and the Plurality of Existence: The Doctrine of the Four Personae in Cicero's De Officiis

Post-Secular World - A306

O. Kletz

Nature as a Self-Representation: How the Deist elevation of Nature enables Colonial Exploitation

A. Gerolin

Belonging to Nature as search for meaning in a post-secular world: anthropological perspectives

C. Fleming

Dominating nature: retrieving an ecology of attention

Communications

Abstracts

Valeria Ascheri

Philosophy of Nature and Modern Science: A Prismatic Vision

When observing nature, one can adopt the Aristotelian-Thomist perspective characteristic of classical natural philosophy. However, today it is impossible not to view nature through the lens of the investigative method of empirical science: with the Copernican revolution and the new science of Galileo and Newton, nature presents itself in a new light, further transformed by the theories of contemporary science, such as quantum physics and general relativity.

There are various ‘readings’ of nature (I would not say ‘interpretations’, a term that might seem more subjective), depending on whether one adopts a philosophical or scientific perspective, and also depending on the purpose of the research being conducted. Even when considering scientific theories such as that of evolution, or those explained by neuroscience, or the most recent cosmological theories, there is no reason to think that philosophical reflection on nature is now useless – if not anachronistic or even absurd. Scientific theories describe and explain nature from the point of view of science, whilst philosophy offers a deeper and more comprehensive vision, seeking to understand the significance of such theories for humanity and our conception of nature itself.

Therefore, following the perspective of scientific realism espoused by philosophers such as Mariano Artigas (*La inteligibilidad de la naturaleza*, 1992), Evandro Agazzi (*Loggettività scientifica e i suoi contesti*, 2018) and Rafael A. Martínez (*La verità scientifica*, 1995 – *Immagini del dinamismo fisico*, 1996), we may conclude that nature can be studied by distinguishing between different levels of inquiry, which do not contradict one another, since both philosophy and science are ‘rational’ inquiries and aim to attain a truth which encompasses the reality of nature – sometimes understood as ‘structure’ and sometimes as ‘process’ – in different ways, seeking to provide an ever more complete, precise and,

so to speak, 'prismatic' view of nature, without neglecting any aspect or any of its properties (yet knowing that it will never be an exhaustive or perfect view).

We may conclude our reflections on the intelligibility of nature by quoting Freeman Dyson: "Unifiers are people whose driving passion is to find general principles that explain everything.

They are happy if they manage to leave the universe a little simpler than they found it. Diversifiers are people whose passion is to explore the details. They are in love with the heterogeneity of nature [...] They are happy if they leave the universe a little more complicated than they found it" (*Infinite in All Directions*, 1988).

Jeremías Avilés

Nature as Created Order: Origen on Providential Concurrence, Creaturely Causality, and the Recoverability of Nature

Modernity's "loss of nature" is often narrated as a double reduction: first, nature becomes a self-enclosed mechanism whose intelligibility is exhausted by efficient explanation; then, any appeal to creation is relegated either to a punctiliar "first cause" or to episodic divine interventions. This paper proposes that an early Christian metaphysical grammar — articulated with particular clarity by Origen — offers a third option: nature as a genuinely intelligible created order, continuously dependent upon God while retaining non-illusory creaturely causality. I argue, first, that Origen's doctrine of providence entails a robust thesis of ongoing ontological dependence. In *De Principiis* II.1.3 Origen interprets "in Him we live and move and have our being" as indicating that God "fills and holds together the world" by divine power; the cosmos is "kept together" by the power and reason of God as by a unifying soul. Complementarily, Origen characterizes divine power as that by which God "appoints, restrains, and governs all things visible and invisible" in providence (*De Principiis* I.2), suggesting a mode of governance compatible with ordered regularity rather than arbitrary interruption. Second, I contend that this sustaining dependence need not collapse created causal agency into occasionalism. Origen's providence is non-competitive: divine action is not one more item within the causal nexus but the condition of the nexus' very being and order. This provides a conceptual space for what later idiom would call secondary

causality, without importing anachronistic machinery: created causes operate truly, precisely because the created order is continually held in existence and coherence by God. Finally, I sketch a minimal dialogue with the philosophy of science: scientific “laws” may be understood as descriptions of stable patterns within nature, but such stability is metaphysically underwritten by the created order’s intelligibility. Origen thus helps “regain nature” by resisting both mechanistic self-sufficiency and interventionist theism: nature is recoverable as created order—dependent, coherent, and therefore intelligible.

Piero Benvenuti

The eschatological vocation of the evolving reality

The Nature regained today is substantially different from the Nature lost by philosophy and theology at the time of the Copernican Revolution. First of all, it includes two elements, space and time, that until a century ago were considered completely separated from the measurable reality: *a priori* forms of the sensible knowledge, as Kant defined them in the Transcendental Aesthetics. Space and time, or, better said, space-time, is now an integral part of physical reality, interacting with matter and energy, as General Relativity has amply demonstrated. When the latter was used to build a model of the entire cosmos, the main characteristics of Nature emerged as a revolutionary surprise: Nature is not static but essentially and holistically evolutive. As a consequence, it can be thought of as an open-ended experiment that, since 13,8 billion years ago, has undergone very different phases, each unpredictable yet strictly dependent on the previous one. Because of its uniqueness and because of the impossibility of determining its boundary conditions, the “experiment” of the evolving Nature cannot be investigated as a whole by the Galilean scientific method alone. Hence, deepening our understanding of Nature, an interdisciplinary approach to Science, Philosophy and Theology is no longer an option but a mere necessity, pointing towards the construction of a global “cosmologia” that includes both the physical and transcendent realities. This paper outlines some of the most promising lines of development of this interdisciplinary enterprise, such as the possible structural analogy between the relational ontology of the cosmos and the trinitarian ontology. This analogy suggests incorporating the history of Salvation

within the evolutionary history of the global reality, matter and spirit included. In this way, the effects of Salvation do not only concern the humanity of the planet Earth, but also the entire cosmos, opening new and interesting eschatological avenues.

Raul Buffo

Nature as Revelation in the Ontology of Creation of Sergei Bulgakov

This paper analyzes the ontology of creation in Sergei Bulgakov's thought, starting from his idea of nature as divine revelation, in a philosophical perspective.

Through a brief phenomenology of his first autobiographical story of encounter with divinity (the divine Sophia) in nature as narrated in *Unfading Light* (1917), the paper aims to show how Bulgakov's conception of creation (and maybe of Sophiology itself) arises from an experience of personal encounter in which nature manifests itself as the locus of divine presence.

From here we will move on to a consideration of the epistemological, metaphysical and ontic-existential implications of a conception of nature as creation, as shaped both in *Unfading Light* and in *The bride of the Lamb* (1945), in order to outline the relevance of the idea of nature nowadays if thought together with the notion of creation. At the epistemological level, the paper will address the possibility of a philosophical discourse on nature as creation; the metaphysical level of the discourse will concern instead the possibility of speaking of an ontology of nature as creation; finally, at the ontic-existential level, the relationship between creator, creation, and creatures (that is, the singularity of created existents and their relationship) will be addressed.

Justin Bullock

"The Earth Hath Bubbles": The Unnatural, the Natural, and the Supernatural in Shakespeare's Tragic Vision

This paper argues that Shakespeare's tragedies offer opportunity to rethink nature through the relation of myth and history. Reading

Richard III, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear* alongside William Desmond's metaxological account of the between and Owen Barfield's account of the evolution of human consciousness, I propose a triadic grammar of the unnatural, the supernatural, and the natural. This grammar is not offered as rigid taxonomy, but as theological-poetic hermeneutic for interpreting rival configurations of transcendence, history, and mediation.

My central claim is that these terms are figured in the Pagan logic of Fate and Fortune, the Protestant logic of Providence, and the Roman Catholic logic of Tradition. Fate and Fortune correspond to the unnatural, not primarily in a moralized sense, but as a condition of primordial participation in which human beings remain immersed in an equivocal and mythically charged cosmos. Poiesis rules and history is yet to be born insofar as history is not yet fully distinguished from omen, recurrence, and sacred pattern. Providence corresponds to the supernatural insofar as Providence risks becoming abstract, disincarnate, and univocal, subordinating creaturely mediation to sovereign meaning or will. The noetic seeks to mediate the collapse of myth into history after the Incarnation. Tradition corresponds to the natural because Tradition preserves an analogical and sacramental middle in which transcendence is neither collapsed into mythic immanence nor imposed as external decree, but embodied through inheritance, liturgy, form, memory, and communal life. Here the noetic and poetic kiss. In this sense, tradition names not mere repetition but the healing middle in which will and providence may be reconciled and the historical and mythological are once again wed.

Shakespeare's tragedies dramatize the instability of these rival logics. In *Macbeth*, the Weird Sisters figure a preternatural distortion in which fate, prophecy, and ambition fuse into an occult parody of transcendence masking the unnatural: "the earth hath bubbles," and political desire mistakes atmospheric equivocation for ultimate sanction. In *Richard III*, rhetoric is severed from truth and becomes a martial *techne* of power, sophistry, and artificial will; yet the play's women, above all Margaret in her curses and laments, preserve a counter-logic of memory, judgment, and morality that exposes the unsubstantial character of Richard's self-making. In *King Lear*, the love test reduces language to magical instrumentality, while Cordelia's silence and the Fool's riddling speech disclose another order of truth altogether. Lear's passage through dispossession and madness

becomes not mere collapse, but a painful unveiling of creaturely dependence, suffering, pity, and embodied relation. Across all three plays, nature appears neither as inert mechanism nor as immediate mythic unity, but as a fragile and recoverable metaxological between. The paper concludes with a Trinitarian heuristic: the Father under the aspect of abyssal origin, the Spirit under the aspect of transcendent excess, and the Son under the aspect of incarnate mediation. In this light, the Incarnation names the regaining of nature itself: the reconciliation of myth and history, the unnatural and the supernatural, in and through the visible, historical, and analogical form of creaturely life.

Maria Antonietta Castaldi

Relorg: a relational ontology of the human embryo in the age of artificial and synthetic embryo technologies

Artificial gametes have become increasingly prominent in recent years, especially as science is advancing the development of human sexual cells. These gametes raise numerous bioethical issues and questions; however, this study primarily focuses on specific problems related to the possibility—though not yet realized—of producing a human embryo with synthetic gametes obtained via in vitro-derived (IVD) gametogenesis. Rather than addressing the moral status of these embryos or their humanity, which are not at issue, this essay assumes the embryo as a relational organism and inquires into what the relational ontology of an IVD embryo would be.

This paper first surveys the state-of-the-art of IVD, including the production of gametes via synthetic DNA (synDNA). It then examines the scientific actuality of the human embryo as a relational organism from a biological, developmental, behavioral, and symbolic perspective, considering all complex networks that characterize the embryo from the very first moments of conception. Accordingly, the human embryo may be regarded as a relational organism, a relorg, echoing Luciano Floridi's notion of the inforg.

On this basis, four interwoven levels of relationality—*intraorganismal*, *interorganismal*, *diachronic*, and *synchronic*—are identified, and the challenges posed by IVD embryos are examined at each level through the lenses of relational biology, Derek Parfit's theory of psy-

chological connectedness, and finally classical Aristotelian–Thomistic hylomorphism. The main question I analyze is what form of relationship an IVD embryo would sustain with its parents and ancestors and whether this relationship was analogous to that of an embryo generated through physiological conception. I first ask (1) whether the relation with the self is preserved in the production of artificial and synthetic embryos. I then inquire whether (2a) the interorganismal synchronic relation is maintained in such embryos and, finally, whether (2b) the parent–child relation is diachronically preserved with respect to (2b1) artificial and (2b2) synthetic embryos.

Relational biology views organisms as networks of relations and can distinguish natural from artificial embryos through internal organization yet struggles with interorganismal relations and material causation across generations. Parfit instead prioritizes psychological continuity, arguing that ethical significance depends on degrees of connection over time rather than origin or substance.

