The Ian Ramsey Centre for Science and Religion

Natural Theology in the 21st Century

2021 IRC e-Conference
ianramseycentre.ox.ac.uk
15–17 July

Speakers
Helen De Cruz
Alister McGrath
Iain McGilchrist
Olivera Petrovich

With generous support from the Issachar Fund, and in collaboration with the Laudato Si' Research Institute

University of Oxford
Ian Ramsey Centre for Science & Religion
Faculty of Theology and Religion
University of Oxford
Laudato Si' Research Institute

	Thursday 15th July 21	Friday 16th July 21	Saturday 17th July 21
08:00			
		08:45 **Introduction**	
09:00		09:00 First Plenary: Olivera Petrovitch, *"The Naturalness of Natural Theology: A Psychological Approach"*	
10:00			
		10:30 **Break**	
11:00		11:00 Parallel Short Papers I	11:00 Parallel Short Papers III
12:00			
13:00		13:00 **Lunch Break**	13:00 **Lunch Break**
		13:30 Parallel Short Papers II	13:30 Final Plenary and Second Public Lecture: Alister McGrath, *"Natural Theology: An Interface between Science and Religion?"*
14:00			
15:00			15:00 **Finish**
		15:30 **Break**	
16:00		16:00 Second Plenary: Helen de Cruz, *"A Taste for the Infinite: What Evolution can tell us about Belief in God"*	
17:00			
		17:30 **Finish**	
18:00			
19:00			
	19:30 Public Lecture: Iain McGilchrist, *"Hemispheric Asymmetry and the Approach to the Divine"*		
20:00			
21:00	21:00 **Finish**		

Natural Theology in the 21st Century

Online Conference

15-17 July 2021

Ian Ramsey Centre for Science and Religion (IRC)
Faculty of Theology and Religion, Oxford University

With gratitude to the project
"The Renewal of Natural Theology"
supported by a grant from the Issachar Fund

Themes of the Conference

Natural theology investigates what we can know or not know about the existence and essence of God and divine revelation on the basis of what we can know about nature. Developments and discoveries in our explorations of nature (e.g., Aristotelianism, Copernican revolution, Newtonian physics, Kant's Critique, Darwinian Evolution, quantum mechanics, and Big Bang cosmology) have enriched and challenged the investigations of natural theology throughout its history. Likewise, discoveries and revolutions in our understanding of nature in the 21stcentury (e.g., AI, Extended Evolutionary Synthesis, fundamental physics, etc.) will have the potential to undermine or enrich future investigations in natural theology. What questions will natural theology need to confront in the 21st century? How can these insights enrich the engagement of religious communities, such as churches, with the wider culture?

Looking backward, what lessons do the future enquiries of natural theology need to learn from its past enquiries? What are the enduring achievements, catastrophic failures, and tangential distractions from the history of natural theology? What place will cosmological, ontological, design, moral, and other arguments for God's existence have in its future investigations? What were the major contributions of the past hundred years of honorary lectures confronting questions in natural theology (e.g., Gifford, Hulsean, Bampton lectures) Looking forward, what challenges from philosophy and the sciences must natural theology confront, from numerous forms of naturalism, to metaphysics of dispositions and grounding, second-person perspective, machine learning, CRISPR, …? Are "nature" and the "natural" still viable concepts for 21st century enquiries, including those of natural theology?

What is or should be the scope of natural theology? Is it strictly concerned with evidence and arguments based in nature known apart from appeals to revelation or numinous experiences? Or, should it be construed broadly to include investigations concerning historical events, including those detailed in sacred and religious texts? What is the relationship between natural theology and the investigations of supernatural theology, philosophy of religion, analytic theology, theology of nature, and apologetics? Is natural theology "natural"? Is the very project of natural theology guilty of the charge of ontotheology? What place should metaphor and analogy have in natural theology? What role do narrative arguments, just-so stories, genealogies, and meta-narratives play in theists', atheists', and agnostics' contributions to natural theology? Can anyone—theist, agnostic, or atheist—engage the enquiries of natural theology or atheology from a neutral point of view? How might these questions be engaged by religious communities seeking to engage a wider culture and cultivate the reasoned faith of their members?

Thursday 15 July (evening only)

All these events will be online via Zoom

6:30pm	Zoom meeting open
7:30pm	PLENARY PUBLIC LECTURE Iain McGilchrist (University of Oxford) **Hemispheric Asymmetry and the Approach to the Divine**
9:00pm	Finish

Friday 16 July

All these events will be online via Zoom

8:45am	Zoom meeting open	
9:00am	PLENARY LECTURE Olivera Petrovich (Oxford Neuroscience, Department of Experimental Psychology) **The Naturalness of Natural Theology: A Psychological Approach**	
10:30am	Break	
11:00am	PARALLEL SHORT PAPERS I (THREE STREAMS)	
	STREAM A	
11:00am	**An Evaluation of The Impact of Gene-Editing Tools on Natural Theology**	Bleacher, Jonathan
11:30am	**Cognitive Science of Religion: An Invitation to Expand the Philosophy of Religion**	de Smedt, Johan

12:00pm	**The Significance of the Oneiric for Natural Theology**	Deman, Isaak
12:30pm	**A Convergence of Minds: How Simon Conway Morris Revived The Thought Of Teilhard De Chardin**	Hart, Seth
	STREAM B	
11:00am	**"If Evil exists, God Exists": Three Theistic Arguments from Evil**	Echavarría, Agustín
11:30am	**Fine-Tuning and Design: A Step Back to More Fundamental Considerations**	Hamri, Soufiane
12:00pm	**Modal Status and A Posteriori Arguments for God's Existence**	Kremers, Philipp
12:30pm	**The Kalam Cosmological Argument for the Existence of God: A 21st Century Defence**	Loke, Andrew
	STREAM C	
11:00am	**Does Reichenbachian Meta-induction Justify Induction – Or Maybe Something Else?**	Pitts, J. Brian
11:30am	**Why Natural Theology need not be Rational in order to be Reasonable**	Premkumar, Finney
12:00pm	**Ungodly Nature: Changes in Accounts of Nature and**	Sweeney, Matthew

	God from Aquinas to Descartes that Undermine Natural Theology	
12:30pm	**How to Read the Book of Nature: Maximus' Book of Nature and Methodology in the Theology-Science Dialogue**	Torrance, Eugenia
1:00pm	Lunch Break	
1:30pm	PARALLEL SHORT PAPERS II (THREE STREAMS)	
	STREAM A	
1:30pm	**CSR Exacerbates the Problem of Divine Hiddenness**	Bennett, Christopher
2:00pm	**Perseverance in Faith. Can the Mars Rover Help Us Find a Further Dimension to Natural Theology?**	Kirby, Mike
2:30pm	**Defending the Value of the Biological Design Evidence for Future Natural Theology**	Kojonen, Rope
3:00pm	**The Possibility of a Scientific Morality within a Natural Theology or a Theology of Nature**	Kumarasingham, Adrian
	STREAM B	
1:30pm	**The Probability of Desire: A Bayesian Exploration of C.S. Lewis' 'Argument from Desire'**	Simek, Slater

2:00pm	**About useful and useless meanings of causality, purpose and order to support God´s existence arguments based on scientific perspectives**	Velázquez Fernández, Hector
2:30pm	**The Ambiguity Argument for Agnosticism and the View From Nowhere in Natural Theology**	Wilczewska, Sylwia
3:00pm	**God, Nature, Reason and Experience**	Younis, Aaron

STREAM C

1:30pm	**Remembering the Jews, Expunging the Queers: Natural Law in the Wake of Auschwitz**	Benson, Bruce Ellis
2:00pm	**Storyteller God: The Postmodern Natural Theology of George MacDonald**	Evans, Robert
2:30pm	**Miracles and Necessitarian Laws of Nature**	Fatona, Buki
3:00pm	**The Possibility of Natural Theology in a World of Horrendous Evils**	Ooi, Daryl
3:30pm	Break	
4:00pm	PLENARY LECTURE Helen de Cruz (St Louis University) **A Taste for the Infinite: What Evolution can tell us about Belief in God**	
5:30pm	Finish	

Saturday 17 July

10:45am	Zoom meeting open	
11:00am	PARALLEL SHORT PAPERS III (THREE STREAMS)	
	STREAM A	
11:00am	**Quantum Mechanics and Salvation: Re-examining Soteriological Change in Light of 21st Century Physics**	Qureshi-Hurst, Emily
11:30am	**The Distorting Natural (a)Theology of The Selfish Gene**	Skogholt, Christoffer
12:00pm	**Evolution and the Applicability of Mathematics in Contemporary Physics**	Stokes, Mitch
12:30pm	**Computational Theology and Natural Theology**	Vestrucci, Andrea
	STREAM B	
11:00am	**Semi-Reformed Natural Theology**	Guillon, Jean-Baptiste
11:30am	**The Not-So-New Natural Theologies? The Need for Historical Perspectives on Natural Theology in the Modern Age**	Klaeren, George
12:00pm	**Substantial Form and *Actus Essendi*. Avenues and Obstacles on the Way from Philosophy of Science to Natural Theology**	Lazzari, Edmund

12:30pm	**Augmented Reality and Theology: A New Analogy for an "Integral" Expansion**	Martini, Alessandro
	STREAM C	
11:00am	**"Teacher of Perfect Wisdom". Calvin's Pneumatological Natural Theology**	Butler, Geoffrey
11:30am	**Tertullian, From *Logos* to the Trinity**	Edmunds-Coopey, Jack Robert
12:00pm	**Irreducible Agent and its role in Natural Theology**	Shahinnia, Niloofar
12:30pm		SPARE
1:00pm	Lunch Break	
1:30pm	PLENARY LECTURE Alister McGrath (University of Oxford) **Natural Theology:** **An Interface between Science and Religion?**	
3:00pm	Conference ends	

Abstracts of Keynote Speakers

Abstracts are listed in order of appearance

Iain McGilchrist
University of Oxford

Thursday 15 July, 7:30pm – 9:00pm

Hemispheric Asymmetry and the Approach to the Divine

In *The Master and his Emissary*, I outlined important differences in cognitive and emotional style between the brain hemispheres. In this talk I will build on that work, examining the capacity of either hemisphere to achieve an understanding of what it is we mean when we speak of the realm of the sacred and divine. The relevance is that I believe that in the modern West we live in a culture whose take on the world is strongly aligned with that of the left hemisphere at the expense of the right. I will suggest that hemisphere differences should not be expected to lead simply to theism or atheism, but to predictably distinct types of either phenomenon.

IAIN MCGILCHRIST is a Quondam Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, an Associate Fellow of Green Templeton College, Oxford, a Fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, and former Consultant Psychiatrist and Clinical Director at the Bethlem Royal & Maudsley Hospital, London. He has been a Research Fellow in neuroimaging at Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore and a Fellow of the Institute of Advanced Studies in Stellenbosch. He has published original articles and research papers in diverse publications on topics in literature, philosophy, medicine and psychiatry. He is the author of a number of books, but is best-known for *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (Yale 2009). His book on epistemology and ontology called *The Matter with Things: Our Brains, Our Delusions, and the Unmaking of the World* will be published by Perspectiva Press in November 2021. He lives on the Isle of Skye, and has two daughters and a son

Olivera Petrovich
Oxford Neuroscience, Department of Experimental Psychology

Friday 16 July, 9:00am – 10:30am

The Naturalness of Natural Theology: A Psychological Approach

Natural theology (NT) is not just a specialist branch of philosophy and theology but a universally occurring pattern of reasoning about the world that begins early in cognitive development. As a psychological topic, NT is concerned with everyday or lay theological reasoning rather than its scholarly versions. The two, however, share important similarities. First, both begin with the existence of the physical world and ask the same questions about its origin and basic structure (i.e., causal, ontological & other metaphysical). Secondly, thinking about the natural world in both everyday (informal) and scholarly (formal) NT is mediated by several key psychological processes or variables (i.e., perception, inferences, hypotheses), where scientific psychology has made significant advances in understanding their early onset and later development. To account for their respective and specific involvement in NT, psychological methods are needed yet this has not been recognised throughout the history of NT, largely because human cognition has for too long been a philosophical rather than scientific topic.

