

Program Draft

24/6	25/6	26/6
8.45 Greetings	8.45 Photo on the terrace	8.45 Keynote5: Wozniak
9.00 Keynote1: Coda	9.00 Keynote3: Desmond	9.30 Pro15: Haecker
9.45 Pro1: Pabst	9.45 Pro8: Edwards	10.00 Pro16: O'Callaghan
10.15 Pro2: Obolevich	10.15 Pro9: GonzálezHincapié	10.30 coffee break
10.45 Pro3: Fiedler	10.45 Pro10: Bellantone	11.00 Pro17: Grimi
11.15 coffee break	11.15 coffee break	11.30 Keynote6: Milbank
11.45 Parallel sessions 1	11.45 Parallel sessions 3	12.15 Conclusions
12.45 lunch	12.45 lunch	13.00 End
14.30 Keynote2: Ph. Gonzales	14.30 Keynote4: Hadjadj	13.30 School of Pasta (optional)
15.15 Pro4: Goodall	15.15 Pro11: Maspero	
15.45 Pro5: Cunningham	15.45 Pro12: Bathrellos	
16.15 coffee break	16.15 coffee break	
16.45 Parallel sessions 2	16.45 Parallel sessions 4	
17.45 Pro6: Tabaczek	17.45 Pro13: Sherman	
18.15 Pro7: Sr Marie	18.15 Pro14: Vigorelli	
18.45 End	18.45 End	

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 1

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

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-οὐρανός, 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.

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 délétères, la conception de l'Aquinat 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 (koinônos) 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 a 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 Trinitarian 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 empiricism 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 subjectless manifold of objects: first, in Quentin Meillassoux'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 his 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 Condillac 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

Calling humanity back to respect for its identity, or to knowledge of its own nature, amounts to mounting a conflict against 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 and was able to highlight the limits that the individual places upon his own self-determination when acting according to a principle of imitation (*mimēsis*) that mistakes self-determination for error. Studying the theology of the double creation of the human being allows us to grasp the power of freedom in the development of the original relationality of human nature, and today can serve to reinterpret the solipsistic and violent drift promoted by the absolutist logic of self-determination — a logic that cannot dispense with a paradoxical appeal to new 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 *Physis* (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.