Thus, relational biology does a better job in answering synchronic intraorganismal questions, while Parfitian theory better fits with diachronic issues. However, one of the theories, from a biological point of view, and the other, from a psychological perspective, both in some way eliminate matter and the notion of substance. Consequently, they fail to grasp the τὰ πρὸς τὶ in their entirety.

Hylomorphism is the only framework that can address these questions, encompassing all kinds of relationality (in terms of τὰ πρὸς τὶ), whether synchronic or diachronic, while retaining the notion of substance. Indeed, the rational soul, as the embryo’s substantial form, directs development top–down, ensuring the intraorganismal relational integration of higher and lower faculties; artificial manipulation can disrupt this intrinsic teleology. Eventually, hylomorphism is shown to be the most suitable framework to provide a possible answer to the ontological questions of relationality in IVD embryos.

Pedro Choucino Brindis

Joseph Ratzinger’s concept of nature in his reading of Bonaventure

This paper examines the concept of “nature” in Joseph Ratzinger’s early theological anthropology, focusing on his *Habilitationschrift* on St. Bonaventure. It argues that Ratzinger develops a broad and

multi-layered understanding of nature that integrates both metaphysical and historical-salvific dimensions. Rather than treating nature as a static ontological substrate or as stage within salvation history, Ratzinger presents it as a key conceptual hinge through which creation, grace, and redemption can be understood within the unity of salvation history. This early interpretation proves programmatic for his later theology, where the relationship between creation, history, and grace remains a central concern.

The paper proceeds through a textual and conceptual analysis of Ratzinger's treatment of the terms *natura*, *naturalis*, and *supernaturalis* in his interpretation of Bonaventure. This analysis shows that the notion of nature operates on several interconnected levels. First, nature appears in a pre-theological sense as created reality that is not artificial and that possesses its own intelligible order. Second, it designates the created causal order (*cursus naturalis*) in distinction from the immediate action of God, clarifying the relation between divine freedom and the relative autonomy of created processes. Third, nature acquires a metaphysical dimension as a stable ontological structure underlying the changing stages of salvation history. Ratzinger's interpretation becomes particularly significant at the anthropological level. In Bonaventure's distinction between nature and spirit, he identifies a dynamic structure in which the human person stands between the order of created nature and the immediate action of God. This structure illuminates the medieval doctrine of the *desiderium naturale videndi Deum*: the human spirit naturally tends toward a fulfillment that exceeds its own capacities and therefore requires grace. Nature is thus neither self-sufficient nor merely completed from outside by grace, but intrinsically ordered toward a supernatural fulfillment.

The result is a vision in which metaphysics and salvation history mutually illuminate one another. Nature provides the ontological foundation upon which the history of salvation unfolds, while the historical drama of creation, fall, and redemption reveals the ultimate meaning of nature itself. Within Bonaventure's schema of *exitus–reditus*, culminating in union in Christ, Ratzinger interprets nature as the created order that proceeds from God, is wounded in history, and is restored and elevated through grace. This synthesis, first articulated in his early work on Bonaventure, continues to inform Ratzinger's later theological reflection on creation, revelation, and the destiny of the human person.

August Crook

Radical Orthodoxy, and the creation of a new relationship between nature and super-nature

Christianity can be seen as a supreme blessing and affirmation of nature; uniting it, in the person of Christ, to the supernatural Absolute; and thereby elevating nature's ability to communicate the divine. However we can also see, in the Bible, as well as in Christian tradition, an attitude that appears more negative to nature, the world, the body, etc. We can see a desire to turn away from the perceived naturalistic divinity of paganism, and a channeling of focus towards the more transcendent, as well as the more humane. Boundaries of exclusion were created to protect Christianity's cultic form. Nature is something that can be affirmed and negated, and both options have their correct application. I will argue for what I believe it is fair to call a more affirmative and pro-nature Christianity; whilst not forgetting why and for what purpose the negations took place; and thereby hopefully fulfilling their intention in this more positive account.

Radical Orthodoxy offers a uniquely powerful, and timely, advocacy of a more pro-nature Christianity. With its Trinitarian and Platonic approach it brings a creative and relational harmony between the Creator and creation, between the one and the many, the transcendent and the immanent and nature and super-nature. Nature is imbued with a vital, and mystic, power to analogically and symbolically reveal God. We rise through nature to a God that is not merely the sublime, transcendent, unitary, absolute; but is the elevated and supremely divinised existence of all the good and love we see in nature; which is expressed in God's active, relational, and Trinitarian life.

Following Radical Orthodoxy's charism for genealogy, I will construct an alternative genealogy, for the purpose of supplementing and developing its pro-nature position. I will focus on a few key historical moments. First I will look at the Bible, focusing on the New Testament, the Synoptic Gospels and the letters of St Paul. Secondly I will look at Aristotle (which I believe will provide an informative contrast to the Radical Orthodox focus on Plato) and the reception of his thought, as well as the thought of his Islamic interpreters, into medieval Christendom, and how that so radically af-

fects the relationship between nature and super-nature; looking especially at the thought of St Thomas Aquinas. Thirdly I will look at the Romantic movement of the 18th and 19th centuries and their enthusiastic embrace of nature and the natural. Lastly I will look at this all in a contemporary context and propose my own, Radically Orthodox inspired, solution to the problem of the relation of nature to super-nature.

Marine de la Tour

Nature, Vulnerability, and the Relational Constitution of Subjectivity in Robert Spaemann

Modern philosophy often conceives subjectivity and nature as opposed principles: nature appears as the domain of causal necessity, while subjectivity is associated with freedom and self-determination. This opposition obscures a fundamental dimension of human existence, namely that subjectivity itself emerges within a natural world marked by finitude and dependency.

In the work of Robert Spaemann, nature is not merely an object of theoretical cognition but a reality whose teleological structure becomes visible precisely in its vulnerability. Living beings are oriented toward fulfillment, and for that very reason they can fail, suffer, or require assistance. Vulnerability therefore does not simply accompany teleology but reveals it.

At the same time, Spaemann's rejection of naturalism does not rest primarily on a metaphysical doctrine of natural law but on a phenomenology of moral subjectivity. Moral experience presents itself as an experience of accountability: the subject discovers itself as answerable for what happens to other beings whose flourishing or failure may depend on its action. In this sense, responsibility is not deduced from an external norm but emerges from the intelligibility of situations in which something is at stake. Nature itself is not first given as an objective teleological order from which moral obligations could later be deduced. Rather, the intelligibility of nature itself becomes manifest through the experience of responsibility and relational freedom.

This paper argues that Spaemann's account of nature implies a relational ontology in which the experience of accountability discloses

both the structure of human subjectivity and nature itself. In responding to the vulnerability of living beings, the subject comes to understand itself as responsible within a network of relations that precede and orient its freedom. In this sense, intersubjectivity does not simply accompany moral life but belongs to the conditions under which moral subjectivity and nature itself become intelligible.

Pia De Simone

The Universality of Nature and the Plurality of Existence: The Doctrine of the Four Personae in Cicero's De Officiis

In Cicero's philosophical reflection, the notion of nature performs both a descriptive and a normative function: it designates not only what the human being is, but also what he is called to become. The rule of nature thus emerges as a relatively stable criterion within a world characterized by the instability of events and the mutability of individual inclinations and choices. From this perspective, reflection on nature is closely intertwined with a broader doctrine of the human person.

This paper investigates the relationship between nature and the human person as it emerges from the well-known Stoic theory of the four personae, taken up by Cicero in his *De Officiis* (I, 105–125), through which the plurality of existential frameworks within which the individual must orient his life is articulated. According to this theory, nature assigns to each individual — much like an actor on a stage — several roles: that deriving from the rationality common to all human beings; that arising from one's individual constitution; that determined by circumstances and fortune; and finally, that which each person freely assumes through his own voluntas.

Within this framework, the will introduces a dimension of knowledge, awareness, and deliberation, giving rise to a dialectic between duty and virtue from which a moral subject emerges who is conscious both of his rational nature and of the contingencies of existence. By adopting and reworking the Stoic perspective of Panaetius of Rhodes — who had sought to adapt the ideal of the sage to the morally imperfect conditions of civic life — Cicero further emphasizes the intrinsically social dimension of virtue and the principle according to which «what is beneficial for the individual is also beneficial

for the community» (*De Officiis* III, 27), a principle that assumes the character of a genuine law of nature.

The paper therefore aims to reveal how, in *De Officiis*, the doctrine of the personae constitutes an original attempt to articulate a theory of the human person capable of reconciling the universality of human nature with the plurality of concrete forms of existence, integrating nature, will, and social life. Such a perspective becomes possible only on the basis of a non-reductive concept of nature — and, consequently, of the human being — within which the positive probabilism of the Academic tradition, when confronted with the complexity of such questions, emerges not as a limitation but as a genuine methodological resource.

Alberto De Vita

From World-Image to Nature: Rethinking Descartes and the Modern Crisis of Nature

In the essay *Die Zeit des Weltbildes*, M. Heidegger attributes to R. Descartes a decisive role in the metaphysical configuration of modernity. According to this interpretation, Cartesian thought would have reduced being to what can be represented by consciousness, thereby transforming the world into an image (*Weltbild*) and conferring upon the ego the role of “*subjectum*” and “*fundamentum*”. Egological cogitatio would thus constitute the inaugural element of a representational dispositif that tends to empty the reality of nature, reducing it to an object available for manipulation. Within this framework unfolds the process of *Entgötterung*, that is, the progressive loss of the divine and transcendent dimension of reality.

Heidegger’s theses have enjoyed considerable influence in contemporary thought, shaping a wide range of theoretical contexts. In theology — both within the Catholic tradition (Gilson) and the Protestant one (Balthasar) — Descartes has often been regarded as one of the figures responsible for the modern separation between the world and transcendence. Similarly, certain strands of Anglophone neopositivism (post Russell) and, more recently, several interpretations connected to the debate on the Anthropocene — such as Latour’s analyses — have identified in Cartesian modernity the inaugural moment of a conception of nature reduced to an object of quantification and subjective disposition.

The paper I propose aims to reconsider this interpretative line, at least partially. The hypothesis is that the Cartesian concept of nature cannot be reduced to the figure of an object entirely available to human subjectivity, but rather exhibits a more complex structure, which may be described as simultaneously “premodern” and, in a certain sense, “postmodern”. Indeed, on the one hand, Descartes establishes a close connection between the notion of nature, considered in its most fundamental meaning, and the very essence of God. In continuity with certain motifs of scholastic theology — particularly within the Thomistic tradition — nature thus refers to an infinite and transcendent reality that radically exceeds the perspective of the creature. On the other hand, precisely this framework leads to the recognition of the problematic character of the relation between the human being and nature: if nature primarily belongs to the sphere of divine action, it cannot simply be reduced to an object of human domination. What emerges is a distinctive theoretical configuration. While contributing to the rise of modern science, Descartes simultaneously appears to reactivate an older meaning of nature and to anticipate some central concerns of contemporary debate.

Eirik Fevang

COSMOPOIESIS. Charles Péguy’s Vitalist Poetics of Nature

In an age marked by the renewed appeal of secular vitalism — most visibly in the Nietzschean revival among younger generations seeking aristocratic heroism and a “superabundance of life” — Christian philosophers face an urgent task: to show that the deepest sources of vitality, creativity, and reenchantment lie not in immanentist naturalisms, but in the infinite, generative life of the Trinity. In other words, we must show how the real vitalism is not to be found in Dionysus, but in Christ. Few modern writers offer richer resources for this task than Charles Péguy. My paper investigates Péguy’s vitalist understanding of nature as it is articulated in *Le Porche du Mystère de la deuxième vertu* (1911), *Le Mystère des Saints Innocents* (1912), and *Éve* (1913). My hypothesis is that the full coherence of Péguy’s poetry and thought only becomes visible in light of his vision of nature as an incomplete, dynamic process that cannot be clearly separated from the free movement and creativity of grace. In this I

go against the main tendency in the secondary literature on Péguy, which has either ignored his thinking on nature in his philosophy and poetry, or explicitly denied its existence. For example, the French philosopher Emmanuel Falque has claimed, both in our personal conversations and in his general work on Péguy, that there is no concept of nature in Péguy. According to Falque, such a concept would be too metaphysical; Péguy only raises the question of habit and the relation of habit to the Incarnation. A thematization of the nature-grace relation, he argues, belongs properly to Thomism, a school Péguy consciously opposed.