What differentiates (a) lay and (b) specialist NT is that the former begins early in childhood (some aspects thereof possibly before the onset of language), whereas the latter encompasses expert knowledge from a number of scientific and humanities domains. Crucially, however, no other major or qualitative differences between the two exist to allow scholars a privileged access to God or equip them with direct knowledge of God's nature. The lecture will also address the apparent discontinuity in the development of natural theological understanding, i.e., why adults typically have no recollection of this pattern of their reasoning, other areas of developmental psychology are directly relevant, notably language and memory. In short, future enquiries of scholarly NT need to encompass study of human nature itself, especially cognitive, as an aspect of the natural world, in order to account more fully for the role of the traditional arguments for God's existence within theology.

OLIVERA PETROVICH is a developmental psychologist with research interests on the interface of scientific psychology and religion. Her research has focused on the origin of the concept of God in young children and its development across the life span. As a Research Fellow in the Department of Experimental Psychology and Associate Member of the Faculty of Theology and Religion, Oxford, she conducted several research projects in UK and abroad with young children and adults from diverse religious and ethnic

backgrounds, designed to investigate their inferences about God based on everyday perception and reasoning in the context of the natural world. Findings from a research project with British and Japanese children and adults were published in *Natural-Theological Understanding from Childhood to Adulthood* (2019) while results of a project with children from different faith schools in England are currently in preparation and due to be published as a book, *Developmental Psychology and Young Children's Religious Education*: *A multi-faith Perspective* (Routledge), probably in 2022. Main courses taught at Oxford include *Developmental Questions in Science and Religion* (Experimental Psychology) and *Psychology of Religion* (Theology & Religion).

Helen de Cruz
St Louis University

Friday 6 July, 4:00pm – 5:30pm

A Taste for the Infinite: What Evolution can tell us about Belief in God

Belief in God is widespread. To explain how it arose, various philosophers and theologians have argued that it is due to some sort of sense or feeling. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) sees religion as intuition and feeling (in his *Speeches* and *Christian Faith*), and identifies a sense of absolute dependence on God as the basis of our awareness (consciousness) of God. More specifically, Schleiermacher has a story of how this God-consciousness arose in evolutionary time. Though he wrote before Darwin published *Origin of Species*, Schleiermacher accepted an evolutionary picture for the origin of life and the universe. Drawing on recent insights in evolutionary biology and cognitive science, I provide an updated version of Schleiermacher's god-consciousness, showing how our feelings are evolved, and give us a sense of the divine.

HELEN DE CRUZ holds the Danforth Chair in the Humanities at Saint Louis University. Her publications are mainly philosophy of cognitive science, philosophy of religion, social epistemology, and metaphilosophy. Her overarching research project is an investigation of how humans engage in thinking about abstract domains such as theology, mathematics, and science and what it means for embodied beings like us to think about these topics. Specifically, she investigates what conclusions we can draw about the metaphysics and our knowledge of these objects. For example, if animals across diverse species such as bees, dolphins, and monkeys can estimate numbers, what does this mean for the reality of numbers? Her publications include the monographs *Disagreement* (2019, Cambridge University Press) and *A natural history of natural theology* (2015, MIT Press, co-authored with Johan De Smedt), she has also recently co-edited *Philosophy through science fiction stories* (2021, Bloomsbury, co-edited with Johan De Smedt and Eric Schwitzgebel).

Alister McGrath
Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Oxford

Saturday 17 July, 1:30pm – 3:00pm

Natural Theology: An Interface between Science and Religion?

Natural theology has a long history of association with the interaction of the natural sciences and Christian theology, particularly during the seventeenth century, when "physico-theology" became an important interface for writers such as Robert Boyle between what was then known as "natural philosophy" and Christian theology. This lecture celebrates the general field of natural theology as an important area of inquiry and reflection, noting how many scientists see this as potentially productive and significant. The lecture reflects on the potential opportunities and challenges that arise in seeing natural theology as some kind of interface between science and religion, and whether it might be retrieved in some form to engage contemporary debates and discussions.

ALISTER MCGRATH. After studying chemistry as an undergraduate at Oxford, McGrath gained a doctorate in molecular biophysics. He then switched to studying theology, with a particular interest in exploring the relationship of theology and the natural sciences. He played a significant role in the major debates about the rationality of religious belief associated with the rise of the "New Atheism." He is at present Andreas Idreos Professor of Science and Religion at Oxford University, and Director of the Ian Ramsey Centre.

Abstracts of Parallel Short Papers

Abstracts are listed in alphabetical order of surname

Christopher Bennett
Faculty of Theology and St Hilda's College, University of Oxford

Friday, 16-Jul-21, 13:30 **Session: II, Stream A**

CSR Exacerbates the Problem of Divine Hiddenness

The Problem of Divine Hiddenness is a popular argument from natural theology against theism. Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) uses various scientific disciplines to study religious belief. There is intriguing, under-examined overlap between these two strands of thought, which wields consequences for the future of dialogue between religion and science. In this paper, I argue that our growing evolutionary and cognitive understanding of how religion arose causes difficulties for theism. These issues arise because, I believe, evidence from CSR reforms and strengthens the ordinary understanding of 'nonresistant nonbelievers' commonly employed by Divine Hiddenness debates. Moreover, I emphasise that our growing understanding of how religious belief evolved lays bare that God is responsible for many believers being misled, while heightening God's attainable responsibility to prevent nonbelief. Therefore, the Problem is exacerbated because common defences of God's responsibility for human belief are defused, and God's culpability is accentuated, with serious ramifications for natural theology.

In terms of the academic context, my presentation brings together two topics with great potential significance for natural theology, and the philosophy of religion more broadly. The Cognitive Science of Religion, and our growing understanding of the evolved nature of religious belief, is a popular and interesting topic in its own right. Yet the philosophical consequences of such studies are in my view an even more intriguing subject of investigation. CSR here refers to a body of work spanning several disciplines of scientific thought: biology, psychology, sociology, etc., with the goal of developing greater understanding of how religious belief arose, spread, and persists. While the field is still burgeoning, a greater consensus about science's ability to explain facets of religion is forming. CSR does have limitations, as it can often only examine specific aspects of religious belief, but the evidence available serves the purposes required of it in this presentation. I aim to offer a valuable scholarly contribution by taking findings from CSR and applying them to real, ongoing debates in natural theology. Philosophy of religion

should utilise empirical work, particularly that which informs us about the nature of humanity and how we form religious beliefs. The Problem of Divine Hiddenness does not become insurmountable in the light of evidence from CSR, but it is indubitably worsened. There has been some, very limited discussion of the interaction between these two fields so far, but I believe that my paper states several original points in this area that should provoke discussion and novel responses. My argument is that the theist's task of explaining nonresistant nonbelief is made significantly more difficult upon understanding the evolution of religious belief, because it is made more clear that God has not only permitted atheism, but seemingly created conditions in which it would flourish. Therefore, my presentation will demonstrate that apologetic strategies in response to Hiddenness should be altered in some ways to account for our greater knowledge of how religious belief evolved, while appreciating the significance of this debate for natural theology more widely.

Bruce Ellis Benson
Logos Institute, University of St Andrews

Friday, 16-Jul-21, 13:30 **Session: II, Stream C**

Remembering the Jews, Expunging the Queers: Natural Law in the Wake of Auschwitz

"Never forget" was frequently uttered at the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz on 27 January 2020. Yet the thousands of gay men from Poland interred there were entirely forgotten in these ceremonies—not to mention those from Germany and elsewhere.

The concept of 'natural law' was often invoked at the Nuremberg trial of Nazi officials,[1] the first ever trial for a 'crime against humanity'.[2] But the world has *never* come to terms with the deliberate dehumanization and genocide of homosexuals perpetrated by the Nazis, nor has it come to terms with the *continuing* dehumanization and killing of untold members of the LGBTQ+ community across the world. As someone whose grandfather was a Jew, I grieve over the Holocaust. But I grieve just as much over the *Vernichtung* of queer people like myself. Holocaust deniers are reprehensible, but no deniers of the gay genocide are necessary *because it has been almost entirely forgotten*. If one researches the

[1] In his opening statement, Justice Robert Jackson asks: "does it take these men by surprise that murder is treated as a crime?"

[2] The term comes from an 1890 description of the atrocities of King Leopold II in the Congo

Nuremberg trials, the closest one finds is the wording "crimes against Jews and others."[3] I am one of those 'others' not important enough to be given a name.

What does natural theology and natural law have to say about queer people in the 21st century? Can we be recognized as *human*? The Nazis were intent on exterminating *Germans* who were mentally and physically disabled, same-sex oriented, and Jehovah's Witnesses: they were seen as 'pollution' and 'unnatural'. We rightly accuse the German church for failing to speak up for Jews, but they did not speak up for the homosexuals either.

Alas, the American Evangelical church is *still* persecuting gays in three ways.

The first strategy is containment. Concentration camps had a function remarkably analogous to landfills—removal and burying of pollution. While American Evangelicals have often used the containment strategy of keeping gays outside of the church, containment is most effective when gays internalize hatred of themselves as unnatural and commit suicide.

The second strategy is conversion therapy. The Nazis attempted this by strenuous labor designed to make them 'men'. Alternatively, gay men were forced to have sex with Jewish and Roma women. Some homosexuals were declared 'cured'. Evangelical conversion therapy also requires a special 'habitat' for gays—'camps' that are designed to help men find their true masculine 'nature'. 'Therapy' can involve shaming, shock treatments, interventions, and medications. Two Evangelical scholars, Jones and Yarhouse, claim that 23% of gays have been able to be 'repaired' into 'natural' human beings.[4]

The third strategy is asexuality. The Nazis used Article 175 to prohibit any same-sex acts—even a glance could be seen as 'unnatural'. One could be a homosexual in what we would today term 'orientation', but one could not act upon it. Many Evangelical churches and colleges hire gays and lesbians as long as they remain asexual. Yet such prohibitions exchange one 'unnatural' thing (homosexuality) for another (asexuality).

What will the 21st century church *do* about queers?

[3] See https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/survival-and-legacy/the-perpetrators/

[4] Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse, *Ex-Gays?: A Longitudinal Study of Religiously Mediated Change in Sexual Orientation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2007).

Jonathan Bleacher
Colorado Christian University

Friday, 16-Jul-21, 11:00 **Session: I, Stream A**

An Evaluation of The Impact of Gene-Editing Tools on Natural Theology

The biomedical field has advanced significantly over the last several decades with prominent breakthroughs such as the Human Genome Project. Through the discovery of the CRISPR-Cas9 system, the scientific community has the ability to edit the genomes of living species. Because of this we are faced with the question, does altering the genome of living species fundamentally shift the biological world from a state of natural to unnatural? Due to these modifications, is the word "natural" still a viable concept when dealing with natural theology? In this paper, I look at the historical basis and evolution of natural theology, what constitutes the CRISPR-Cas9 system, how gene-editing technologies have altered what "natural" is, and what viable concepts of natural theology still exist the 21st century. Finally, I will discuss whether these developments in genome modification change the notion of what is "natural" when dealing with natural theology.

Geoffrey Butler
Wycliffe College, University of Toronto

Saturday, 17-Jul-21, 11:00 **Session: III, Stream C**

"Teacher of Perfect Wisdom".
Calvin, the Holy Spirit, and the Question of Natural Theology

As perhaps the most influential Protestant theologian of the 20th century, there are few doctrinal distinctives for which Karl Barth is better known that his adamant rejection of natural theology. Though the Swiss theologian, from his Session: in the Reformed tradition, drew heavily from the work of John Calvin, David Barbee points out that "A large portion of *Nein*! Is devoted to the exegesis of Calvin's theology upon this question of revelation in which Barth concedes that Calvin adhered to a theoretical possibility of natural theology, but not a possibility that can be realized by humans independently."[1] The idea of a "natural theology" that requires a supernatural aid to access indeed sounds paradoxical, if not incoherent. However, for Calvin – who has been identified by some as "The Theologian of the Holy Spirit"[2] – the key to reconciling this apparent contradiction lies in his pneumatology.