By doing a close reading of decisive parts of *Le Porche*, *Saints Innocents*, and *Éve*, however, I show that Péguy does indeed have a concept of nature, and that he was a “cosmopoet” who revived and dynamized a classical, pre-modern conception of cosmic and human nature. Not only can we identify and explicate a vision of nature in Péguy; we shall see that his notion of nature provides a hermeneutical key to his entire oeuvre. A reading of Péguy’s poetry in the light of his prose reveals a writing that links both human nature and cosmic nature more generally to incompleteness, creativity, and radical futurity. Péguy’s nature is “supernatural” in the sense of being self-transcending, continually formed and re-formed in the creativity of the infinite—what he calls in *Éve* “l’immense printemps”, the immense spring.

Whereas the scholarly tradition has thus far mainly emphasized the political, historical, or theological aspects of Péguy’s project, I seek to highlight the vitalist nature-poetics and philosophy that ontologically undergird his politics and theology. Once it becomes clear how Péguy’s vitalism differs from that of contemporaneous vitalists such as Bergson and Nietzsche, it also becomes more difficult to categorize him within either a reactionary or a progressive framework, as much of the existing research still tends to do.

With regard to the question of nature, Péguy is neither a static essentialist nor a nominalist constructivist, but a thinker-poet who figures nature as open to creative transformation through “repetition”. The central lacuna in current research on the question of nature is one of systematics: nowhere do we find a systematic account—across Péguy’s works and in relation to other contemporary vitalists such as Bergson and Nietzsche—of his vision of nature that reconstructs and clarifies how Péguy’s philosophy of history and critique of modernity/contemporaneity are tied to this vision. The interplay bet-

ween fallen nature and healed “new nature”, the relation between the experience of death and the search for vital restorative and creative power, has not yet been elucidated, because the question of nature as such has not been posed. This is what the paper sets out to accomplish. By retrieving Péguy’s vision of nature, the paper proposes a way of “regaining” nature beyond both physicalist-mechanistic reductions and Nietzschean vitalist naturalisms, reconceiving nature as cosmopoiesis, an apocalyptic force-field of creative futurity.

Connell Fleming

Dominating nature: retrieving an ecology of attention

This paper will show that the digital age has foregrounded a site for the exercise of power, defined here as control over attention. While this is not entirely new, it has been deemed marginal in previous political theory. With the emergence of this new site, the urgent question is to what extent are new forms of domination well underway? And further still, has this already reshaped our own fundamental nature? The commodification of attention as a mode of social control in the digital age by the ‘big tech’ companies, has been usefully charted by Zuboff (2019). Zuboff sees human experience as being claimed by surveillance capitalism as free raw material. This is then translated into behavioural data which can be used to predict the likelihood of what you are likely to do now and in the future. This has led to several consequences.

Firstly, the emergence of a new class revolution, fuelled by imperialism over attention (tech barons), asks: are we witnessing a seizing control over and reshaping of modern institutions of power (capital, government, science)? Secondly, investment into modern modes of political resistance, such as collective action and strikes, has become disempowered through the adoption of new media - prompting the question, is the attention generated or concern proffered perpetually insufficient? Finally, we must scrutinize whether this investment into modes of culture and self-cultivation undercuts print media, to the extent that it is superseded by digital media?

These three political questions all address the control of attention and have a common feature; they have influence in directing individuals’ voting intentions. Further control emerges in directing how

time is spent (Hayes, 2025), as well as the digital propagation of certain emotions, like increased anxiety and helplessness through isolation from non-digital interaction. We see increasing exclusion from economic/political/social significance, with the substitution of AI for working, communicating, and thinking.

Despite these political ramifications, most recent conceptions of attention have regarded it solely in neo-liberal, economic terms. This misnomer is largely thanks to popularisation of Goldhaber's 'attention economy' (1997) - which has dominated socio-political analyses of attention. Whilst there does exist profit-motives of attention, this economic formulation of the term restricts the diversity and multiplicity of attention. Yves Citton (2017) usefully reframes the paradigm, moving from typical narrow economic terms ('paying attention' and 'investing one's attention') towards an ecological perspective. Where attention is understood as an ecology, we examine how it responds to particular environments: from advertising, literature, search engines, etc., and further still, how our attention is subsequently conditioned. We ultimately discover that attention is not just a commodity.

This talk will conclude that through recovering, renewing and developing theoretical resources (Arendt, Weil) to illuminate attention in the digital age, what will be recognised is the centrality of the concept to modernity's milieu. Only with this ecological recognition and recovering of the term, rather than solely economic, will a re-opening of the question of nature be possible recovering a richer account of human engagement and experience with the world.

Patrick Friddle

Aquinas on the Kingdom of Creation and the Kingdom of God: Divine Governance and Divine Kingship

Scholarship on Thomas Aquinas's theology of the Kingdom of God has largely concentrated on the ecclesiological and eschatological aspects, but it has left little to be said for its foundations in nature and creation. To address this neglected aspect, this paper adopts the methodology now known as biblical thomism, which bridges the scriptural and philosophical gap of classical thomism. From this perspective, I argue that Aquinas develops a theology of divine kingship at the level

of nature. Grace builds upon nature, and Aquinas builds up the various New Testament senses of the Kingdom of God upon the foundational notion of providence over creation. When treating providence, Aquinas explicitly takes the analogy of a king in his kingdom from the Wisdom books of Scripture to illuminate God's reign over creation. Through a close reading of this text alongside his broader account of God's governance, I show that Aquinas understands God's ordering of creation to be a true exercise of kingship. Recovering the divine kingship over nature is not merely a thomistic tribute to modern ecology, but it lays the foundations in nature upon which Aquinas then builds his doctrine on the Kingdom of God. As a result, one can better appreciate the intellectual unity of Aquinas the philosopher and theologian.

Luis Javier García-Lomas Gago OSB

Lo sguardo sulla natura nel pensiero del XII secolo: dalla sostanza alla relazione

Il cosiddetto «Rinascimento del XII secolo» comportò per il pensiero medievale l'introduzione di nuove categorie che, ereditate dalla tradizione platonica, venivano ora rilette in contesti diversi. Così, la scuola di Chartres, leggendo il *Timeo* platonico e le opere di Boezio e di Dionigi, sviluppò una nozione innovativa di natura che avrebbe aperto la strada alla speculazione della grande scolastica del XIII secolo.

Lo scopo di questo intervento è mettere a confronto tale visione con quella del pensiero monastico del XII secolo. Le opere di Guglielmo di Saint-Thierry, Isacco della Stella, Bernardo di Chiaravalle o Aelredo di Rievaulx affrontano la natura da un punto di vista radicalmente diverso rispetto a quello dei loro contemporanei di Chartres; tuttavia, sotto questo aspetto sono state studiate molto meno.

Questi autori, inseriti in un contesto di pensiero agostiniano, affrontano la natura da due prospettive: natura decaduta e natura ricreata. La natura decaduta diventa fonte di tentazione per l'uomo, allontanandolo dalla felicità che trova in Dio. La considerazione della natura ricreata (contemplata come tale dall'uomo riconciliato) costituisce invece uno dei grandi contributi di questa scuola di pensiero.

Come verrà illustrato, gli autori monastici partono da una concezione della natura lontana dalle visioni che postulano un'indipendenza di qualsiasi cosa creata rispetto allo sguardo dell'uomo. Nei loro scritti,

la natura esiste a partire dall'uomo e per l'uomo. Ma, lungi dal cadere in un antropocentrismo cieco, gli autori monastici contemplano sempre la natura a partire dalla relazione dell'uomo con Dio. La prospettiva "relazio-centrica" aiuta a ripensare questa categoria dal punto di vista della metafisica e rivela l'attualità del pensiero monastico e la sua capacità di entrare in dialogo con il pensiero contemporaneo.

Alessandra Gerolin

Belonging to Nature as search for meaning in a post-secular world: anthropological perspectives

One of the most interesting phenomena within the post-secular age is a need for 'mutual belonging' after the failure of modern individualism, and a search for meta-biological meanings able to mobilize people on a universal scale. Green movements are rooted within this idea which involves a common physical origin, that of being generated and nurtured by Nature and a consequent hermeneutic of the body as part of a larger cosmic order. Whereas, until recent times, Nature has nurtured human beings and has offered protection to humanity, nowadays we can argue that, within a post-secular narrative, the opposite is true: it is Nature *herself*, as the Body, that must be protected from exploitation and human cruelty. Human beings' relationship with Nature is not just normative, because it describes, first of all, a matter of fact: we belong to Nature and we are part of *her* Body. This is not only a variant of 'cosmoteism', as it involves an anthropological repositioning in a post-secular world, along with a new anthropology also rooted within a 'corpus mysticum' understood as a symbol able to transform individuals into a 'substantial whole'. This 'corpus mysticum' engenders political and social mobilizations worldwide, gathering people together for a universal cause (to protect and to save Nature) which can be also translated into a search for a inner-worldly salvation. In Western democracies, within a dominant liberal climate we come across strict normative islands which involve strong spiritual bonds rooted within horizons of meanings. I believe that this situation represents a paradox of our age as well as its main resource: contemporary human beings are experiencing that celebrating pure 'negative' freedom, independently from any goal, is not sufficient. In this perspective the idea of belonging to Nature reflect a crucial attitude

of our times, that is to live as ‘seekers of meaning’ and this search engenders a sense of mutual belonging. This hermeneutics arise many questions: can the idea of Nature, understood as a new variant of ‘corpus mysticum’, answer to the human need for mutual belonging? Can this idea offer opportunities to arise questions concerning horizons of meanings crucial for human life and for the common good? Which kind of anthropology do we need in order to face the challenges characterizing an age which is not simply an ‘epoch of changes’, but an ‘epochal change’?

Gunnar G. Gjermundsen

God-Man and Gaianthropos: Human Nature, Theosis and Planetary Consciousness at the Second Axial Threshold

The twin crises defining our civilizational moment — ecological collapse and the ‘multipolar trap’ of accelerating AI competition — are not just technical or political failures. They are symptoms of a philosophically defective and historically contingent account of what a human being is: the atomized, self-sufficient, competitive ego-subject of secular modernity, trapped in what economist Garrett Hardin famously termed the ‘tragedy of the commons’. In this scenario, individual rational actors, driven by perceived scarcity and survival, inevitably deplete shared resources, leading to collective ruin. To transcend this trap within an age of planetary, networked intelligence, the paper proposes a radical ontological reconfiguration of the human subject along the twin axes of the God-Man and the Gaianthropos. The first is vertical: the God-Man of patristic Christian anthropology, developed through Maximus the Confessor’s vision of the human as ‘microcosm and mediator’ and Sergei Bulgakov’s concept of ‘divine-humanity’. The second axis is horizontal: the Gaianthropos, the human being understood as a planetary organ, the most recent fruit of Gaia’s long evolutionary odyssey, whose embodied personhood is constitutively inseparable from the Earth’s metabolic and material matrix.