Though rejecting the Thomistic understanding of natural theology where knowledge of God can be obtained through human reason,[3] Calvin nevertheless acknowledges that all

individuals possess an intrinsic knowledge of the divine; in his own words, "God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty….. therefore, men one and all perceive that there is a God and that he is their Maker."[4] Since his formidable doctrine of sin precluded any human ability to perceive this independently, Calvin expressed, in his commentary on Romans 1, that the "Spirit, the teacher of perfect wisdom, does not in vain invite our attention to what may be known."[5] Indeed, Calvin taught that human consciousness of the divine had been so distorted by the Fall that it cannot independently procure proper knowledge of God in and of itself.[6] It is therefore the Holy Spirit's work to overcome this distortion.

The place for any type of natural theology in Calvin might surprise those who are familiar with the rather negative view of the doctrine advanced by modern reformed theologians like Barth. However, in light of Barbee's assertion that "For Calvin, it is the Holy Spirit who facilitates the knowledge of God," perhaps it is only fitting he would touch on natural revelation relative to his pneumatology. This paper will therefore engage Calvin's view of natural theology, suggesting that there remains a place in evangelical theology today for the concept as addressed in his work. It will further contend that his emphasis upon the role of the Spirit with regard to natural revelation makes it especially useful in considering where God might reveal himself through other disciplines beyond theology, and encourage further conversation on this topic within Pentecostal-Charismatic circles where this question has only recently begun to attract significant attention.

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[1] David M. Barbee, "The Influence of John Calvin's Pneumatology on Karl Barth," in *The Holy Spirit and the Reformation Legacy*. Mark J. Cartledge and Mark A. Jumper, eds. (Wipf & Stock, Eugene, OR: 2020), 157.

[2] Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1956), 484-85.

[3] William Terrell Chandler, *General Revelation in Romans 1:18ff: A Description of the Views of John Calvin and Karl Barth* (Evangelical Theological Society Papers, 2002), 3. https://doi.org/10.2986/tren.ETS-0938.

[4] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles. The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1.3.1.

[5] John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, trans. Ross Mackenzie, David Wishart Torrance and Thomas Forsyth Torrance, eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

[6] Chandler, *General Revelation in Romans*, 1-2.

Johan de Smedt
Department of Philosophy, Saint Louis University

Friday, 16-Jul-21, 11:30 **Session: I, Stream A**

Cognitive Science of Religion. An Invitation to Expand the Philosophy of Religion

The cognitive science of religion (CSR) has matured since its inception in the 1990s and has given rise to a suite of insights into the diversity and cognitive underpinnings of religious belief and practices. Rather than exclusively pointing to Christianity, CSR indicates our minds are receptive, and in fact generate a wide range of religious beliefs, ranging from animism, to polytheism, to monotheism, to belief in ghosts, etc. For example, CSR authors have studied the propensity of human minds to think about divine minds. They found that people across cultures come up with a wide range of religious concepts, ranging from omniscient, morally concerned gods, to gods with more limited knowledge, and gods who care more about ritual than about moral violations. By contrast, if one looks at publications in philosophy of religion journals, the vast majority of papers (whether Christian or atheist) assume an Anselmian omnitheism where God is both omniscient and concerned about morality.

The aim of this paper is programmatic: I will argue that the findings from CSR exhort philosophy of religion (POR) to expand in order to include traditions that are currently underrepresented. If the human mind is capable of generating many different god concepts, and in fact does so, then the failure of POR to discuss and accommodate those different perspectives means a large part of human religious belief and experience remains outside its purview.

There are two ways to envisage such an expansion. One is to shift the burden of proof away from unconventional, underrepresented POR to classic POR and to argue that only POR that engages with the full range of religious beliefs and practices is worthy of the name. A second proposal, at once more modest and more radical, suggests we question the culture of justification within philosophy: let's query the idea of trying to figure out whether something is proper POR. I will defend this second proposal, arguing that POR, like other philosophy, originates in a sense of wonderment, including the wonderment at religious beliefs and practices. POR then, in a broad sense, engages with religious beliefs and practices, not only those already amply discussed now (Christianity, Anselmian theism, atheism), but should also invite those not yet part of the current publication culture (such as animism, polytheism, Daoism, Buddhism). As a case study I will look at animism, its underpinnings according to CSR, and its philosophical significance.

Isaak Deman
KU Leuven

Friday, 16-Jul-21, 12:00 **Session: I, Stream A**

The Significance of the Oneiric for Natural Theology

Despite their fundamental role as a pathway towards the supernatural across various cultures (cf. Gregor 1981, Lohmann 2003, Robbins 2003, McNamara & Bulkeley 2015), dreams have largely been omitted from the realm of natural theology ever since its inception. Even the fact that both the Old and New Testament, as well as the Church fathers (e.g., Gregory of Nazianzus, Syesisus, Origen) have engaged with dreams and visions as a possible means to connect the human and the divine (cf. Kelsey 1973, Brueggeman 2005, Wei 2011), has not led natural theology to engage with this matter. Instead, it seems as if natural theology, with its emphasis on reason and empiricism, has pushed the oneiric outside the logical and the empirical. The rise of Freudian psychoanalysis further reduced the oneiric to mere illusions and repressed desires. Recently, some have tried to bridge the gap between neurobiology and theology, by pointing out that REM brain mechanisms enable the reception and procession of extremely complex sensory inputs that could labeled as religious (McNamara 2018). While these neurobiological proposals seem promising for theology, more discussion is need to include the oneiric within (future) debates on natural theology. After all, it is remarkable that humankind spends a lot of time in dreaming. What is more, dreams have imaginative power. They push the boundaries of reason and empiricism to another level, in which the question of 'what is real' becomes pertinent. One might even argue that AI, Web 3.0, Avatars and the digitization of the world is an extension of the oneiric. Popular films like the Matrix have already touched upon some of these issues.

While much can be said about the oneiric for natural theology on a general level, I particularly seek to engage with the oneiric as a force and particular form of knowledge in nature through the analysis of the film *Embrace of the Serpent* (2015). The filmscript was written with a great input from the local Amazonian people, and introduces an intriguing outlook on the way local people understand their immediate environment as being intertwined with the oneiric. On the basis of this analysis, I seek to incorporate this Amazonian vision of the oneiric into natural theology. In doing so, I aim to demonstrate how a different outlook on nature, i.e., one that does not differentiate nature from the oneiric, can act to enlarge and redefine the existing framework of natural theology.

Agustín Echavarría
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Friday, 16-Jul-21, 11:00 **Session: I, Stream B**

"If Evil exists, God Exists". Theistic Arguments from Evil

The existence of evil in the world is usually considered to be the starting point for atheistic arguments of different kinds (logical, evidential, probabilistic, explanatory, etc.). Even the different strategies adopted for theistic philosophers to reply to atheistic arguments from evil –such as Soul-Making Theodicies, Free-Will Defence and Sceptical Theism– assume the idea that evil, in its different forms, counts as evidence against the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God, and that this evidence needs to be counterbalanced with some other evidences in favour of theism. Although in recent years some philosophers have started to develop arguments for the existence of God that take the existence of evil as their stating point (see, for instance, T. Daugherty and J. Walls, "Arguments from Evil," in Ch. Taliaferro, V. S. Harrison, S. Goetz [eds.], *The Routledge Companion to Theism*, Routledge, 2012, 378-380), there is still much work to do on this regard. If a successful argument for the existence of God could be drawn from the existence of evil, the whole debate on evil would change completely, since the burden of the proof would be on the atheist. In this presentation I will sketch three simple arguments for the existence of God based on the existence of evil, and briefly analyse their prospects of success.

Two of these arguments are developed from ideas found in Thomas Aquinas' works. The first argument starts from evil conceived as disorder (*Summa Contra Gentiles* III, 71), claiming that if evil as disorder exists, then there is a pre-existent natural teleological order in reality; but if there is a natural teleological order reality, then there is an intelligent cause of that order, which we call God.

The second argument starts from evil conceived as privation (*De malo* q. 1, a. 2). If evil as privation exists, then there are finite beings capable of losing perfection, in which a privation can inhere; but in order for a being to be able to lose perfection, it must have some kind of metaphysical composition; now, everything that is metaphysically composed depends in its being on some entity that is metaphysically simple and is identical with its own being, which is what we call God.

The third argument is developed form ideas found in the *Conclusiones Theologicae* (Rome, 1648, 4, 13) of Spanish Baroque Scholastic philosopher and theologian Antonio Pérez, S.J. (1599-1649), and it could be called the 'deontological argument from evil.' The argument claims that, if evil exists in the world, then there are some things in the world that 'should

not exist'; but in order to say about something that it should not exist, some power capable of eliminating it must exist; so, if evil exists, there must be some power capable of eliminating every evil in the world; but only an omnipotent being could be capable of eliminating every evil; therefore, there is an omnipotent being, which we call God.

Jack Robert Edmunds-Coopey
University of Durham

Saturday, 17-Jul-21, 11:30 **Session: III, Stream C**

Tertullian, From Logos to the Trinity.
The Understanding of the Trinity and the Flesh of the Resurrection in the Early Modern Culture of Thomas Browne's Religio Medici (1643)

Tertullian was brought to the attention by the work of Hans Blumenberg in his *Legitimacy of the Modern Age (*1966) but his influence on understandings of culture stretches far back to the Early Modern Period. In the Oxford Bibliography entry on Tertullian (2016) it is remarked that Augustine admitted influence in relation to the Trinity, language, the central position of the Resurrection, and the belief that all real things are material. As the Father of Latin Christianity and Western Theology, Tertullian's influence is enormous when considering Harrison's suggestion in his "*I Believe Because it is Absurd": The Enlightenment Invention of Tertullian's Credo*" (2017) that "printed editions of Tertullian's works began appearing with some frequency in the early sixteenth century". Whilst Tertullian's writings are edited in two volumes in the Patrologia Latina, the focus of this paper will be on Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici (The Religion of a Physician)* (1643) and his understanding of Tertullian's emphasis on faith, in the words of Browne "I learned of Tertullian, [...] I desire to exercise my faith in the difficultest point". Tertullian's point that the Resurrection although improbable it was to be believed, Browne used this to exercise "personal faith" in that in Harrison's words "proposing that the strength of one's faith is proportional to the improbability of its object". Tertullian's founding of the Trinity and the heretical materialism in relation to the Flesh of the Resurrection influenced Browne's Protestantism as an alternative to Origin of Alexandria's Middle Platonism which Robert Boyle and John Locke alongside Browne would side with later. In conclusion, the argument of the paper will be that Tertullian's emphasis on living within Roman, pagan culture for Christians was interpreted by the Early Moderns as Harrison (2007) suggests, that Tertullian's place was one of both Enlightenment critique and religion as a "patripassianism".

Robin Evans
Sarum College (MATIC), formerly Magdalen College and the Mathematical Institute

Friday, 16-Jul-21, 14:00 **Session: II, Stream C**

Storyteller God: The Postmodern Natural Theology of George MacDonald

The writer Madeleine L'Engle once quoted a friend, "Jesus wasn't a theologian, he was God who told stories", and Jesus did indeed tell stories, of lost coins and lost sheep, of the weather and the seasons, of crops and weeds, of parents and children, all natural things. Creation too is a story, though we may have lost the ability to read it.