Drawing on African philosopher Achille Mbembe’s call for a ‘planetary consciousness’ and American philosopher Sean Kelly’s notion of ‘becoming Gaia’, this axis demands repentance of anthropocentric, supremacist modes of being, and colonial, extractive logics, while cul-

tivating what Pope Francis called an ‘ecological conversion’ to a genuinely common-world sensibility. The paper argues that these two axes are not merely complementary but internally united in Maximus’s cosmic anthropology. The human is Gaianthropos precisely because the human is God-Man, for on the path of *theosis* the progressive deification of the microcosm reveals the whole of earthly creation as one luminous whole inseparable from the human being and her divine source. This synthesis is situated within the framework of what theologian Ewert Cousins has called the Second Axial Age: a looming civilizational threshold at which the individual spiritual consciousness achieved by the First Axial Age (800-200 BCE) must be integrated with a planetary-collective consciousness adequate to humanity’s shared ecological and technological predicament. Based on the transformational, ascetic and contemplative ethos of *theosis*, the paper concludes that the necessary motivational alternative to competitive survival is not a moral demand imposed against human nature, but the natural expression of human nature operating at its full ontological depth. Recovering this true human nature births a mind made peaceful in *apatheia* and a heart pierced by *agape*, in which the fear-driven scarcity logic of the bounded ego-self is dissolved by genuine participation in the overflowing love that grounds all being. That more and more humans recognize their nature as simultaneously God-Man and Gaianthropos thus opens the only viable path beyond the terminal feedback loop of the ‘tragedy of the commons’ inherent to late-stage capitalism: a global vocation of kenotic love that treats the planetary network of all living beings as a site for the generous, cooperative realization of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.

Arthur Grupillo

Nature as Limit: Hegel and the Medieval Critique of Roman Law

Hegel criticizes Roman law not only for its formalism, but also for what he considers its barbaric character, especially in the sphere of family law. Institutions such as the *emancipatio* or the *pater familias*’ power over life and death seem to indicate that relations founded on generation could be treated as objects of arbitrary disposal: the father could sell the child, repudiate the child, or release the child from his authority by means of a juridical act. In contrast, modern law,

according to Hegel, should overcome both formalism and such arbitrariness by grounding personhood in ethical life and in processes of social formation that lead from natural dependence to autonomy. Yet Hegel does not ignore the pervasive use of legal fictions in Roman law and understands them as a way of introducing rationality into imperfect laws. He recognizes juridical fictions as an ingenious device developed by Roman jurists to circumvent the rigidity of positive law. By treating someone who was not an heir as if they were one, a foreigner as if they were a citizen, or an adopted child as if the child had been born to the adoptive father, jurists could apply more universal principles without formally modifying the law. Legal fiction thus appears already in Hegel as a form of the cunning of reason operating within Roman law.

This paper argues, however, that such a reading still underestimates the extent of Roman legal constructivism. Recent studies in the history of Roman law show that these operations were not merely occasional devices to correct defective rules, but belonged to the functioning of the *ius civile* itself. The emancipation of the son, adoption, or the fictitious grant of citizenship indicate that relations originally grounded in nature could be reorganized through institutional constructions. In this sense, the modern conception of autonomy radicalizes a movement already present in Roman law: the progressive displacement of natural relations by artificial legal constructions.

A decisive shift occurred with the medieval reception of Roman law. Medieval jurists preserved the techniques of juridical fiction but began to interpret them according to the principle of *imitatio naturae*. Nature was not conceived as a complete source of law, but as a criterion of plausibility and a limit to the use of legal fictions. Certain operations seemed inadmissible when they contradicted the evident natural order of things, for instance recognizing as an adoptive father someone younger than the adopted child, or supposing that a dead man could generate a child.

From this perspective, the modern critique of Roman law acquires a different meaning. By treating natural dependence, including infancy and formation, as a merely transitional condition in the development of autonomy, modern philosophy completes an ongoing process of conceptual neutralization of nature. What is lost is not so much nature as an empirical fact or ontological framework, but above all nature as limit. The medieval reaction is significant precisely for preserving this idea: certain relations of dependence tied to

generation, vulnerability, and formation remain structurally implicated in freedom itself.

Thieler Holley

Reason's Religious Excess: French Spiritualism, Schelling, and the Return of Metaphysics

This paper will demonstrate that French Spiritualist thinkers like Félix Ravaisson and Maurice Blondel construct a metaphysical picture that bears important similarities to Schelling and the Early German Romantics. For these thinkers, nature is neither a static collection of atomized units nor a reality caught up in random flux. It is dynamic and intelligent action. By construing the foundation of reality — whether thematized as the Absolute, nature, or being — as a kind of movement or activity, these thinkers offer a conception of the subject that is in the process of creative self-becoming, but without a postmodern dissolution into the flux of discourse. The subject participates in the dynamic activity of being itself, and it is this participation that allows the dynamism of the subject to potentially exist in harmony with nature and other subjects. Mediation by means of a relational co-activity becomes an existential possibility for the subject who is necessarily wrapped up in the creative self-becoming of all that is.

Tobias Hoonhout

The Pondus of Mimesis: An Augustinian-Girardian Synthesis

Modernity's "Nature Lost" is frequently characterized by a reduction of the human person's free will to a functional mechanism driven by evolutionary necessity. This paper argues for a "Nature Regained" through a relational ontology that synthesizes René Girard's evolution regarding his theory of mimetic desire with St. Augustine's development regarding his psychology of love. In doing so, I attempt to address the seminal critique leveled by Hans Urs von Balthasar, who in *Theo-Drama* IV argued that Girard's early framework — by emphasizing the mimetic maelstrom found in the scapegoat mechanism — left no room for the integrity of nature or a natural theology, effectively resulting in a "bondage of the will."

This paper argues that Girard's gradual shift toward "positive mimesis" — culminating in his dialogue with Benoît Chantre in *Battling to the End* — parallels the development of desire in Augustine's own corpus and presents an opening towards a Girardian-Patristic "lexical ressourcement."


The crux of this restoration is found in Girard's adoption of "Innermost mediation." Explicitly invoking Augustine's *Deus interior intimo meo*, Girard identifies the imitation of Christ not as an extrinsic imposition, but as an "essential anthropological discovery" that redirects the soul's inherent mimetic capacity as a free act. This move parallels the maturation of desire in Augustine's own corpus. We trace the trajectory from the stark dualism of *De Vera Religione* 46 — where the soul must "hate" the earthly to love the heavenly — through the fru-uti distinction of *De Doctrina Christiana*, to the crux of this synthesis in the transition from desire as *motus* to *pondus* in *Confessions* XIII.9.10. In *De Civitate Dei* (Bk. XIV), Augustine completes his arc by situating the *pondus* of desire in the *voluntas*. This allows love to be both a movement and a rest (et-et), solving the problem of *caritas* vs. *cupiditas* as two competing "weights" of the same mimetic nature. By synthesizing Girard's arrival at the "Innermost Mediation" of mimetic desire with this Augustinian development, I propose a model of the human person where the "weight of the will" (*voluntas*) is fundamentally a relational gravity. Mimetic desire does not abolish the free will of the person; rather, nature is "regained" when mimetic desire is baptized into a positive internal mediation toward the "Innermost" model.

This paper concludes that this Augustinian-Girardian synthesis answers Balthasar's critique by establishing a "mimetic natural theology." It posits that mimetic desire is not a passive, evolutionary mechanism, but a dynamic *appetitus* — a principle of motion that finds its true order only when its "weight" is drawn toward the non-rivalrous imitation of the Divine Life.

Oskari Juurikkala

Nature, Grace, and the Readable World: The Book of Nature Tradition Revisited

Modern culture has largely lost the sense of nature as intelligible,



communicative, and gift. This loss is often diagnosed in terms of its symptoms — mechanism, reductionism, disenchantment — but the deeper problem is prior: the severance of nature from its intrinsic orientation toward the uncreated. This paper argues that the patristic and medieval book of nature tradition offers a neglected but precise diagnosis and remedy. From Origen and Augustine through Maximus the Confessor and Bonaventure, the metaphor of creation as a “book” presupposes that nature is structured as address: its rationality (logos) is participated rationality, and its intelligibility is ultimately communicative, a form of divine speech inscribed in creatures. To read the book of nature is therefore not a purely natural act, but one in which the human intellect — formed and elevated by grace — perceives in created things their orientation toward the uncreated. Grace, on this account, does not compete with nature or supervene upon it from outside; it is what allows nature to be fully itself, fully legible, fully real as gift. This argument shares certain commitments with twentieth-century ressourcement theology, particularly de Lubac’s critique of extrinsicist accounts of grace and Balthasar’s theology of creaturely expression. But it differs in grounding the nature/grace relationship specifically in the epistemology of natural reading: it is not only that nature is oriented toward the supernatural, but that nature is constituted as something meant to be read, and that this readability — partially available to natural reason — is fully disclosed only within the horizon of grace. The paper concludes by suggesting that this recovery is not antiquarian: in an age where both nature and meaning are felt as lost, the book of nature tradition offers a framework in which nature’s intelligibility and its character as gift are not competing claims but a single vision.

Andrew Karpinski

F.W.J. Schelling’s Double Challenge to Mechanistic Reductionism: Towards a Theology of Nature

In this paper, I will argue that Schelling’s philosophy can be a useful resource in devising a critique of atheistic and mechanistic naturalism. Thereby, it can help us recover a sense of nature which is richer and more philosophically robust as a metaphysical presupposition

for the actual *praxis* of experimental science. I propose that this critique can be carried in two steps: the 'genetic' and the 'ontic'.

To make sense of the first step, I consult Schelling's early criticisms of mechanical philosophy and of Kant in his philosophy of nature (*Naturphilosophie*) and his *System of Transcendental Idealism*. Already Kant was aware of the difficulty in combining a mechanistic conception of nature with the presence of subjects whose ability to know is governed by transcendental principles. In his *Critique of the Power of Judgment* he attempted to solve it by arguing that, when investigating biological questions, we cannot but presuppose a usage of teleological judgments. However, we can only assume that systematic self-organization and teleology plays a regulative function for our capacity to know ourselves and living nature, rather than being present in the external world itself. Schelling sees this conception as extremely dualistic. Kant never properly answers the genetic question: where does the transcendental subject itself come from? Schelling argues that if the subject who thinks organically comes from nature, than nature itself must be wholly organic. Instead of founding science on the transcendental ego which comes from nowhere, Schelling founds it on nature which organically progresses in increasingly higher-order modes of self-apprehension all the way up to human consciousness. Life is not a regulative category, it is the very guiding principle of all matter. Instead of all things being dead, we just perceiving it as alive, now everything is alive in various degrees of 'intensity'.

I argue that this critique is a good way to methodologically respond to reductionists. They always intend to reduce the meaning of all phenomena to a common base, so that higher-order properties, such as consciousness and life, become epiphenomenal and/or illusory. But even if those are illusions, *what must the world be such that those illusions arise in the first place?* In the end, those illusions are themselves part of the world. In this way, we can argue that the world must contain consciousness and life if they are necessary (even if as an illusion) ways in which humans make sense of things.

By the late phase of his career, however, Schelling goes farther in this critique. Without cancelling the validity of his earlier organic philosophy, Schelling came to an awareness that it cannot create a foundation for itself. In his positive philosophy, Schelling compounds the second, 'ontic' challenge to the reductionist: all science, even if understood organically, only proceeds to know the essences of objects, but presupposes their existence. This existence, sheer fac-

ticity and actuality of the world, leads Schelling to theological conclusions about the unknowable Cause of all being.

Elias Kjork

Essence as Nothingness? Ferdinand Ulrich's Reframing of Nature

Appeals to nature often move between two familiar extremes: accounts that treat nature as fixed and approaches that abandon it altogether. As references to “nature” continue to shape philosophical and theological debates, the concept has become increasingly unstable. This instability matters because appeals to nature frequently guide ethical and anthropological arguments without a clear account of what “nature” is meant to name.

This paper argues that Ferdinand Ulrich's (1931–2020) ontology of essence offers a way beyond this oscillation. For Ulrich, essence is not a static structure but something that exists only insofar as it is enacted. Essence remains open and unfinished, oriented toward a kind of nothingness that resists final formalization.

The paper unfolds in three steps. First, I examine Ulrich's kenotic metaphysics of Being as gift, with particular attention to his account of Being's movement from ideality into concrete reality and goodness. Rather than understanding Being as stable presence, Ulrich presents it as self-giving, marked by vulnerability and risk.