The storyteller JRR Tolkien wrote that when we make up imaginary worlds, "we make because we are made, and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a maker." And a love of, and a closeness to nature shows clearly through Tolkien's Middle Earth. Fellow Inkling CS Lewis wrote very different stories, but there was still a closeness to nature and a deep justification. As Alsan said to Lucy in The Voyage of the Dawn Treader, "This was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there." What all three of these writers believed is that through encountering imaginary worlds we can be informed about the real world we live in, and the God who created it. Another common thread is that all three paid tribute to the Victorian writer George MacDonald. Tolkien wrote of the power and beauty of his stories, Lewis regarded MacDonald as his master, and L'Engle wrote that the world was in dire need of his message.

In "The Penultimate Curiosity", Wagner and Briggs argue that "Science swims in the slipstream of ultimate questions" and although many of the arguments of Natural Theology now seem untenable, their book provides compelling justification for continuing the project.

In her doctoral thesis, "Rooted in all its story", Kirstin Jeffrey Johnson writes of the mythopoeic art of George MacDonald. She observes of his mentor, "Scott's lectures contended that the God of spiritual truths is revealed in the truths of the natural world; with Celtic perspective he complained that too often religious persons did not see the relation between God's spiritual and physical modes of utterance." MacDonald clearly took this on board, and his writings are full of its implications.

Another aspect of MacDonald's writing that makes him particularly helpful today is that he constantly challenges and questions our assumptions, and it has been claimed that he anticipates many of the doubts and uncertainties of our post-modern culture. This makes

him well suited to be a guide through our lostness just as he guided Lewis through the margins of heaven in "The Great Divorce".

So my argument is that by looking at George MacDonald's writings, we can gain an ability to re-read the book of nature in a way that teaches us about the nature and character of the God who made it. It cannot prove an existence theorem, but it can help make sense, "especially at a moment in history when it may be harder than ever to accept the precedents of sense-making." (Frank Kermode, "The Sense of an Ending")

Buki Fatona
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Friday, 16-Jul-21, 14:30 **Session: II, Stream C**

Miracles and Necessitarian Laws of Nature

In this paper, to examine one of the ways philosophy still poses a challenge to natural theology on the notion of miracles; I explore the logical consistency of a necessitarian account of laws of nature with the notion of miracles as events that contravene natural laws. An event E is a miracle if it is divinely caused for the benefit/punishment of E's recipient(s). Richard Swinburne, in his *Concept of a Miracle* defines a miracle as an "event of an extraordinary kind brought about by a god and of religious significance" (1970, p.1). Thus, E aligns with Swinburne's (ramified) natural theological account of miracles.

On Swinburne's account, E's violation of a law of nature, which predicts E's non-occurrence, is what qualifies E as a miracle. Swinburne circumvents the incoherence of an exceptionless regularity with E as its exception—pointed out by Hume in '*On Miracles*' (Section X, 1975)—by describing E as a "non-repeatable counter-instance to natural law" (1970, p.26). Swinburne thinks his conception of miracles does not threaten the status of laws of nature. The non-repeatability of E under normal conditions proves that E is a miracle as well as preserves the exceptionless-status of the law which has E as its counter-instance. However, there is a philosophical challenge facing this understanding of miracles.

In his *What is a law of nature?* David Armstrong offers an account for laws of nature via necessary relations between universals. I shall henceforth refer to Armstrong's account as AA. A 'universal' is a property or relation that can be, or is, instantiated by a plethora of particulars. For example, property 'redness' is instantiated by red things. On AA, 'all *F*s are *G*s' asserts a law of nature if there is a necessary relation between universals *F*s and *G*s: denoted as N(F,G). To illustrate, if Newton's first law is a fundamentally true

description of matter in motion or at rest then, on AA, each instantiation of inertia is a particular of N(F,G).

E, being a counter-instance of a law, means that E requires an *F* not to be *G*. For example, the turning of water into wine by Jesus in John 2:1-11 would be an E if the transformation of H_2O (water) into C_2H_5OH (ethyl alcohol) requires a disconnection between the universals that govern molecular interactions.

Using modal logic, I arrive at the conclusion that E is logically inconsistent with AA. As I argue, E's '*F* and ¬*G*' contradicts AA's 'Necessarily (If *F* then *G*)'. Therefore, law-breaking miraculous event E which requires an *F* not to be *G* is contradictory, and hence impermissible, on AA. Even E's non-repeatability, as specified by Swinburne, is not permitted in a world wherein AA holds. Consequently, I leave it at an open question whether it is satisfactory for a natural theologian, who wishes to uphold AA, to assert that even for God all *F*s are *G*s.

Jean-Baptiste Guillon
Faculty of Philosophy, University of Navarra

Saturday, 17-Jul-21, 11:00 **Session: III, Stream B**

Semi-reformed Natural Theology

Natural Theology is traditionally defined as the knowledge of God that we can acquire "through the natural lights of reason alone" – as opposed to Revealed Theology, which appeals to the "supernatural lights" of Revelation.

The idea that we can have some knowledge of God without the help of revelation has been a traditional teaching in much of the Christian tradition for at least three reasons. One reason is Biblical (e.g. Romans I, 18). Another is empirical (it appears empirically that pagan philosophers have *actually* arrived at some knowledge of God without revelation, therefore it is *possible*). Thirdly, one motivation seems to be pragmatic and apologetic (it is *useful for evangelisation* if we can take for granted some *praeambula fidei* established by reason alone).

In the philosophical discussion, we can distinguish three models of this "Natural Theistic Knowledge". The most traditional model is "deductive natural theology", best represented in the "five ways" of Aquinas: the idea is that, starting from observational premises about Nature, we can produce a deductive argument establishing the existence of God. In modern times, though, this traditional strategy has received a lot of criticisms, and the other two models can be considered as attempts to dispense with deductive natural

theology. One such attempt, defended by Swinburne, is "inductive natural theology", which starts with roughly the same observational premises about Nature but proceeds via a cumulative inductive argument instead of a deduction. Another solution is Reformed Epistemology, defended by Plantinga, according to whom human beings have in their nature an epistemic faculty whose function it is to produce the *basic* (non-inferential) intuition and knowledge that God exists (the *sensus divinitatis*, comparable to other natural epistemic faculties).

I will defend a fourth model, namely "semi-reformed natural theology". Like Plantinga, I will defend that human beings have *naturally* a *basic* belief with religious content, namely a general belief in "Providence", and that a Christian apologist does *not* need to try and establish the truth of that proposition via inferences starting from natural premises. But unlike Plantinga, I don't think that this natural basic faculty allows us to know "the existence of God" (Monotheism). In order to move from the natural belief in Providentialism to full-blown Monotheism, I will argue that we need to make an inference to the best explanation (inspired by many elements of Swinburne's program, but starting from the data of Providence instead of premises about Nature). The strategy I defend, therefore, contains both a basic stage and an inferential stage.

I will argue that this theory is more satisfying both from an empirical point of view (as a description of how people *actually* form their religious beliefs, according to our best knowledge in contemporary cognitive science of religion), and from the pragmatic point of view of apologetics (as a more efficient way to discuss with non-believers).

This new theory of natural theology is supported by a general framework of Common Sense Epistemology, according to which our natural epistemic faculties have a *prima facie* justification.

Soufiane Hamri
University of Birmingham

Friday, 16-Jul-21, 11:30 **Session: I, Stream B**

Fine-Tuning and Design: A Step Back to More Fundamental Considerations

Cosmic fine-tuning has recently attracted considerable attention from natural theologians. It is widely believed that cosmic fine-tuning permits a revival of the design argument for the existence of God. I would like to challenge this common wisdom by arguing that once fundamental considerations about natural laws and initial conditions are taken into account, fine-tuning's support to the design argument is neutralized. I conclude that natural

theologians are better-off focusing on more fundamental issues in the metaphysics of science if they are to strengthen the design argument, while circumventing the controversy about fine-tuning.

Seth Hart
Durham University

Friday, 16-Jul-21, 12:30 **Session: I, Stream A**

A Convergence of Minds:
How Simon Conway Morris Revived the Thought of Teilhard de Chardin

Simon Conway Morris's work on convergent evolution has garnered tremendous attention from both the scientific and theological community. In fact, a recent Templeton funding cycle included five million dollars in research funding for projects devoted to the implications of convergent evolution. While Conway Morris continues to spark interest in this topic, little work has been done to demonstrate the parallels of his work with the natural theological project of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Habitually assigned to the dustbin of scientific history, Teilhard's work is ritually accused of being grounded upon Lamarckian or vitalistic assumptions. In my paper, I reveal the fundamental commonality of each scholar's teleological system.

I start by detailing the development of Conway Morris's thought, noting in particular his "theological turn" whereby he begins to engage in theological interpretations of his work. I reveal the perceptible shift that occurs after the publication of *The Crucible of Creation*. These prior works are free of theological engagement apart from a few vague references to human "stewardship." However, with the dawning of the new millennium, Conway Morris's works begin to venture into metaphysical and theological domains. I then compare this with Teilhard's evolutionary theology, establishing a broad conceptual overlap. This includes their overt application of Neoplatonic thought, the role of convergent evolution, mind as evolution's *telos*, the extension of mental attributes to lower levels of reality, and the broadening of evolutionary principles to the cultural domain. I conclude that every major tenant of Conway Morris's thesis is prefigured in Teilhard's system. The differences between the scientists reduces to one of emphasis rather than content. Perhaps the only overt distinction between the two scholars lies in Teilhard's explicit intention to pose his work as a work of natural theology.

I then speculatively conclude that this reveals an engagement with Teilhard by Conway Morris. From his available writings, one can demonstrate that Conway Morris's "theological turn" occurred simultaneously with his written interaction with Teilhard de

Chardin. Moreover, Teilhardian allusions occur sporadically in Conway Morris's writings such as in *Life's Solution*'s direct reference to Omega Point theology. While references to Teilhard are often veiled, their presence is undeniable and suggest a deep appreciation for the work of Teilhard. Consequently, I argue this merits Teilhard's inclusion in contemporary discussions of convergent evolution and biological teleology. Specifically, I maintain that Teilhard de Chardin's ambitious evolutionary natural theology should not be construed as an antiqued relic of scientific and theological speculation. Rather, Conway Morris's writings have breathed new life into the late Jesuit's works. As such, I conclude that Teilhard's work should command a greater presence in discussion of evolutionary convergence, natural theology, and a Christian philosophy of biology.

Mike Kirby
University of Liverpool and Liverpool Cathedral

Friday, 16-Jul-21, 14:00 **Session: II, Stream A**

'Perseverance' in Faith. Can the Mars rover help us find a further dimension to Natural Theology?

One can't help be captivated by the most recent happenings on Mars. Accomplished through advanced science and technology which enabled NASA to land the Mars rover 'Perseverance' on the planet's surface in February; and in April accomplish the first flight on another planet through the Mars helicopter 'Ingenuity'.

Such events have become natural in our 21st century lives; natural in the sense they are 'not surprising' or 'to be expected' (as some definitions of 'natural' lend us). The scientists, engineers and technologists are clearly 'suited to be such' in their work and endeavours; the unbridled joy and enthusiasm seen in them coupled with patience over decades of research and development, have brought about such achievements. Success has been achieved alongside numerous past failures; making 'Perseverance' a very fitting name.

But are there not elements of a natural theology here, in considering such feats alongside our faiths; using these to help illustrate the realities of both faith and science; to make faith more accessible and engage with a wider culture? Perhaps, in essence, enabling a more natural discussion about God…..by involving the things people are naturally talking about in everyday life. Beyond the analysis of the scientific data, could one consider a hermeneutic of the qualities expressed by the scientists themselves within their endeavours? Recent personal experiences in preaching and reflection with the aid of both

'Perseverance' and 'Ingenuity' have prompted such thinking in the author and are the substance of this paper.

For the 2nd Sunday in Lent, soon after the actual landing on 18th February, 'Perseverance' was at the heart of a multimedia sermon[1]. The journey of the rover through to landing; the perseverance of the scientists over decades; the intelligent imaging systems for ensuring a safe landing zone were placed alongside the perseverance of Jesus at the turning point in Mark's gospel (Mk 8:31-38). Jesus' own journey, his perseverance even in the face of a known outcome, without any safe landing site in Jerusalem, were considered.

Following the first flights of 'Ingenuity', the best endeavours of the scientists were placed alongside a reflection of God's nature; in whose image we are made (Gen 1:27)[2]. The natural ways of humankind to create, be inquisitive, do good for the sake of others – fragments of God's own fingerprints within human DNA – were placed in context with the ultimate Good Shepherd (from Jn 10:11-8 for Easter 4); whose genius (the basis of ingenuity in terms of cleverness, originality and inventiveness) was demonstrated through Jesus' teaching, and his very death and resurrection for our salvation.

This paper will describe in more detail how both 'Perseverance' and 'Ingenuity' were used, through multimedia, as aids in unpacking scripture. The experiences of such an exposition will be compared and contrasted with current thinking and scholarly viewpoints on natural theology; and one will examine whether such discourse on events, naturally a part of our everyday lives, might help us consider a further dimension to Natural Theology.

Links:

1) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HyQRsO5kS7I&t=1390s (Timestamp 18:00)
2) https://www.liverpoolcathedral.org.uk/43/section.aspx/37/ingenuity__reflection_by_canon_mike (Audio version https://www.prayerforliverpool.org/)

George Klaeren
Pembroke College, University of Oxford

Saturday, 17-Jul-21, 11:30 **Session: III, Stream B**

The Not-So-New Natural Theologies?
The Need for Historical Perspectives on Natural Theology in the Modern Age

In recent years, scholars of science and religion have witnessed renewed interest in the study of natural theology; new discoveries from the observation of the natural world have invited a reconsideration of the articulation and persuasiveness of past arguments from

natural theology and created opportunities for new forms of natural theology. Much of this has been described by scholars as a wave of "new natural theology" (John Polkinghorne) as a "re-imagined" natural theology (Alister McGrath) or as a "revival of natural theology" (Richard Swinburne). But to what extent do these "new" expressions of natural theology have historical predecessors which may inform or challenge how natural theology is reconceived in the twenty-first century?

In this paper, I argue that the "new natural theologies" of the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries, are in fact, not new at all, but rather representative of natural theology's ability to respond to shifting contextual understandings regarding the study and observation of nature, the formation of convincing arguments, and the purpose of natural theology. I demonstrate the existence of earlier waves of "new" natural theologies and suggest that the current "new natural theology" is largely a reaction to the legacy of a particular form of design-based arguments largely represented by the works of English physico-theologians from the early modern period. Lastly, I assert that broadening our awareness of alternative historical forms of natural theology besides these English works, as well as by learning more about the historical trajectory of natural theology, helps to better inform contemporary discussions regarding the scope and use of natural theology today. Especially using examples of Catholic natural theologies from the early modern and nineteenth centuries, I provide several examples where 'modern' topics of natural theology may find forgotten partners in dialogue from the past. I therefore argue that any conversations on natural theology in the twenty-first century must take a historical perspective into more serious consideration.

Erkki Vesa Rope Kojonen
Faculty of Theology, University of Helsinki

Friday, 16-Jul-21, 14:30 **Session: II, Stream A**

Defending the Value of the Biological Design Evidence for Future Natural Theology

The apparent designedness of the biological world has long been seen as an intuitively compelling reason to believe in a Creator by both sceptics and believers. Indeed, in the pre-Darwinian vision of the world, many thought of biology as kind of a sacred science, with biological organisms as the ultimate manifestations of the Creator's wisdom and love. However, criticisms abound. The following three critiques are probably the most common: (1) Many have seen Darwin's theory of evolution as undermining any such religious understanding, as the process seems generate "design without a designer". (2) Such arguments seem to imply a "God of the gaps" type understanding, in which divine action

is only perceived where natural explanations are lacking, and (3) they seem overly anthropomorphistic in describing the Creator primarily as a designer. Some, such as theologian Conor Cunningham, have accordingly argued that defending biological design arguments like those of the Intelligent Design movement leads away from the Trinitarian Christian God far more effectively than any Dawkinsian critique. While the Christian tradition also speaks of God as an artificer, it always makes it clear that this is analogical talk. The Thomistic teleological way also does not require the rejection of evolution, as biological design arguments seem to do. There are other critiques as well – for instance, (4) Humean philosophical criticisms of the logic of the argument, (5) arguments based on the cognitive sciences of religion, which form the basis of arguments debunking the reliability of our intuitive design detection, and (6) and the problem of bad design, which seems particularly acute for any account which gives God responsibility for biology. It would seem, then, that perhaps the best response of the contemporary natural theologian is to abandon biological design arguments. Insofar as we still see theological value in seeing organisms as somehow designed by God, we should at most state with John Henry Newman that "I believe in design because I believe in God, not in God because I believe in design." On this way of thinking, Paley-type biological design arguments should then be seen as almost entirely as a misstep in the history of natural theology.

In this paper, I defend the value of the idea of biological design, responding briefly to the first three concerns and presenting two main ideas that motivate salvaging something of value in such arguments. First, the appeal of biological design arguments to widespread intuitions about apparent design in biology is already a reason in its favour. As C. Stephen Evans argues in his *Natural Signs and the Knowledge of God*, natural theological arguments should ideally build on signs which are as universally available as possible, and biological design arguments fulfil this condition better than arguments like cosmological fine-tuning. Second, it would be desirable for the rationality of the "theist on the street" to be able to claim that their intuitive design detection in biology is not wholly wrong, even with evolution. I argue that it is possible to link the case for fine-tuning with biology, and to argue that biological organisms can be understood as akin to icons in the temple of nature, which best manifest the inbuilt creative potential of the entire cosmos, and so also manifest the wisdom of the Creator.

Philipp Kremers
Department of Philosophy, Georgetown University

Friday, 16-Jul-21, 12:00 **Session: I, Stream B**

Modal Status and A Posteriori Arguments for God's Existence

In general, ***a posteriori*** arguments for God's existence consist of two components. First, the claim that some empirical piece of evidence exists. Second, the claim that this empirical piece of evidence gives us a reason to increase our credence in God's existence. For instance, the moral argument takes for granted that stance-independent moral truths exist and that this fact gives us a reason to increase our credence in God's existence. Accordingly, ***a posteriori*** arguments for God's existence are typically criticised for two reasons: First, critics object that the empirical evidence in question actually does not exist (e.g., Mackie (1982, pp. 102-118) argues that the moral argument fails because stance-independent moral truths actually do not exist). Second, critics object that the empirical evidence actually does not give us a reason to increase our credence in God's existence (e.g., Wielenberg (2009) concedes that stance-independent moral truths exist but claims that a non-theistic version of moral platonism can explain their existence equally well).

In my talk, I propose a new strategy to make the case against ***a posteriori*** arguments for God's existence. For the sake of argument, I accept that the empirical piece of evidence in question exists and that it gives us a reason to increase our credence in God's existence. However, I challenge the (often tacit) assumption that accepting God's existence is the most reasonable conclusion to draw in the face of the evidence. Rather, I will argue that the most reasonable conclusion to draw in the face of the evidence is to accept the existence of an ***unfree*** God-like creator, i.e., a creator that is just like God with the only difference that he cannot refrain from bringing about the evidence in question (e.g., a fine-tuned universe, stance-independent moral truths, etc.). However, an unfree God-like creator differs from God, as He is traditionally understood. For instance, Aquinas claims that "God acts, in the realm of created things, not by necessity of His nature, but by the free choice of His will" (SCG II, 23). Similarly, Swinburne claims that "[t]he theist also normally holds that all God's actions are free" (Swinburne 1993, 145). Furthermore, a number of powerful theological arguments for this assumption can be extracted from Leftow (2017). Thus, I argue that the proponents of ***a posteriori*** arguments for God's existence face a dilemma: either (a) to abandon ***a posteriori*** arguments for God's existence while maintaining a traditional understanding of God or (b) to abandon a traditional understanding of God (and replace it by, say, Spinoza's understanding of God) while maintaining ***a posteriori*** arguments for God's existence.

Finally, I defend this argument against a number of anticipated objections. In particular, I will argue that neither ***a priori*** arguments for God's existence, simplicity considerations, nor (alleged) constraints that God's nature imposes on His actions are sufficient to save the claim that it is all things considered most reasonable to accept God's existence.

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Friday, 16-Jul-21, 15:00 **Session: II, Stream A**

The Possibility of a Scientific Morality within a Natural Theology or a Theology of Nature

The possibility of a scientific basis for morality has been explored at least since Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*, 1859.[1] In the 1960's and 70's, influential papers by W. D. Hamilton[2] and Robert Trivers[3] led to systematic studies of the biological basis of social behavior. These studies were made available to general audiences and attracted much attention and debate for decades to come with the publications of landmark works such as *Sociobiology* by the celebrated Harvard biologist E. O. Wilson,[4] and *The Selfish Gene* by Oxford's Richard Dawkins.[5] A hopeful line of thought emerged that perhaps the time had come for scientists to consider the possibility for ethics to be removed temporarily from the hands of philosophers and biologicized.[6]

In the last decade or two, however, a new science of morality seems to have given Wilson's dream new life as a result of growing research in psychology and neuroscience.

Some of this research has been explored within a particularly anti-theistic agenda by Sam Harris,[7] Michael Shermer,[8] and others in the new atheist movement. Yet other psychologists and neuroscientists such as Jonathan Haidt,[9] Paul Bloom,[10] and Joshua Greene[11] have sought to provide a descriptive scientific morality that could enrich a Christian understanding of a natural law. Evaluating this new science of morality from a theological critical realist perspective,[12] this paper seeks to explore the implications of research in a scientific morality for natural theology and shows how a natural theology redefined as a theology of nature[13] can enrich and critique future explorations of a scientific morality.

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[9] Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind : Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (London: Allen Lane, 2012).
[10] Paul Bloom, *Against Empathy : The Case for Rational Compassion*, (London: The Bodley Head, 2016).
[11] Joshua David Greene, *Moral Tribes : Emotion, Reason, and the Gap between Us and Them* (New York: Penguin Press, 2013).
[12] See Alister E. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology. Volume 2, Reality* (London: T & T Clark, 2002).
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Edmund Lazzari
Marquette University

Saturday, 17-Jul-21, 12:00 **Session: III, Stream B**

Substantial Form and *Actus Essendi.* Avenues and Obstacles on the Way from Philosophy of Science to Natural Theology

Over the last fifty years, anglophone metaphysics has experienced a striking revival of the thought of Aristotle. Contemporary metaphysicians and philosophers of science have breathed new life into Aristotle's metaphysics of substance, form and matter, and act and

potency to address problems of material constitution, develop ontologies of causal powers, and address scientific phenomena such as emergence, rendering Aristotelian doctrines viable for approaching contemporary metaphysical problems.

Given the intuitive nature and explanatory power of Aristotelian metaphysics, these developments are encouraging to the natural theologian and to any theologian for whom natural theology is indispensable. Broadly Aristotelian concepts of act and potency, change, and causality have been useful tools in the history of natural theology both for arguments regarding God's existence and for explaining the difference between creatures and God.

However great the potential of this new Aristotelianism, though, there is still a great distance to traverse from contemporary hylomorphism in metaphysics to a fully fledged natural theology. Perhaps the most characteristic claim of classical theism is the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo,* a doctrine which is notably lacking in the metaphysics of Aristotle. The very concept of existence is only debatably distinct from the concept of οὐσία in Aristotle, and Neo-Aristotelian philosophers have yet to provide a satisfactory account of existence in contemporary metaphysics. Without a robust account of existence as actuality for a given substance, the most fruitful paths from metaphysics to natural theology remain unavailable to the Neo-Aristotelian philosopher.

Taking the natural theology of Thomas Aquinas as a paradigm, this paper will posit three major obstacles to be overcome on the avenue from Neo-Aristotelian philosophy of science to a new natural theology. The first, focusing on Aquinas's paradigmatic dictum "*forma dat esse,*" will show the difficulty of providing a satisfactory account of the real distinction between substantial form and existence. This problem is made more acute by the logical mode of discourse in analytic philosophy and the naturalistic hesitancy about the proliferation of possibly unnecessary entities and principles.