Second, I show how this account of Being shapes Ulrich's understanding of essence. Through an analogy between Being and essence within creation, Ulrich develops an ontology in which essence does not subsist independently but exists only in and through enactment. At the same time, this account exposes a recurring temptation to stabilize or reify essence. When abstracted from its enacted relation to Being, essence becomes prone to distortion.

Finally, I suggest that Ulrich's understanding of essence as oriented toward nothingness offers a constructive posture for contemporary attempts to retrieve nature. The central question is no longer whether nature is fixed or dispensable, but how it is enacted, sustained, and deformed within concrete ontological and anthropological contexts. By naming the temptation to essentialize both Being and the human person, Ulrich provides a framework that avoids both rigid substantialism and the evacuation of nature.

Oliver Kletz

Nature as Self-Representation: How the Deist Elevation of Nature Enables Colonial Exploitation

This work argues that the ‘religion of nature’, prized and encouraged among the deists, referred to a notion of nature which elevated the proponents’ own mode of being as natural, with colonial effects. Matthew Tindal, in his prominent deist work *Christianity, as Old as the Creation* (1730), describes nature as the manifestation of the will and laws of God; examining nature, through the use of reason, reveals that human potential (God’s selflessly loving intent for us and so the best that we can be) is a mode of being rather like himself and his civilised Enlightened contemporaries, living according to nature, known by the dictates of reason, separate from the unnatural and irrational practices of the ‘heathens’. In this then, nature is a self-representation: the type of being that is most natural, given normative significance as the means by which the will of God is known, reflects Tindal — he represents himself in the very structure of the world, as he sees it.

This is a colonial characterisation of nature. Relying on the work of Sylvia Wynter (2003), I argue that the projection or representation of the self onto nature universalises that self as the acultural mode of being. The arbitrariness of this mode of being is then lost, it is naturally ordained and becomes normative. This results in other modes of being insufficiently natural, and the people lives according to these modes of being are unnatural, irrational, and as such less. In representing the self as nature, others embody unnatural. The deist description of nature as the will of God means that those who do not operate within the deist mode of being are unnatural and therefore, as the deist sees it, against God. Not embodying this will of God, they are naturally ordained as inferior and appropriate for subservience, exploitation, and destruction (again as the deist sees it). Nature then, as the canvas on which a notion of the self is represented, operates to universalise that self in colonial ways.

Luka Kuchukhidze

Nature and Humanity: Interconnection and alienation in the 12th century allegories: Bernardus Silvestris and Alain de Lille

Contemporary debates concerning humanity and nature often oscillate between two poles: anthropocentrism, which elevates the human as sovereign over a passive natural order, and posthumanism, which dissolves the distinctiveness of the human into broader biological or material processes. Despite their opposition, both positions risk obscuring the ontological interconnection of humanity and nature. This paper argues that the twelfth-century natural philosophies of Bernardus Silvestris and Alain de Lille offer a more integrated account, in which the human and nature are internally related within a participatory and hierarchically ordered whole.

In Bernardus's *Cosmographia*, the cosmos unfolds through the mediating agency of *Natura*, who shapes primordial potentiality according to divine exemplarity. Humanity emerges within this ordered totality as microcosm: a being in whom material and intellectual dimensions converge. The human person is not an external governor of nature, nor merely one species among others within an indifferent field of forces. Rather, the rational soul recapitulates the very structure of the cosmos, rendering explicit within consciousness the intelligible order that pervades creation. Humanity belongs to nature as its most interior articulation, the point at which cosmic intelligibility becomes reflexive. Alain de Lille develops this vision by dramatizing *Natura* as both generative and normative principle. In the *De planctu Naturae*, human moral disorder represents not simply social or biological deviation, but a fracture in the ontological continuity between human embodiment and cosmic form. The generative structures of the body express a rational order that binds human flourishing to the wider coherence of creation. In the *Anticlaudianus*, the allegorical construction of the virtuous man depicts ethical formation as the restoration of consonance between human agency and the patterned intelligibility of nature. The human person is elevated, yet never extricated, from the natural order. Taken together, these prosimetric cosmologies articulate a metaphysics of reciprocity: the human is in nature as embodied and generated, while nature is in the human as rationally disclosed and normatively enacted. This vision avoids both anthropocentric domination and posthuman flattening. Human

distinctiveness does not entail separation, and embeddedness does not require erasure of hierarchy. Instead, humanity occupies a mediating position in which dignity and dependence coincide.

By retrieving this twelfth-century account of the human-nature relation, the paper proposes a conceptual alternative to contemporary polarization. Bernardus and Alain present an ontology in which the integrity of nature and the distinctiveness of the human are mutually reinforcing rather than mutually exclusive. Their natural philosophies thus illuminate a model of participation in which humanity neither stands above nature nor disappears within it, but realizes itself precisely through its ordered belonging to the whole.

Gennaro Luise - Ivan Colagè

Evolutionary Convergences and Forms of Knowledge of Nature An Epistemological Perspective and a Metaphysical Question

In order to exist, real material entities must be stable. Being material, they are made up of parts, components. Hence, stability fundamentally implies an appropriate structure among parts. A structure, at the most basic and general level, can be understood as a set of relationships among components.

Convergences are different occurrences of the same structure, a structure able to arrange different parts in a stable manner. Such convergent different occurrences give rise to (structural or functional) equivalence classes. Classical example of evolutionary convergences are the wings of birds and bats, the eyes of mammals and octopuses, or the body shapes of some mammals and the “corresponding” marsupials. Much more deeply than that, stable structures are reiterated in nature at any level, from the atomic structure of the various substances, to the way in which enzymes (both proteins and RNA-based enzymes) are built out of chains of more basic chemical elements.

Consequently, one can have convergences concerning the “mere” stability of aggregates (such as atoms or molecules) – and at this level the variability of the emergent stable solutions depends on the different boundary conditions – or convergences that beyond stability also have functional constraints (i.e., structures that besides being stable must also be able to perform some kind of function).

We could generalize a mathematical representation of the of equivalence classes of stable solutions to the quest for permanence in dynamic systems (typically biological ones), and then study the functions that represent the identities (i.e., emergent patterns) that the observational models suggest.

The next step is to address the question of what an emergent pattern actually is. Emergent patterns are key items in scientific research nowadays, employed on many different levels of complexity and various disciplines (from physics to sociology, from observational to speculative sciences, from qualitative to quantitative approaches). We outline several possible answers to this question, indicating, where appropriate, the authors back to whom these positions may be traced. Accordingly, a “pattern” may be understood as: a) a mode of access to a persistent (though not static) formal entity (Aristotle); b) a mode of access to an ideal entity (Plato, Frege); c) a representation in the Stoic sense, namely as both judgment and perception; d) a “phenomenological” structure, that is, a manifest reality constituted through the interplay of intentionality (Brentano, Husserl, Meinong), formal and eidetic organization, and a recursive distinction between form and matter in representation; e) a true proposition subsisting independently of any subject who apprehends its truth (Frege); f) a statistical regularity, and thus an explanatory and heuristic model.

In the concluding section we will clarify which theoretical understanding of emergent pattern can be conveniently applied to the examples of convergences enquired in the sciences.

Maurizio Maria Malimpensa

Human History in the Light of Nature: Myth as Unconscious Revelation in Schelling's "Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology"

In the Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology, Schelling proposes a radical reinterpretation of myth that overturns both Enlightenment reductionism and purely historical explanations. Rather than treating myth as poetic invention, primitive science, or allegorical distortion, he understands it as the manifestation of a deeper process unfolding within human con-

sciousness and history. This paper focuses in particular on Lectures VI–VIII, where Schelling articulates the decisive conceptual shift of the work: mythology is neither fabricated nor historically instituted but emerges from a pre-historical process through which humanity itself comes into being.

Lecture VI introduces the hypothesis of an original unity of humankind grounded in the recognition of a universal God. From this starting point Schelling develops the concept of “relative monotheism”, which precedes the differentiation of peoples and languages and gives rise to mythology as a lawful process of differentiation. Mythology thus accompanies the historical emergence of nations and linguistic plurality rather than resulting from arbitrary invention. In this sense, myth is inseparable from the genesis of human history itself.

Lectures VII and VIII deepen this thesis by interpreting biblical narratives — especially the Flood and the figure of Abraham — as witnesses to this primordial stage of religious consciousness. Schelling argues that even early monotheism retains a mythological dimension and cannot be understood as a purely rational or abstract doctrine of God. Instead, mythology expresses a *theogonic* process that unfolds within consciousness prior to reflective thought. This process is “subjective” insofar as it occurs within human consciousness, yet its content consists of real divine potencies that generate both consciousness and nature.

The consequence is a striking philosophical thesis: mythology is neither illusion nor symbolic disguise but the unconscious revelation of the divine within history. The history of myth therefore appears as a natural process through which the divine powers that ground reality become progressively manifest in human consciousness. In this perspective, history itself assumes the character of nature — a dynamic process governed by inner necessity rather than arbitrary human construction.

By reconstructing Schelling’s account of myth as an unconscious, pre-reflective revelation, this paper argues that his philosophy of mythology provides a distinctive framework for thinking the relation between nature, history, and revelation. Myth is neither merely cultural nor purely theological: it is the medium through which the natural history of consciousness becomes intelligible. In this sense, Schelling’s philosophy offers an original way of reconsidering the idea of nature — not as a static substrate, but as a histori-

cal process through which meaning, community, and religious consciousness emerge.

Robert Marsland

What can the Bible teach us about Biology? Order and agency in early Christian cosmology

The past two decades have opened exciting new horizons for theoretical biology. The immense empirical labors of the genomic era have dissolved the dream of achieving a comprehensive mechanistic account of the biosphere. While many biologists have taken this as a cue to leave theory behind, contenting themselves with generating training data for statistical models, others have seen an invitation to explore new ways of thinking previously excluded from mainstream scientific discourse. In this talk, I will argue that the view of the cosmos emerging from the encounter of Hebrew, Christian and Greek wisdom traditions in ancient Alexandria provides a promising context for integrating some of the latest developments in theoretical biology into a coherent world-picture. In particular, I will show how the cosmological speculation of Origen, as further developed by Maximus the Confessor, embraces two central themes in this sector of biological research: the relational identity of organisms as parts of a larger order, and the true agency of organisms as causes of their own goal-seeking behavior.

Travis McKinney

Yielding Before Nature's Indifference: Annie Dillard, Heidegger, and Relational Intelligibility

This paper examines how encounters with indifferent nature may result not in nihilism but renewed relational intelligibility through ontological destabilization, attentiveness, and release. Focusing primarily on Annie Dillard's essay "Living Like Weasels", I argue that Dillard's encounter with a weasel suspends for her the familiar interpretive structures through which modernity ordinarily secures meaning and selfhood, producing an experience closely aligned with Martin Heidegger's account of profound boredom, uncanniness, and

the withdrawal of everyday legibility. Nature's in-difference here exposes the human being to its own estrangement from being. Drawing on Heidegger's later notion of *Gelassenheit* ("releasement"), as well as Simone Weil's understanding of attention and affliction, I argue that Dillard's response to her own ontological destabilization is neither an existential self-assertion nor retreat into despair, but yielding: a relinquishment of mastery and an openness to mystery. Silence and attentive openness become necessary conditions for *poietic* disclosure. Nature's indifference thus becomes paradoxically generative, opening the possibility for a renewed mode of dwelling and openness to being.

Anthony Momah

Towards a shared and common nature

Before examining the Aristotelian explanation of nature, it is necessary to emphasize that what is most natural to the human person is reason. According to Aristotle, nature (*physis*) is the internal principle of order that enables things to grow, change, and act according to what they are. Similarly, for Aquinas, nature is the essence of a thing considered as the source of its operations. However, contemporary philosophical ethics is often shaped by relativism, skepticism, and nihilism—perspectives that tend to dismiss these classical explanations of nature as outdated or obsolete. In this context, the removal of the transcendent dimension of metaphysics from philosophical inquiry risks leading human reason toward an partial or lost state.