Even if this obstacle is overcome and Neo-Aristotelians can show that form must be actualized by an external source, the next obstacle casts doubt on the coherence of an "*esse commune*": why should there be a presumption that the acts of existence of radically different entities (such as an angel and a carrot) can be considered under the same category? If the acts of existence of different entities cannot be compared intelligibly, then why must there be only one source of different acts of existence?

The final obstacle is the question of actuality and limitation when speaking about created substances and God. With the crucial role limitation plays in the natural theology of divine attributes, what coherent account can be given for actuality and limitation of which we have no experience whatsoever?

This paper will take each obstacle in turn and suggest some avenues of approach to these obstacles for the Neo-Aristotelian philosopher based on contemporary voices and insights from the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas.

Andrew Loke
Hong Kong Baptist University

Friday, 16-Jul-21, 12:30 **Session: I, Stream B**

The Kalam Cosmological Argument for the Existence of God. A 21st Century Defence

The development of Big Bang cosmology has led to renewed scholarly and global public interest concerning the question of First-Cause and the traditional Kalam Cosmological Argument (KCA) for the existence of God (Copan and Craig 2017). Nevertheless, while the Big Bang is commonly understood as the beginning of space-time, many cosmologists are now discussing pre-Big Bang scenarios in which the Big Bang is not the absolute beginning. On the other hand, cosmologist George Ellis (2007) notes, with respect to the criteria for a good scientific theory (internal consistency, explanatory power, etc.), that 'these criteria are philosophical in nature in that they themselves cannot be proven to be correct by any experiment. Rather their choice is based on past experience combined with philosophical reflection.' In view of the importance of philosophical considerations, cosmologists should not ignore the philosophical problems associated with certain models of the universe, such as problems concerning an infinite regress and the violation of Causal Principle 'everything that begins to exist requires a cause' (see below). Indeed, scientists who are well-informed about the importance of philosophy have used philosophical arguments against an infinite regress to argue against cosmological models that postulate an infinite past (e.g. Ellis et al. 2004). This indicates that philosophical arguments are relevant for modern cosmology. In this paper, I shall develop a new philosophical argument taken from my book *God and Ultimate Origins* (Loke 2017), which demonstrates that, if every prior entity in a causal chain has a beginning, then given the Causal Principle nothing would ever begin to exist, therefore what is required is a beginningless First Cause. I defend the Causal Principle by developing a new Modus Tollens argument which addresses the objections by Oppy (2015) and others, and which demonstrates that, if something (say, the universe) begins to exist uncaused, then some other things which begin to exist would also begin uncaused, which is not the case, therefore the antecedent is not the case. I shall show how this argument can be modified to address the apparent challenge of fundamental physics to the directionality of causality and time (Linford 2020) by understanding 'beginning of existence' more broadly as

'finitude in temporal extension'. With these new arguments it can be demonstrated that the KCA is compatible with the static theory of time and hence has no problem with Theory of Relativity. In response to Hawking's (2010) proposal that the initial state of the universe consisted of a timeless (no boundary) state, which can be understood as a beginningless impersonal First Cause, I shall use these new arguments to show that an infinite regress of events (=changes) is impossible and the first event did not begin to exist uncaused. Thus the first change (=first event) must have been caused by a First Cause which was initially changeless, and which must have libertarian freedom in order to bring about the first event from an initially changeless state, and therefore is a personal Creator of the universe (Loke 2017).

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Alessandro Mantini
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Saturday, 17-Jul-21, 12:30 **Session: III, Stream B**

Augmented Reality and Theology: A New Analogy for an "Integral" Expansion

The new frontiers and advances concerning Artificial Intelligence and Augmented Reality are increasingly widespread in various areas of daily life, and they also offer the possibility to open unexpected horizons in order to explore and understand the world around us, but also to extend it, offering more possibilities of interaction.

With Artificial Intelligence it is possible to exhibit performances comparable or exceeding that of humans in different tasks, also if it is very problematic to use and understand the term "intelligence", discussing on whether it is applicable or not to auto-improving and "learning" machines. "Intelligence" and "learning" are therefore concepts increasingly challenging man to better understand his own specificity: both terms are in fact strictly connected to knowledge and therefore to thinking, which are attitudes properly belonging to man and his conscience.

Furthermore new technological opportunities offer the possibility to improve the reality itself in different fully immersive and interactive ways: elaborating a new artificial environment (Virtual Reality), or building an enhanced world where what is real is "augmented" with new virtual spaces (Augmented Reality). Both Virtual and Augmented Reality can be collected referring more generally to Mixed Reality.

In these cases we deal with concepts such as "reality", certainly not obvious because it appears to be wider and deeper than it seems, extending what is just natural; "interaction", with the possibility to act on something that is virtual; and "sensitivity", discussing whether it concerns only what is touchable or also what is virtual!

In any case three levels can be considered: (1) a cross disciplinary approach involving not just technology and science but also philosophy and theology, searching for an epistemological growth and interconnection of knowledge (augmented epistemic level); (2) a multi sensorial experience, where we are concerned with corporeal and artificial senses strictly merged (augmented sensorial level); (3) and finally a multi dimensional reference, with which we consider a sort of new reality composed with "augmented" dimensions surpassing the classical four and offering new virtual references or dimensional jumps, exactly inside the reality itself, like a sort of real expansion of space-time (augmented dimensional level).

With these new instruments nowadays more and more familiars, we will explore the possibility to consider the natural theological level as a particular and involving augmented reality offering new coordinates, exactly into and for the real life. Furthermore and specifically, the revealed catholic theology is an ulterior and decisive step towards the concrete, reasonable and effective expression of a solid epistemic (presence of God), sensorial (spiritual senses) and dimensional (access and relation with God in Jesus) expansion. Will be described the analogy between what is virtual, and inserted into the real world, and what is revealed, and discovered into the real world. Subsequently the very concept of "Augmented" changes from seeing and interacting with something that doesn't exist or it is just virtual, to seeing and interacting with God into the real life according not anymore with the use of technological extensions, but with the specific sacramental expansions.

Daryl Ooi
National University of Singapore

Friday, 16-Jul-21, 15:00 **Session: II, Stream C**

The Possibility of Natural Theology in a World of Horrendous Evils

'Horrendous evils' designate a category of evils, roughly speaking, the participation in which, gives the sufferer *prima facie* reason to doubt whether life, given the inclusion of said evil, could be a great good to the participant on the whole (Adams 1989, 1993, 2006). With the increase in information flow and spike in 'horrendous evils' such as the Holocaust and the Cambodian genocide in the 21st century, many philosophers have questioned whether theodicies are still possible. Similarly, I argue, horrendous evils pose important questions to the task of natural theology.

In part one of this paper, I attempt to clarify different ways to understand the category of 'horrendous evils', specifying three different senses of the category in the theodical literature: the first-person perspective, the community-perspective and the objective sense (eg. Rowe 1991, Wetzel 1989, Mesle 2004, Shearn 2013).

In part two, I consider two contemporary responses to the problem of horrendous evils: (a) protest theodicies (eg. Wiesel 1979, Roth 1981, Blumenthal 1993) and (b) sceptical theism (eg. Wykstra 1984, Rea and Bergmann 2005, Bergmann 2011). Protest theodicies, roughly speaking, attempt to respond to the problem of horrendous evils by focusing on practical aspects of the sufferer's response, and emphasise the role of lament, complaining, and protesting in the lives of believers. Sceptical theists, roughly speaking, attempt to respond to the problem of horrendous evils by arguing that if God exists, it would be

unsurprising, even expected, for there to be suffering in the world, the reasons of which are beyond our ken. These two responses, however, have raised a variety of questions for natural theology, including: can we believe in a God who allows horrendous evils to exist in his universe? What implications do horrendous evils have on the kind of inferences we can draw concerning the moral attributes of God from the natural world? If humans do not share a moral community with God, is natural theology regarding the moral attributes of God possible?

In part three, I draw on conclusions from part one to argue that, even in the face of horrendous evils, the inference that protest theodicists like John Roth have drawn – that God cannot be good – is not necessary. However, I also argue that we have good reason to think that the scepticism in the sceptical theists' response should apply to the nature of inferences that can be drawn from a world with horrendous evils to the moral attributes of God. Finally, I discuss two ways natural theology can conceptualise the moral attributes of God in the light of horrendous evils: (1) the sceptical view, one which I think, can be found in David Hume's works: in short, that we cannot draw any reasonable conclusions regarding the moral attributes of the Deity from natural phenomena and (2) the optimistic view, one which I argue, opens the possibility for us to argue that, even with horrendous evils in the world, an inference that God still possesses the moral attributes of love and justice is still possible.

J. Brian Pitts
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Friday, 16-Jul-21, 11:00 **Session: I, Stream C**

Does Reichenbachian Meta-induction Justify Induction – Or Maybe Something Else?

The empiricist denial of synthetic *a priori* knowledge made logical empiricists face the problem of justifying induction. The Feigl-Reichenbach-Salmon pragmatic justification of induction held that no predictive method is guaranteed to work, but if anything does, induction does. This was perhaps the best of the justifications offered during the serious effort through the 1970s, when justifying induction fizzled out due to exhaustion. In recent years Gerhard Schurz has extended these ideas, emphasizing Reichenbach's theme that induction is employed at the meta-level of predictive methods in light of their track records. One entertains *a priori* all manner of esoteric prediction methods, and is said to arrive *a posteriori* at the conclusion, based on the actual past, that object-level induction (science, the uniformity of nature) is optimal for predictions. Thus one is justified in consulting doctors over witch doctors, meteorologists over weather diviners, *etc*.

An apparently novel difficulty is noted, related to recognized short-run worries but based on disagreement about the past. Usually the meta-inductive justification assumes the past to be infallibly and uncontroversially remembered. But real induction-relevant debates in intellectual history involve fallible and contested testimony to isolated events. Any seriously entertained predictive method will agree with induction most of the time; on any view, fortune tellers, prophets, *etc*., predict only rarely; the design of airplanes (*e.g*.) is based on science, not prophecy. Famously, there exists testimonial evidence for isolated non-uniformities of nature (miracles or the like---e.g., someone's being alive after being dead for some time). With induction in dispute, such evidence cannot be discarded automatically, as Broad noted. For those inclined to accept such testimony, meta-induction might support a partly non-inductive/non-uniform method. If Prophet Bob predicts induction-violating event *E*, and *E* comes true, then Bob's later prophecies become more credible, as Reichenbach's discussion of clairvoyance in *Experience and Prediction* fleetingly recognized. Schurz offers meta-induction as a way to resolve worldview conflicts between 'esotericism' (prophecy, *etc*.) and science in favor of science. But the dispute about the past implies that meta-induction fails to yield an objective answer to some existing disputes, such as whether miracles associated with religious figures long ago really happened. More seriously, meta-induction might support part-time esotericism, not (just?) science, depending on one's beliefs about the past.

This novel hypothetical worry is in fact real and ancient. The Stoic defense of divination (prophecy) paralleled the empiricist school of medicine in defending divination on the basis of its track record of successful predictions. One can also find meta-induction in the Pentateuch. Evidently a meta-inductive justification of induction works best where it isn't much needed. Tentative ideas for responding to this situation are sketched.

Finney Premkumar
Azusa Pacific University

Friday, 16-Jul-21, 11:30 **Session: I, Stream C**

Why Natural Theology need not be Rational in order to be Reasonable

Natural theology, for the most part, seems to emerge from a picture of rationality as the employment of an innate truth-oriented faculty thereby leading to the oft-repeated claim that certain things are 'necessitated by reason.' This in turn supports the related stance that the deliverances of natural theology are a 'natural' output of specific cognitive capacities or faculties that human beings inherently possess. The usual conclusion to be drawn is that natural theological arguments are more intuitive rather than reflective and that the utilized

notions like ‘justification’ and ‘warrant’ within its epistemological structure can in fact be normative.