Aristotle explains that scientific knowledge (*epistēmē*) consists in knowing something through its causes. Technology (*technē*), by contrast, refers to a rational skill or craft directed toward production; it is knowledge of how to make or do things according to right reason. Thus, while science enables us to understand the *what* of a thing through its causes, technology concerns the *how* of its production in accordance with rational principles. Knowing both the "what" and the "how" of a thing becomes a path toward understanding its nature. In his metaphysics, Aristotle describes metaphysics as the science that studies being insofar as it is being. Unlike disciplines such as biology or physics, metaphysics does not focus on a particular category of things; rather, it investigates what it means for anything to

exist at all. Yet if sciences such as biology, physics, and chemistry are recognized as systematic inquiries into causes and principles, the question naturally arises: what is the purpose of technology—especially emerging forms such as artificial intelligence and biotechnology? Are these developments ultimately intended to support human nature, or do they risk replacing human capacities, even at accessible or affordable costs?

This situation calls for a rethinking on the concept of nature across both the sciences and technological disciplines. Human reason itself involves an integration of intelligibility, the will, and the emotions. When culture exaggerates one or two of these elements at the expense of the others, human nature becomes fragmented. The absolutization of a particular standpoint may even arise from the absence or neglect of another.

Consequently, contemporary culture increasingly trains artificial intelligences to function as stimulative sources of positive psychological reinforcement for human beings. Yet this raises an important question: does stimulation through digitally informative emotions really enhance human nature?

Finally, theology — understood as the science of God — invites further reflection on ‘how’ human beings communicate the knowledge of God to one another. This communication involves more than a merely technical *how*; it also concerns a transmissible form capable of reaching persons meaningfully. The form of theological transmission may begin with shared knowledge and common ground before presenting the deeper message it conveys. In this way, a renewed understanding of nature — integrating reason, science, technology, and theology — may contribute to recovering a more complete vision of human nature within an increasingly polarized cultural landscape.

Riccardo Mona

The Naturalistic Foundation of Value: An Aristotelian-Thomistic Approach

This paper aims to demonstrate the plausibility of an Aristotelian-Thomistic approach to the naturalistic grounding of value, drawing on insights from contemporary anthropology and evolutionary biology. While modern philosophy has radically separated being and

ought, nature and normativity, I argue that the Aristotelian-Thomistic framework offers a way to think of a gradual transition between the two. In a Thomistic perspective, I'll show that any *being* always entails an *ought*. In this perspective, I will show that we can overcome Modern hollowing of nature, and once more consider it as a source of values for human action.

The argument will unfold along two main lines. First, I'll show how contemporary evolutionary biology reflects a resurgence of Aristotelian formal and final causality. In this context, it is crucial to emphasize that an Aristotelian and Thomistic understanding of living organisms involves a conception of teleology that does not reduce to mere survival, well-being, or utility, on which attempts at naturalising morality by authors such as Harris or Pinker usually focus. I'll argue, however, that they presuppose a shallow and impoverished concept of nature. A richer concept can be recovered through Aristotelian teleology. The preservation of what Aquinas called *form*, which can today be interpreted as the emergent ability of the organism of upholding its integrated unity, shows that natural teleology consists in an activity (Aristotle's *enérgeia*) of the organism itself. "Ought" and normativity, as opposed to mere being, are always present because life actively organises itself rather than being a passive outcome of other phenomena. The coextension of being and normativity can be supported, in a Thomistic view, if we consider that "the good" is a transcendental, thus coextensive with being, and that according to Aquinas the good inevitably introduces a normative aspect. While survival or well-being are indeed part of form preservation, they don't fully capture its scope. This opens the possibility of claiming that the *telos* toward which living beings tend – which may serve as the foundation for a naturalistic account of value – extends beyond mere survival and encompasses a broader spectrum of meanings.

Secondly, building upon advances in anthropology and evolutionary biology, I'll identify specific phenomena that illustrate how the teleological nature of living beings can function as a bridge between the natural and the normative dimensions, thus making nature something that can represent a source of values for human beings. More precisely, I aim to trace a trajectory from contexts where the normative dimension is minimally present to those where it becomes increasingly salient, culminating in the free and rational agency of human beings. I'll focus in particular on phenomena such as epige-

netics, niche construction, and cultural evolution. In each of these, living organisms exhibit species-specific tendencies toward an *ought-to-be*, a telos that presents itself as a task to be realized. These phenomena point towards an active engagement of organisms with their environments, highlighting the teleological orientation of life toward ends that acquire the character of naturalistically grounded values.

Declan O'Byrne

*Nature Lost and Regained: Acting *Kata Physein* in John Zizioulas's Eschatological Personalism*

This paper takes as its central question a specific lacuna in John Zizioulas's theology, present even in his final work *Remembering the Future* (2023): the absence of a sustained positive account of acting *kata physein* (according to one's nature). This absence is symptomatic of a structural tension that persists across his development: a tendency to oppose person to nature, so that redemption is often narrated as liberation from 'nature' rather than the healing of nature's own movement. While *Remembering the Future* helpfully clarifies aspects of his earlier, much criticized elevation of "per-son" over "nature" and explicitly reworks ontology in an eschatological key, he appears to remain reluctant to say that eschatological completion is inscribed in nature's own *logos* and *natural will*.

This is especially striking when his work is read alongside Maximus, whom Metropolitan John invokes as a primary authority. Zizioulas appears to assume an asymmetry between "being" and "well being", on the one hand, and "eternal well being" on the other: the former mark the contingent realm of created existence, the latter is emphatically a gift of God's free decision, rather than the explicit realization of a teleology inscribed in nature's own *physis*. The contrast with Maximus is clear. For the 7th century monk-philosopher eternal well being is precisely the fulfillment of the *logos* of human *physis* and the natural will's movement *kata physein* toward God.

The deeper source of this persistence is hermeneutical: a metaphysical redeployment of conciliar terms (person, nature, *hypostasis*, *ousia*), that tends to stabilize a nature/person polarity and to overlay it with a modern schema of nature as necessity versus person as freedom. Thus, even in *Remembering the Future*, where Zizioulas explicitly

radicalizes escha-tology and insists that truth comes from the future and not from a protological state, the being / well being / eternal well being triad is not fully received in the Maximian sense. The “kata physein” lacuna is precisely the point at which the gap between well being and eternal well being becomes visible, and so reveals the limits of an eschatological revision carried out within a framework that still tends to cast person and nature in oppositional terms.

Sean. R. Palmer

Science, Nature, and Relation: Evaluating the Scientific Claims of Mimetic Theory and its Implications towards a Relational Philosophy of Nature

To understand Mimetic Theory, one engages with two interconnected ‘theories’: Mimetic Desire and the Scapegoat Mechanism. The combination of both is what is usually termed Girard’s Mimetic Theory, which is his architectonic ‘explanatory hypothesis.’ This can be brought to explain most literature, art, cinema, religion, or even less intellectual parts of daily life, such as dating applications or Facebook advertising schemes. We are quite clearly in the midst of the cultural moment of Girard’s hypothesis — references in pop philosophy, ‘tech bros,’ even political leaders, all citing ‘mimetic desire’ indicate something about the intuitive persuasiveness of Girard’s insight. The purpose of this article is not necessarily to wade into this debate or develop why Girard’s thought has found a popular audience, but to show how, despite his Darwinian pretensions or Freudian influences, that his social scientific theory is in fact a scientific theory, and not only one that befits the criteria elaborated by Thoms Kuhn’s famous paradigm shift, but one that is able to coexist within a philosophy of Nature. Thus, not only is Mimetic theory a scientific approach to understanding, seeking more empirical causes and connections, but it is also a standpoint on natural phenomena that attempts to dissolve the subject-object distinction, as seen in Schelling’s *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*.

How can mimetic theory straddle both domains? Between science, which is the approach towards a reduction and abstraction from nature, in order to predict, quantify, and gain deeper insight into its functions, while still affirming nature as the source and whole that is more

than the condition for human activity, but human activity itself is *natural*? I will show that the modern turn to the subject, which in our contemporary experience is even more abstracted and virtual, relies on the affirmation of the subject over and against objects that it can gain ‘mastery and possession’ of. Mimetic theory directly challenges not only this view of subjectivity but also the ethical problematic that ignores the objective sphere as conditioning the subjective through a common social relational composition. This ethical and epistemological condition of subjectivity shows that the current paradigm shift in mimetic theory, in which relational intersubjectivity is empirically discovered via mirror neurons, heralds a path for science to become more relational, not merely as an effort to gain mastery over the objective sphere. This mimetic paradigm has begun to undermine the previous one, which was a ‘magnificent edifice’ of rationality, supported by pragmatic and even entertaining simulacra, in which the proliferation of information limited our rational or interpretive frames to the subject's point of view. By underpinning Mimetic theory with a philosophy of nature that reemphasizes the human as not merely a subject but as both subject and object in an ‘absolute identity’ with nature, a relational view of the scientific (relating the human, science, and nature) becomes conceptually possible.

Jack Louis Pappas

Nature, Person, and Intertwining: Retrieving Merleau-Ponty's l'être sauvage as a Submerged Christology

The tension between the seemingly “pre-personal” givenness of nature and the dynamism of the concrete subject has been a persistent problem in both phenomenological and theological accounts of human existence. While much recent philosophical theology has attempted to think through this tension, it has often done so in ways that leave nature and personhood in a relation of mutual externality — either reifying nature as an impersonal field that swallows the subject, or elevating the personal subject against nature in a way that severs it from its own constitutive ground. This tendency is visible across otherwise quite different intellectual traditions: in Jean-Paul Sartre's existential ontology; in the Christian personalisms of Nikolai Berdyaev and Emmanuel Mounier; and in the more recent Eastern Orthodox persona-

lism of John Zizioulas and Christos Yannaras, where the hypostatic freedom of the person is articulated in terms that risk setting personhood and nature into a similarly antinomic opposition.

This paper proposes that Maurice Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology offers a more generative point of departure for thinking this relation. Against accounts that treat nature and personhood as antinomically opposed, Merleau-Ponty's concepts of the flesh (*la chair*) and "wild being" (*l'être sauvage*) establish their mutual correlation or "intertwining" (*chiasmus*) as ontologically primary. On this account, nature is not a brute impersonal given that the subject either negates or is absorbed into, but the very medium in which subjectivity takes shape — always already oriented toward personal expression, even in its pre-personal depth. I further argue that this chiasmic structure is not merely a phenomenological finding but carries a suppressed theological valence that becomes legible when read against the Christological metaphysics of Maximus the Confessor. Maximus's account of the relationship between the one Logos and the many *logoi* — in which the inner principles of created things are both genuinely distinct and dynamically gathered into the one person of the Word — exhibits a formally analogous structure to Merleau-Ponty's chiasm. Re-theologizing Merleau-Ponty's on these terms, I thus argue that the flesh and wild being provide the conceptual resources for a more radically Chalcedonian understanding of the nature-person relationship — one in which nature (*physis*) is grasped as always already inwardly ordered toward personal expression, and personhood (*hypostasis*) is understood not as the negation or transcendence of nature but as its creative incarnation and fulfillment.

Sam Pimentel

Digital Microcosms: Climate Modelling and the Intelligibility of Nature

Modern climate models represent an ambitious scientific effort to mathematically represent the dynamics of the Earth system. Built upon coupled representations of atmospheric physics, ocean circulation, cryospheric processes, and biogeochemical cycles, these models integrate diverse physical processes into a unified computational framework. Their success raises a philosophical question central to

ongoing debates about the status of nature in modern thought: what must the world be like for such modelling to be possible?

Climate modelling is often regarded as the culmination of the modern reductionist project: the entire Earth system translated into differential equations, parameterization schemes, and numerical algorithms. On this reading, “nature” is finally dissolved — replaced by a computational mechanism. Yet this paper argues that the practice of climate modelling presupposes a deeply intelligible natural order. Far from reducing nature to a single mechanistic substrate, Earth system models depend upon a layered and relational structure in which diverse processes remain both distinct and mathematically articulable. Fluid dynamics, radiation physics, chemical cycles, and ecological feedbacks must each be represented according to their own governing principles while remaining dynamically coupled within a coherent system. The possibility of constructing such models therefore reflects an underlying order in which multiple levels of causation coexist within a unified yet differentiated whole.