I will argue, first and foremost, that its misleading to use normative notions like ‘rational’ and more profitable to utilize alternative and fluid terms like ‘reasonable’ which lay bare operative constitutive standards for the use of such words as “justification” and “warrant” based on interpretive commitments within specific communities. Furthermore, rational notions like ‘objectivity’, ‘clarity’ ‘methodological rigor’ etc., seem to make no sense unless we already inhabit the conceptual space opened up by the applicability of an antecedent vocabulary that is favorable to such specific use. Natural theology is ‘natural’ only to the extent that it has been deemed as such by the ‘reasonableness’ attributed by practitioners (natural theologians) who firmly establish or make foundational specific intuitions conducive to particular ends. In other words, it is internally constructed and sustained with the potential for micro-evolution based on fluctuations within communal agreement. As such, the various theological conversations that have transpired historically converge and coalesce in current trends and provide insight into why and how natural theology is undertaken today.

Secondly, I will content that studying natural cognitive processes underlying religious thinking and natural theology in order to erect a ‘rational’ basis and justification for the discipline will not avail much. It is the notion of ‘reasonableness’ when institutionalized and solidified that seems to give rise to normative concept like ‘rational’. This is the result of natural theologians buying into the modernist view of moving from tradition to (strict standards of) rationality rather that discarding this illusory chronological transition and perceiving the entire phenomenon as a progression of tradition-constituted rationality (which is what ‘reasonableness’ is all about). In fact, it could be sustained that the constantly emerging concepts and the functional aspects of ‘rationality’ in natural theology are concrete embodiments of often unarticulated expressions of what theological traditions, through conversation and convention, find ‘reasonable’. Accordingly, natural theology can be practiced communally based on what is reasonable rather than the community adhering to non-contextual, non-communal objective standards of what is ‘rational’ which are often influenced by sustained myths in philosophy.

I’ll conclude by fleshing out the implications of my view focusing on the importance of natural theology even when it loses its perceived objectivity based on pre-commitments to specific definitions of rationality. In fact, I will maintain that it actually gains more value and would incite more excitement because of its reasonableness rather than otherwise.

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Saturday, 17-Jul-21, 11:00 **Session: III, Stream A**

Quantum Mechanics and Salvation: Re-examining Soteriological Change in Light of 21st Century Physics

As stated in the call for papers, 'Natural Theology investigates what we can know or not know about the existence and essence of God and divine revelation on the basis of what we can know about nature.' I propose, using a new finding from Quantum Mechanics, to argue for a reinterpretation of the doctrine of salvation, broadly conceived. In this way, I bring 21st century science into dialogue with theology. Time is often neglected in interdisciplinary conversations between science and religion, and occurs infrequently in discussions of Natural Theology. Prior discourse on time and theology has focused on the relationship between God and time. This has brought forth some excellent work, particularly from William Lane Craig and Richard Swinburne. Nevertheless, with the exception of Robert John Russell, there is a significant gap. Little has been done on the issue of time and salvation. This paper is, therefore, cutting-edge in two domains. It employs recent data from quantum mechanics, which is yet to receive significant metaphysical engagement, and applies it to salvation, itself a neglected dimension of the 'theology and time' debate thus far.

Despite ongoing debates regarding time's nature and structure, both the metaphysics of time and relativistic physics hold that the temporal order between two causally related events when viewed from a single perspective is fixed. Recent work in Quantum Mechanics suggests that, at the sub-atomic level, this may not be the case. I examine the metaphysical and theological implications of a quantum phenomenon: Indefinite Causal Order. This hypothesis applies the superposition principle to the order of events, widening the principle's domain from that of objects to that of temporal structures. Recent experimental support for Indefinite Causal Order was provided by K. Goswami et al in 2018. Essentially, two operations A and B were shown to be in a superposition with regard to their order – viz. the relations *A before B* **and** *B before A* both obtained. Metaphysically, Indefinite Causal Order poses a significant challenge to the orthodox bifurcation between the A-theory and B-theory, as it undermines both an objective present moment and fixed temporal order relations. These are core features of the traditionally defined A and B-theories respectively. The A and B-theories were constructed in the context of 20th century physics and philosophy and need updating following new insights from the weird and wonderful quantum world. I argue that the A-theory is incompatible with Indefinite Causal

Order, and the B-theory can only remain coherent in the 21st century following modification. I suggest a new model of the block universe.

As for salvation, my argument has two stages. The first, employing an argument from Carl Hoeffer, shows how free choice can be compatible with a B-theoretic ontology. The second draws on the work of Adolf Grünbaum to argue that the precise mechanism of salvific change is best conceived as mind-dependent becoming. On this model, individuals freely choose to respond to a saving power. They then experience a salvation-transformation as a result. Essentially, salvific change is sufficiently accounted for by a *subjective* change in the consciousness of the individual. From the perspective of the saved person, a subjective and psychological change can be just as significant and transformative as an objective, ontological change. A subjective transformation can be accommodated within the block universe through the mechanism of free action dubbed 'downward causation', and the salvific change that comes as a result of this action takes the form of mind-dependent becoming. The enhanced psychological existence, enriched relationality, or fulfilment that follows constitutes salvation.

This paper brings natural theology into the 21st century by taking cutting-edge scientific data and using it to interpret the metaphysics of time. Then, with this scientifically informed metaphysical framework in hand, a central theological doctrine, salvation, is re-examined. The result is a novel soteriology which takes contemporary physics and metaphysics into account.

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Saturday, 17-Jul-21, 12:00 **Session: III, Stream C**

Irreducible Agent and its role in Natural Theology

Human mind/agency and its distinction from the material body have always been one of the most important premises/ preconditions for the transition from naturalism to natural theology .Naturalists claim that all physical and non-physical phenomena have a naturalistic explanation that can be explained without the use of any non-physical or supernatural components and one of the most important naturalistic strategies is reductionism, which involves free agency. If we show that the reduction of the human agency to the set of events is not successful, the agent is again presented as an irreducible substance, thus we can speak of natural theology.

In contemporary philosophy of action, the standard causal theory of action is the dominant theory, on the basis of which an action is an event that is the result of the beliefs and desires of the agent. And the agency is reduced to a set of mental and physical events that have a deterministic or indeterministic relation with each other. Thus, naturalists, by reducing agency and contenting themselves with a functional role of it, consider the agent not as the origin of an action, but as a set of events that are in a causal relationship with each other.

So we will argue that a reduction of agency cannot explain all that we understand of it, our intuition of agency and moral responsibility cannot be compatible with reductionism. As a result, the agent is an irreducible substance that has causal powers, and these powers become the source for his actions, which historically goes back to Aristotelian metaphysics. But how to explain its essence, causal powers and how it can overcome its problems such as the mind-body is one of the issues that have received less attention among the proponents of the agent-causal theory of action.

In the following, we introduce the views of Muslim philosophers, who consider the human self (Nafs) as the source and origin of any kind of action and movement, both mental and physical. Despite the fact that they all believe in the existence of the human self as a substance, but they have different explanations for it. We follow Mulla Sadra's views in the thought of the self as a hierarchical substance, in some degrees, are physical and some of which are non-physical. His explanation of substance is based on two metaphysical doctrines modulation and gradation of existence called *tashkik al-wujud* and substantial motion (*haraka jawhariyya)*

The unique substance, which is the source of mental and physical action, and being able to respond to the problems posed by event causation and reductionist explanations can free themselves from the problems of dualism. For, here the mind and the body, mental and physical, are not two separate domains, which are the degrees of a substance and the material levels can be transformed into the immaterial levels by substantial motion.

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Friday, 16-Jul-21, 13:30 **Session: II, Stream B**

The Probability of Desire: A Bayesian Exploration of C.S. Lewis' 'Argument from Desire'

One of the most original contributions to natural theology in the 20th century was C.S. Lewis' 'Argument from Desire.' The argument, in short, is most neatly summarized in Lewis' *Mere Christianity,* where Lewis notes, "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."[1] In other words, the experience of unfulfilled desires is a clue to these desires pointing to fulfillment in another realm, which in Lewis' understanding was Heaven.[2]

Since John Beverslius coined the phrase 'Argument from Desire' in 1985,[3] the argument has generated no shortage of philosophical disagreement, ranging from Peter Kreeft commenting that outside of Anselm's ontological argument, Lewis' 'Argument from Desire' is the most interesting argument "in the history of human thought,"[4] to Arend Smilde arguing it is legitimate to question whether Lewis ever intended his "argument" as such.[5]

Various attempts have been put forward to construct a syllogistic "Argument from Desire," be they deductive, inductive, or abductive.[6] However, given the widespread disagreement over the various premises, it seems an alternative way forward amidst the disagreement would be assessing the merits of an "Argument from Desire" using Bayes theorem.

In this talk, I will take this alternative, and novel, approach; using Bayes' theorem to assess the success of Lewis's argument in support of theism over and against naturalism. As I will argue, a strength of this approach is that it allows me to largely bypass a significant area of disagreement within the literature, namely, whether these desires are best seen as natural or artificial. Additionally, I will argue for why these desires are the sort of good God would be interested in giving to persons. Then I will proceed to outline what I take to be the best naturalistic accounts of these desires and outline some of the challenges these accounts face. Finally, I will conclude with plugging these results into Bayes' Theorem.

[1] Lewis (1997), p. 118.
[2] See McGrath (2014), p. 117.
[3] See Beverslius (1985).
[4] Kreeft (1980), p. 201.
[5] Smilde (2014), p. 69.
[6] See Holyer and Peterson (1988), pp. 62, 68 and Lovell (2003), p. 130.

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Saturday, 17-Jul-21, 11:30 **Session: III, Stream A**

The Distorting Natural (a)Theology of *The Selfish Gene*

In this paper I will argue that Richard Dawkins' *The Selfish Gene* (1976/2016) can be understood as a form of natural (a)theology, when natural theology is understood along

the lines laid out by Alister McGrath in *The Open Secret* (2008). The central characteristic of this form of natural theology is that some extra-scientific concepts can enable us to "read" nature fruitfully. What is sought is "resonance, not proof" between theological and scientific perspectives, as McGrath says. To use a visual metaphor, as McGrath does: it gives rise to a depth-perception where the somewhat different, but not conflicting, perspectives of natural science and theology combine to give rise to a deeper picture – analogous to how the two eyes provide slightly different pictures on each retina, which, when combined, gives rise to depth-perception. In *The Selfish Gene* the concept of "selfish genes" functions as an interpretative lens through which Dawkins reads evolution.

However, the "selfishness" that is said to characterize genes turns out to have three distinct meanings in *The Selfish Gene.* One sense is given by the technical definition, which is provided on page 5 (2016) and which corresponds roughly to the standard definition of "evolutionary selfishness" within evolutionary theory. However, there are also two other senses which are used interchangeably with the technical definition: evolutionary selfish as strongly connected to moral selfishness, and evolutionary selfish as another term for whatever it is that is adaptive. Thus, in the second edition of *The Selfish Gene* which includes a chapter on reciprocal altruism, building on the work of Robert Axelrod, we are told that cooperative individuals are driven by "selfish genes" since cooperation is more adaptive than defection. Here "selfish genes" means genes that give rise to adaptive, cooperative behavior.

However, the *moral implications* of evolutionary theory become vastly different depending on how one conceptualizes the relationship between these three different meanings of selfish. Natural selection should be understood, not as favoring "selfishness" but as favoring adaptivity. And that is a *formal* property: how that is which is adaptive (and thus selected) cannot be settled in advance, in contrast to Dawkins admonition that natural selection only can give rise to selfishness, and that we therefore are "born selfish" but should rebel against our selfish nature. Through this equivocal use of the term "selfish" Dawkins is able to present a darker reading of evolution than the scientific content warrants. However, not only does it go *beyond* science, which in itself is not a problem for a "natural (a)theology": it does not do justice to the underlying science. Adaptive genes need not give rise to selfish individuals neither in terms of behavior nor psychology. Thus, *The Selfish Gene* must be understood as not an *enriching* but a *distorting* form of natural (a)theology.