Building on this observation, the paper proposes that climate models may be understood as digital microcosms: computational worlds that mirror, in simplified yet structured form, the dynamic order of the Earth system. Like earlier cosmological representations that sought to render the order of the world intelligible through symbolic or geometric means, climate models construct a mathematically mediated representation of planetary processes through measurement, abstraction, and simulation. They are not replicas of nature but structured representations that reveal the intelligible relations underlying complex natural phenomena.

Finally, the paper suggests that modelling provides a distinctive form of participatory knowledge. It is a way of knowing that may be understood as a finite participation in the divine intellect by which creation is sustained. By exploring counterfactual scenarios and projecting future trajectories under varying conditions, climate models map the range of possible futures permitted by the causal structures of the Earth system. In doing so, they illuminate the possibility space of creation, the structured field of potential outcomes within which human actions participate and exercise influence. Modelling therefore functions not only as a predictive tool but as a mode of mediated participation in the openness and intelligibility of creation itself.

In this way, contemporary climate science may contribute to the recovery of a richer conception of nature: not a fiction, not a mere me-

chanism, but a reality that discloses its Creator. It reveals a world that is ordered and intelligible, whose patterns can be represented, explored, and responsibly engaged.

Piotr Sebastian Popiołek

Theosis and Transhumanism: Nature, Grace, and Limits of Technological Eschatology

In his lectures on Catholic Social Ethics, Karol Wojtyła spoke of the “objective superiority of the communist ideal”. However, the problem with this idea was that it presupposed a perfected human nature — free from greed, and attachment to material goods. As he emphasized, such an ideal cannot be realized in a world after the Fall, marked by original sin. Consequently, any attempt at the universal implementation of communism must ultimately rely on coercion and violence. History has shown that the future pope was right.

Today, another form of utopianism looms over the world, offered to us by utopian futurists, tech billionaires and megacorporations. They promise a new vision of transcendence in which the human being is reduced to a machine, a stream of information that can be modified and enhanced. In the Christian doctrine of theosis, human nature is perfected by grace in accordance with its inner potential. God purifies our likeness to Him, so that we become like the Son, the Man-God — we are, as the Polish dogmatic theologian Czesław Bartnik put it, “christified.” What we encounter here are two radically different visions of transcendence and the perfection of the human being. The vision proposed by “dataist” utopians is detached from the creative spirit of the human person, participation in God and human telos, and grounded instead in the external technical manipulation of biological body and mind (which can be reduced to data).

The vision of the future society that follows from this anthropology is equally at odds with the Christian tradition. This new technological utopia, a parody of the Kingdom of God, is built upon the promise of a world without suffering, without work, with scarcity eliminated and universal access to comfort and luxury. In these techno-eschatological visions of Yuval Noah Harari, Aaron Bastani, and Nick Bostrom, human labor is largely automated, replaced by robots and AI, and humanity is liberated from toil and hardship through technology.

This, however, is a naïve vision — about which warned pope Benedict XVI in *Spe Salvi*: changes in external conditions, technological progress, and improved tools do not transform the condition of human nature itself. The “technofeudal lords,” as Yanis Varoufakis calls them, offer us a quasi-Pelagian dystopia — one in which, not through virtue and good works but through technology and the violent domination of nature, we attempt to free ourselves from the burden of original sin and become gods. According to this secularist theory of salvation, the human nature is not perfected by God, but it is destined to become god via technological advancement. Techno-utopians are not outright negating transcendence, but they reproduce it in an immanent, technological form.

Daniele Puleio - S. Furlan

On the Shores of the Cosmic Ocean: Rethinking Life and Nature Through Wheeler’s Participatory Universe

In 1970 Jacques Monod published his famous book “Le hasard et la nécessité”, in which — in the name of science and scientific rationality — the existence of life and consciousness appears as a meaningless contingency in the vast, desolate immensities of the universe that were already terrifying Blaise Pascal. A few years later, this view was echoed in another popular book by an authoritative theoretical physicist and cosmologist such as Steven Weinberg, with “The First Three Minutes” (1977). People cherishing these “classics” seem often to assume, implicitly, that the barren view of nature and life therein expressed corresponds to the verdict of contemporary scientific rationality. However, such a view actually elicited some reaction from other distinguished scientists, even when they were not moved by specifically religious motivations. A rather well-known case is that of Ilya Prigogine, who, with “La nouvelle alliance”, explicitly challenged Monod’s text. Archival research allows us to place these conceptual tensions within even richer and more fascinating intellectual constellations, though. For instance, Freeman Dyson too reacted against Weinberg’s picture of the universe, and the same goes for his friend John Archibald Wheeler, who had some interesting and largely unexplored exchanges with Prigogine as well. Wheeler’s case is particularly stimulating not just because he seemed to capture all these tensions, but mainly because, in those same

years, he was attempting a new kind of Naturphilosophie, drawing inspiration from Leibniz, Schelling, Peirce, Darwin, as well as from problems and results of the new cosmology informed by general relativity. Even if all this remained largely hidden in his unpublished notebooks, the peculiar cosmological vision that Wheeler developed ever since Copernicus's fifth centenary in 1973 — as will be detailed in this talk — has actually had an impact on more recent scientific ideas. Perhaps the most interesting episode of this reception concerns another distinguished scientist who, at a popular level, is often associated with anti-religious or even anti-philosophical claims, Stephen Hawking. In his last years, partly inspired by Wheeler's previous ideas, he collaborated with Thomas Hertog to develop a cosmological picture in which our role as observers within the universe ("observers-participators", in Wheeler's jargon) is not a mere accident, but plays a crucial role in the organization of the cosmos itself — a cosmological picture in which we are "at home in the universe" (Wheeler), instead of being thrown in a meaningless and immense space. Will this be a viable way to recover a broader, richer notion of Nature?

Duncan Reyburn

A fairy-tale phenomenology of nature

For G. K. Chesterton, nature invites our perplexity. Its meaning is found in a paradoxical participation that cannot be entirely encapsulated in any concept or formula. Indeed, Chesterton is bothered by our reductionist tendencies. He writes, with reference to a biblical notion, "The real problem is — Can the lion lie down with the lamb and still retain his royal ferocity?" The mistake of the person he half-jokingly calls the "maniac" is to adopt a mechanised perception that has grown used to one way of viewing things and has thus become dull to the call of being. This gives rise to the idolisation of a rationality that downplays our more religious inclinations. The constricted perception of the maniac fosters and entrenches malaise. The maniacal perspective is bewitched by immediacy and self-mediation, and reduces what is encountered to ready-made interpretive assumptions and categories; it is more or less closed off to incarnate surprise.

While mindful of this and more, Chesterton makes it one of his core aims in his work to disrupt mechanised perception through a consi-

stent appeal to formal causality. He seeks to reawaken awe in his readers in several ways, most notably by attending to analogy, paradox, humour, and imaginative defamiliarisation, which I reframe as *rewondering* or *rewonderment* as the main focus of this paper. Here, I explore Chesterton's *rewondering* with reference to his understanding of how fairy tales (and his own writing of fairy tales) serve re-encountering and rethinking nature, which he wants us to see as always already graced and supernaturalised, while also encouraging us to think better of the place of the human being in the cosmos.

I clarify what is happening, phenomenologically and theologically speaking, in Chestertonian *rewondering*, to differentiate it from the more 'deconstructive' approaches associated with defamiliarisation, as evident, for example, in Shklovsky's *ostranenie* or Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*. Chesterton's unique form of attunement — implied most famously in his 'Ethics of Elfland' chapter in *Orthodoxy* (1908) but suggested elsewhere as well — employs what I call a 'fairy-tale phenomenology' to restore humility and wonder, and help us to see that nature is not our 'mother' but our 'sister'.

Calum Robson

"Trinitarian Ontology and the Bohm-Hiley interpretation of Quantum Mechanics"

The mathematics of classical physics, describing a Cartesian and atomic universe, is suited to systems which can be described separately from their surroundings and independently of the way in which they are interacted with. Conversely, quantum physics describes systems which cannot be isolated from their environment and which cannot be measured (and hence interacted with) without being changed. In the late 20th century the physicists David Bohm and Basil Hiley developed an approach to understanding quantum theory based on the distinction between a holistic, non-local, 'implicate' order, and a local and separated, 'explicate' order. The universe is intrinsically holistic and forms an implicate order. In measuring a part of the universe, we bring that part from the implicate order to the explicate order.

I will show how this approach gives a relational — and even a Trinitarian-ontology. First, using the semiotics of C.F. Pierce, I will

analyse the implicate/ explicate distinction in terms of object/representation, with the act of measurement as the third, linking, term. This gives a triadic structure, which can be understood as fundamentally Trinitarian. I will conclude by discussing how this motivates a relational ontology for physics, and as a corollary I will suggest how Newton's view of absolute space and time is linked to his Arian Christology.

Paweł Rojek

Relational Being: Aquinas and Analytic Ontology of Relation

Joseph Ratzinger famously accused the Thomistic tradition of lacking a universal relational vision of being. According to him, for Aquinas only the Persons of the Holy Trinity had relational nature, not the created beings. In response, William Norris Clarke argued that in Aquinas every being, by virtue of its natural activity, is connected to all others. David Schindler went further and argued that esse of each being has an essential relation to God. In my talk, I will attempt to interpret this dispute in terms of contemporary ontology of relations. It seems that Clarke merely pointed out that, for Aquinas, relations are grounded in the nature of their terms, whereas for Schindler, created things stand in essential or constitutive relation to God. The idea of essential relation is one of the key concepts of Ontic Structural Realism, a position inspired by contemporary science and developed within the framework of analytic philosophy. It seems that it is precisely the combination of Thomism and OSR that can lead to a new understanding of the relational nature of all beings.

Enrico Schirò

Philosophies of Nature after Schelling: Baudrillard Reconsidered

Back in the 1990s, in his theory of *maleficent ecology*, Jean Baudrillard argued that «there is no need to reconcile with nature». Instead we need to acknowledge its exponential potency of instability and stability — something that neither chaos theory nor complexity theory fully captures. This claim is usually underestimated as

a mere exercise in irony, due to the dominance of a mainstream interpretation of Baudrillard that reduces his thought to signs, simulacra, and simulation.

However, in his 1998 essay “Schellingianism and Postmodernity: Towards a Materialist Naturphilosophie”, Iain Hamilton Grant proposed a suggestive parallel between Baudrillard and Friedrich W. J. Schelling. According to Grant, they share a common problem: how to circumvent the Kantian pan-representationalist aporia. Whereas Schelling addresses this problem by placing nature and freedom in a chiasmic relation — such that semiotic cognition appears as the product of a natural ontogenetic process — Baudrillard’s hyperreality may likewise be interpreted in this ontogenetic sense.

Recent research has brought to light previously unnoticed Schellingian traces in Baudrillard’s work, beginning with his persistent references to the *Weltalter* from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s. This discovery makes it possible to develop Grant’s intuition in a new way. A key aspect overlooked by past scholarship is Baudrillard’s use of the Schellingian concept of *Steigerung*, or *steigernde Potenz*. Schelling places this notion at the center of his strategy against the Hegelian model of dialectical sublation. In the 1813 draft of the *Weltalter*, he presents what Xavier Tilliette calls the “loi de la Steigerung, ou du Potenzieren” as a fundamental principle of his philosophy of nature.

As is well known, Schelling’s objection to the Hegelian conception of becoming-other through determinate negation is that it operates solely at the level of conceptual mediation and therefore cannot adequately account for the complexity of natural processes. To avoid this dialectical sublation, Schelling develops a conception based on doubling (*Doublierung*) and intensification (*Steigerung*) of identity. When an identity doubles itself (A as A), it multiplies with itself (A·A) and thereby manifests as other than itself (B) without undergoing determinate negation (¬A), but rather by being elevated to a higher potency (A²).

Baudrillard develops a similar anti-Hegelian logic when he speaks of «this revolution in things which no longer lies in their dialectical sublating (*Aufhebung*), but in their potentiation (*Steigerung*), in their elevation to the potency of two, to the nth potency». This *steigernde Potenz*, which Baudrillard explicitly describes as “exponential”, lies at the basis of his concept of maleficent ecology. Any ecological

thought remains “benevolent”, since it tends toward reconciliation in the Hegelian sense. Conversely, even theories of chaos that emphasize the turbulence of nature fail to capture the Schellingian logic of exponential intensification through which nature can be as much disorder (instability) as it is order (stability), without any reconciliation between the two.

Jan Juhani Steinmann

The Poetry of Grace

The alienation of humans from nature and their own naturalness is rooted today in a revolutionary paradigm shift that we are all currently experiencing. Not only does this threaten to replace classical *humanitas* with technological transhumanity, but it also gives rise to a new, technocentric understanding of the true, the good, the beautiful and the sacred. Metaphysics is being replaced by materialistic feasibility, understanding by information, judgement by automation, cultivation by optimisation, and the old creator god by a new technological god. This shift is characterised today by terms such as high-tech, human enhancement, big data, singularity and artificial intelligence. The digital drowns out the formerly real, the artificial the originally natural, the virtual the primarily physical, and even reverence for life gives way to the availability of matter. The one-sided and excessive emphasis on the artificiality of mere technology thus alienates us from nature, culture and the true God.

Overcoming this crisis and renewing a healthy and well-founded relationship with nature requires a return to grace. For nature and naturalness can only be adequately conceived in the light of grace, which has always complemented nature beyond nature, namely *from* God (as the creator of nature) and *towards* God (as the redeemer of nature). To grace human beings always respond poetically, and that means not primarily through the means of lyric poetry (although that too), but through a poetry of existential responsiveness and creative power (from the ancient Greek ποίησις, *poiesis*, meaning creation, making and crafting). Where this allows us to recognise nature again in its blessedness *from* God and *towards* God, it proves to be a *poetry of grace*. This dual movement of a poetry of grace is analogical in nature (from the Greek ἀναγωγή (*anagoge*), in the verbal

form ἀνάγειν (*anágein*), meaning both “leading up” and “bringing back”), because it advances both into the depths (*from* God) and into the heights (*towards* God). Its double opening thus allows us a general poeticisation of the true, the good, the beautiful and the sacred; and with it a regaining of nature and naturalness in the light of grace. Concretely, this can be achieved if we approach the true anew through a *poetic phenomenology* (the body-responsive illustration of pathos as a gift), the good through a *poetic doctrine of virtue* (an ethos of fertility and abundance of value), the beautiful through a *poetic culture of form* (a new art in the interstice between figuration and symbol), and the sacred through a *paradigm of theo-humanity* (the reconsideration of theosis as the destiny of creation). Such a *poetry of grace* is holistic and proves grace to be the *poetry of nature* even beyond the whole, namely towards the truly divine.

Catalina Vial

By knowing and loving the rational creature attains to God Himself. Divinization in Aquinas

In recent decades, the topic of divinization, which was traditionally associated with Eastern theology, has also gained particular relevance among scholars working in the Western theological tradition. By contrast, the concept of “created grace,” which in some way characterized Latin scholastic theology, has been pushed into the background. At the same time, in the history of theology the terms “divinization” and “grace” are often connected with the notion of participation (2 Pt 1:4). In applying the concept of participation, Aquinas follows the principle that whatever is participated is always received according to the mode of the receiver, not of the giver. This means that when a creature participates in the divine nature, it does so in a finite way. Aquinas usually uses the term “sanctifying grace” to refer to participation in the divine nature. By contrast, the vocabulary of deification (*deificatio*, *deificare*, *deificus*) appears only rarely in his writings. One possible reason is that Aquinas wishes to avoid expressions that might be imprecise, namely, statements suggesting that human beings are gods in a human way, without truly being God. However, this does not mean that Aquinas lacks a doctrine of divinization; rather, he expresses it using different terminology. According to Aquinas, when the human person knows and loves the

Triune God, in this very activity the person “reaches” or “touches” God himself (attigit ad ipsum Deum; ST I, q. 43, a. 3). Through charity, wisdom, and the beatific vision, the human person performs acts that are divine in character. This allows us to speak of a true divinization, without in any way diminishing the infinite distance that remains between the creature and the Creator. The aim of this paper is to explore the concept of divinization in Thomistic doctrine, within the context of a personal relationship made possible by the divine missions and by created grace — that is, sanctifying grace and the gifts of grace, especially the theological virtues.

Virgil Lualhati McCorgray - Anna K. Winters
Catastrophic Metacritique and the Paradox of Nature

Christian metaphysics is an extended project in theorizing nature as structural openness to grace. Aristotelian philosophy is the historically privileged meta-language of Christian metaphysics for the not-so-simple reason that Aristotle endeavored to theorize the entanglement of form and matter. But whereas Aristotle himself sought to clarify their mutual jurisdictions, Christian metaphysics postulated the independent principle of hypostasis. But it is this move that sets into motion what Hans Urs von Balthasar called the “catastrophe of nominalism”. Nominalism doubled down on the meta-category of singularity centered by the dogma of incarnation, disposing of every model of complexity, every multi-layer model of nature developed by Christian Aristotelianism thus far. The historical success of the nominalist school is predicated on a theoretically valid hysteria over the absolute priority of singularity for Christian thought. Nominalism thus anticipates modern science’s radical purification and replacement of the human subject by the signifier with its research program of transcendent atomism. Aristotelian substance does not so much cause nominalist metaphysics to ‘over value’ singularity as much as Aristotelianism simply lacks sufficient resources to stabilize cosmic architecture under the weight of incarnational singularity. Nominalism is the catastrophe set (of metaphysics) in the sense developed by mathematician Rene Thom: a region of singularities in a system where smooth changes suddenly result in discontinuous shifts in a stable equilibrium state. If nomi-

nalism is the critical point of Christian metaphysics, we seek to elucidate the structure of criticality by catastrophic metacritique.

The paper makes a broad appeal to Rene Thom's catastrophic "kinematics of form" to elicit a kinematics of metaphysical form. The history of metaphysics is implicated in salvation history as a process of producing models of meaning about that history. We think morphogenetically about a salvation history in which the theorization of nature as nature subjects that theorization to semiotic catastrophe. We therefore theorize metaphysical form semiophysically, with reference to the second moment of Thom's visionary design. The catastrophe of metaphysics articulates a dynamic of meaning embedded in nature that metaphysics performs unconsciously. "Semiophysics" directs us to a metaphysical overcoming of metaphysics, which brings itself to its catastrophic minimum to herald an order of thinking at once continuous and discontinuous with Aristotelian tradition. Drawing on Ferdinand Ulrich's account of the "crisis of being," we claim that the apocalyptic reduction incarnation set as a task for thought instructs us to think nature paralleled by systematic supernatural purification of the fallen drift towards the unnatural. This enables a third differentiation of the modalities of physis with a para-physics that situates the natural as a paradoxical category dependent on the supernatural for its identity, while self-othering if relegated to self-sufficiency.

In sum, the paper strives to convey three basic arguments: 1) that metaphysics yields a physics of meaning, with nominalism understood as a special case of semiotic catastrophe; 2) that a dynamical supplement to kinematics is needed to theorize metaphysics as a site of production of semiophysics; 3) that metaphysical semiosis is an organic surplus of nature from the perspective of incarnational morphogenesis.

Gianluca Zuccaro

Physical Laws Between Exemplarism and Process: A Historical Arc from Franciscan Scholasticism to Contemporary Philosophy of Nature

The question of the nature of physical laws — whether they are necessary or contingent, imposed or intrinsic, static or dynamic —

has accompanied Western natural philosophy from its scholastic origins to the present day. This paper traces a historically structured argument across three moments: First, Bonaventure's medieval exemplarism; second, Newton's mechanistic nomology; and third, contemporary process philosophy of nature. The paper argues that this historical progression reveals a progressive recovery of insights that modernity had systematically suppressed.

For Bonaventure, the intelligible order of nature is grounded in divine rationes aeternae. The Word impresses exemplary forms upon created things, making physical regularities participatory expressions of an infinite Logos. Nature is not a closed mechanism, but rather, a web of vestigia that is intrinsically referential and transparent to a transcendent rational ground. Lawfulness and meaning are inseparable here.

Newton's scientific revolution decisively reconfigured this intellectual inheritance. In his work, especially in the *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1687), nature is described through universal mathematical laws that govern the motion of bodies within absolute space and time. While the theological framework was not entirely abandoned — Newton still understood God as the creator and sustainer of the natural order — the explanatory structure of natural philosophy changed profoundly. Matter appears largely passive, motion is determined by mathematically formulated laws, and the cosmos increasingly takes on the character of a vast mechanism. Thus, the traditional Aristotelian conception of nature as an intrinsic, teleological principle of motion gradually gave way to a mathematically structured order.

Contemporary process philosophy marks a significant rupture with this Newtonian inheritance. Drawing on Whitehead's metaphysics of creative advance (*Process and reality*, 1929), the philosophy of nature understands physical laws as emergent, historically conditioned patterns that arise within the temporal unfolding of reality itself, not as timeless, external decrees. Quantum mechanics, non-equilibrium thermodynamics, and complexity theory lend scientific credibility to this processual vision. According to this vision, lawfulness is inseparable from becoming and regularity from creativity. Theologically, this allows us to rethink divine agency as a continuously creative ground that sustains and orients natural self-organization, rather than as the imposition of fixed nomological structure. This vision recovers the Bonaventurian intuition that

creation is constitutively ordered toward an inexhaustible logos in a dynamized form.

In conclusion, this historical arc is not merely retrospective, but also constructive. Retrieving Bonaventure's exemplarism through the lens of process thought enables us to articulate physical laws as genuinely contingent yet deeply intelligible. They are not brute facts nor logical necessities, but rather the dynamic grammar of a creation that remains open to both scientific inquiry and theological contemplation.



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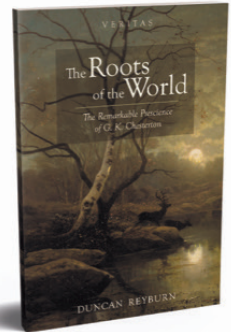
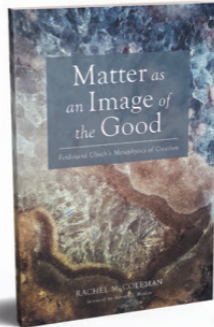
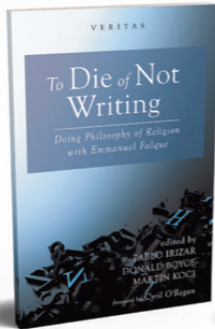
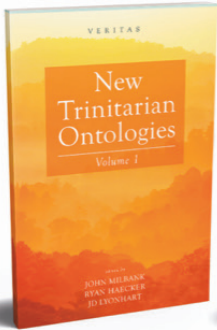
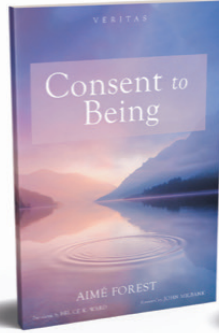
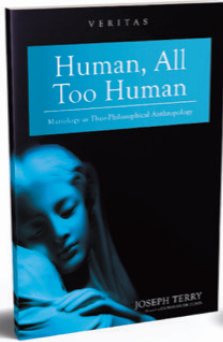
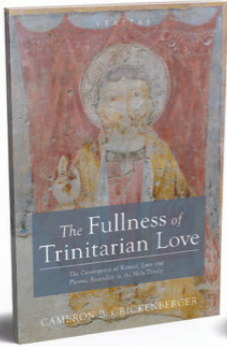
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