Mitch Stokes
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Saturday, 17-Jul-21, 12:00 **Session: III, Stream A**

Evolution and the Applicability of Mathematics in Contemporary Physics

In *The Applicability of Mathematics as a Philosophical Problem* (Harvard), Mark Steiner describes various applications of mathematics to quantum mechanics, general relativity, and quantum field theory that, he says, suggest that naturalism is false. But are there purely naturalistic explanations of these applications? What are the current evolutionary explanations for the applicability of mathematics in contemporary physics? There are two puzzling features of math's applicability that I will highlight (by looking at a few of Steiner's specific examples, including Gell-Mann's discovery of the omega minus particle). One feature is the mere fact of applicability, the fact that highly sophisticated mathematical concepts are used to describe parts of the world that behave very differently from the realm relevant to the evolution of our conceptual and perceptual faculties. Call this the "descriptive" problem. The other, related feature—call it the "discovery" problem—is that various methods of discovering key applications make the universe look, as Steiner puts it, "user-friendly," as if the universe were in some sense anthropocentric. So then, what exactly are our evolutionary accounts of applicability in such cases, and do these accounts explain both of the above features without any need for a divine creator/designer? And finally, how are the answers to these questions affected by taking an instrumentalist or anti-realist attitude towards the relevant parts of physics?

Matthew Sweeney
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Friday, 16-Jul-21, 12:00 **Session: I, Stream C**

Ungodly Nature: Changes in Accounts of *Nature* and *God* from Aquinas to Descartes that Undermine Natural Theology

A high water mark in the history of natural theology was Thomas Aquinas's integration of the Aristotelian account of *nature* and with his own account of *God*. In this presentation, it will be argued that fundamental changes to the ways that *nature* and *God* were understood in Early Modern thought largely undermined the possibility of natural theology and set the stage for its widespread rejection in contemporary thought.

Given the obvious importance of the accounts of *nature* and *God* to natural theology, this essay will sketch how their understandings shifted from the Medieval Scholastic to the

Early Modern era. The two notions will be investigated together because, as will be seen, they are so closely connected in the Medieval Scholastic and Early Modern philosophical systems that the shifts in one can't be adequately explained without a sufficient understanding of the shifts in the other. To trace the main lines of the ways these notions were shifting relative to eachother from Medieval Scholastic to Early Modern philosophy, this essay will focus on the thought of major representative thinkers of each era – Thomas Aquinas and Rene Descartes.

It will be shown how, from the Medieval Scholastic thought of Thomas Aquinas to the Early Modern thought of Rene Descartes, the accounts of *nature* and *God* when through corresponding shifts which have undermined the possibility of natural theology. This will be accomplished in four main parts: The first part will provide an overview of Aquinas's accounts of *nature* and *God*. The second will sketch early intellectual departures from Scholastic thought in their historical context prior to Descartes. The third section then will illustrate how with Descartes there was a clear break from Thomistic-Scholasticism with respect to his accounts of *nature* and *God*. And lastly, the fourth will argue that the shifts in these accounts undermined the possibility of the investigation of God through the natural world – i.e. natural theology – and ultimately set the stage for its widespread rejection in contemporary thought.

Eugenia Torrance
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Friday, 16-Jul-21, 12:30 **Session: I, Stream C**

How to Read the Book of Nature: Maximus' Book of Nature and Methodology in the Theology-Science Dialogue

Largely inspired by Hans Urs Von Balthasar's masterful introduction to Maximus the Confessor in *The Cosmic Liturgy*, his theology has been put to creative and fruitful use in many areas of theology's engagement with science: in ecotheology, evolutionary biology, and physics. What is central to these retrievals is Maximus' cosmic vision of Christ's presence in the natural world, particularly through the theory of the many *λόγοι* that are unified in the one Λόγος. What has been less utilized is the epistemology that is implied by Maximus' *Logos* theory, specifically, his version of the idea that nature and scripture represent two books. Drawing on the work of Joshua Lollar, this paper will offer a reading of Maximus centered on Ambiguum 10 in light of *Logos* theory that addresses the question: how do we read the book of nature? It will then use this rereading to assess two retrievals of Maximus in theology and science: Celia Deane Drummond's discussion of the role of purpose in evolutionary biology and Christopher Knight's discussion of the

laws of nature in physics. I will argue that Maximus' theory of the book of nature has more to offer their projects and to the general field of methodology in theology and science than has been noted.

Héctor Velázquez Fernández
Centro Sociedad Tecnológica y Futuro Humano, Universidad Mayor, Santiago de Chile

Friday, 16-Jul-21, 14:00 **Session: II, Stream B**

About Useful and Useless Meanings of Causality, Purpose and Order to Support God´s Existence Arguments based on Scientific Perspectives

In this paper I will explore some useful and useless meanings of causality, purpose and order to support God´s existence arguments based on scientific perspectives.

There are arguments like Intelligent Design that understand causality as an explanation of special and mechanical phaenomena, interpreted as a result of extraordinary and external intervention in nature. This meaning of causality implies a natural order understood as a distribution of inert parts, fixed according with some external rules (from an external Agent, too). In the same context, purpose means behaviour of nature as a result of this external intervention conducted by an external rationality.

These meanings of causality, order and purpose have been refuted by current scientific knowledge and have led to the false conclusion that it is impossible to base the existence of God on arguments with a scientific perspective.

But, is it possible that science can support God´s existence arguments? According to my paper, it depends on the meaning of causality, order and purpose that is taken as a starting point.

For example, in opposite way to Intelligent Design, If we understand causality as an explanation of dynamic phenomena, that is, a natural and regular interaction within a changing and complex nature, and we understand natural order as a set of non-special or singular phaenomena with intrinsic and unconscious tendencies, it is possible to support God´s existence from current scientific knowledge.

If we understand cosmos as a result of self-organised processes, in this context causality means not an external influence, order means the natural way of processes within cosmos, and purpose means regular tendencies self-conducted. Neither of these phaenomena (causality, order and purpose or tendencies to determined goals) can support their

existence in itself, that implies the possibility to argue the existence of God as Creator of this existence but not external ruler of natural processes.

In my paper in first place I emphasise the differences among classic design arguments, the 5th via of Aquinas and Intelligent Design argument, to avoid a possible confusion among them. Secondly, I compare the meanings of causality, order and purpose implied in Design arguments, Intelligent Design and 5th via of Aquinas argument, and at the end I describe what phaenomena within dynamic and self-organised cosmos could be useful to support God´s existence arguments from a scientific perspective.

Andrea Vestrucci
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Saturday, 17-Jul-21, 12:30 **Session: III, Stream A**

Computational Theology and Natural Theology

The paper discusses aspects of interaction between computational theology (CT) and natural theology (NT). I define CT as the theological field that studies 1. the formalization, translation, and re-assessment of theological arguments within an automated reasoning environment; 2. the theological relevance of outcomes from theorem provers applications carried out by other disciplines such as computational metaphysics; 3. the relationship between theological problems and tools, concepts, and problems from theory of computation.

My paper focuses on the second point. It considers two case studies from computational metaphysics. First, Zalta and Oppenheimer's application of theorem prover Pover9 to a Meinongian formalization of Anselm's ontological argument (2011, 2020). Second, Benzmüller *et al.* application of proof assistants Leo-II and Isabelle to (varieties of) Gödel's ontological argument (2013, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2020). My paper analyzes two theologically-relevant features shared by both case studies. First, the automated reasoning-induced improvements of the original arguments; these improvements are: the discovery (and emendation) of a redundancy in the premises (first case study); the formal clarification of an inconsistency in Gödel's axioms (second case study). The second feature is the use of mathematical tools/objects: for instance, the first case study clarifies that Anselm's argument uses diagonal reasoning with no paradoxical outcomes.

The paper discusses the following aspects:

1. The software-induced improvements contribute to the theological discussions on the ontological argument; they deepen the limits of informal/intuitive theological arguments and, also, the limits of formalizations of these arguments.

2. The use of mathematical tools can be relevant to the debate on the relationship between the object of theology and the objects of mathematics (e.g. Harrison 2017), and to the debate on the scientificity of theology (see, for instance, the famous debate between Heinrich Scholz and Karl Barth).

3. Finally, the application of automated reasoning programs can help to present an argument in the most transparent and unambiguous way; this feature can be helpful in an interreligious environment.

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Friday, 16-Jul-21, 14:30 **Session: II, Stream B**

The Ambiguity Argument for Agnosticism and the View from Nowhere in Natural Theology

Out of the three main positions in the debate on the existence of God – theism, atheism, and agnosticism – agnosticism has been the one least discussed by natural theologians, who often conflate it with atheism on the grounds that it is identical with the latter in practice or from the viewpoint of a theist (see e.g. Swinburne 2004, 267272). In spite of this, the topic of natural theology features prominently – though indirectly – in the arguments of the defenders of agnosticism. The aim of my presentation is to (a) reconstruct the line of reasoning underlying the most popular argument for agnosticism – the ambiguity argument – presenting it (like the majority of its proponents) in evidentialist terms, and (b) discuss its consequences for natural theology.

Contemporary argumentation for agnosticism tends to focus on evidential ambiguity: the possibility of interpreting the evidence underlying the premises of proofs and arguments within natural theology as supporting arguments and proofs leading in the opposite direction. Such argumentation can be roughly divided into general and specific current: while some authors, in continuity with the Kantian heritage of agnosticism (cf. Lightman 1987, 51-53), point out the ambiguity of the evidence underlying specific arguments for and against the existence of God (see e.g. Lucey 1983; Kenny 2004, 81-100), others discuss the ambiguity of the evidence relevant to God's existence in general (see e.g. Le Poidevin 2010, 54-76, Oppy 2018, 12-13, 61-62). Though few authors infer agnosticism

directly from evidential ambiguity, most evidentialist discussions of agnosticism include the claim that the ambiguity of evidence in some way constitutes (higher-order) evidence for the agnostic conclusion, making it more probable that the right response to the problem of God's existence is the suspension of judgement. Agnostic philosophers who made this claim tend to rest it on the assumption that agnosticism constitutes, or is the closest to, the neutral position in the debate on God's existence – a "view from nowhere" in natural theology. The usual way of rebutting this claim has been *reductio ad absurdum:* stating that if the ambiguity of evidence requires suspending judgement on the existence of God, it also requires suspending judgement on other philosophical problems, resulting in global skepticism; since global skepticism is absurd (or not possible in practice), evidential ambiguity is not a reason to be agnostic about God's existence (for a *locus classicus,* see Van Inwagen 1996).

Both the ambiguity argument and its rebuttal come in different variants, depending on the context in which the evidence concerning God's existence is discussed. I will argue that (1.) some of the newer versions of the argument are resistant to the *reductio* rebuttal and should be treated seriously by natural theologians, but that (2.) the same features of those versions which make it immune to the *reductio* weaken their skeptical consequences, opening the way to weaker, or qualified, variants of theism and atheism. As I will briefly show, the resulting epistemological landscape reflects much better than the earlier one some contemporary spiritual phenomena of increasing social importance – such as postsecularism.

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Friday, 16-Jul-21, 15:00 **Session: II, Stream B**

God, Nature, Reason and Experience

Many philosophers have proposed arguments for the existence of God, of course, and many others have resisted such attempts, arguing, for example, that the reasoning or the available evidence, is subject to antinomies, limited, flawed or just insufficient. I will look closely in this paper at three major challenges to thinking about God and nature that must be confronted in the 21st century: the appeal to *verificationism,* the appeal to *explanation* (neo-Atheism) and the appeal to *evidentialism* (all of which will be carefully defined). I will argue that all of these, in logical or in empirical terms, are limited, incomplete, incoherent or insufficient.