



**Christian Philosophy**  
facing Naturalism



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# **Christian Philosophy facing Naturalism**

## **Book of Abstracts**

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# KEYNOTE LECTURES

Peter van Inwagen

University of Notre Dame, USA

## Naturalism

Epistemological and ontological definitions of naturalism are considered, and it is argued that the ontological definitions are preferable. The following ontological definition is endorsed. Naturalism comprises the following theses: that everything (concrete) there is composed of certain fundamental entities; that fundamental entities are mereologically simple, and wholly without mental or teleological properties; that the truth-value of every proposition supervenes on the intrinsic properties of and relations that hold among the fundamental entities conjoined with the proposition that everything (concrete) is composed of fundamental entities. The relation of naturalism to the following concepts and topics will be considered: property dualism; theism; supernaturalism; ethical intuitionism; miracles; magic; the simulation hypothesis.

Robert C. Koons

University of Texas at Austin, USA

## The Prime Mover from Aristotle to Aquinas: A Fresh Interpretation and Defense

In the First Way for proving God's existence in the *Summa Theologiae* (I.2.3), Thomas Aquinas extracts a version of Aristotle's argument for the unmoved prime mover in *Physics* books VII and VIII, describing it as the "most manifest" (*manifestior*) way. It has in fact been the most heavily criticized of the Ways, with negative appraisals supplied (either explicitly or implicitly) by Duns Scotus, Suarez, and Anthony Kenny, to

name just a few. Most commentators believe that it relies on ancient and now-refuted theories of mechanics, mechanics that supposedly denied anything like inertia or locomotive impetus. And even contemporary defenders, like Daniel Shields, concedes that it falls far short of establishing the existence of a transcendent God. I offer a new interpretation of the Aristotelian argument, one that circumvents all these objections, building instead on Aristotle's analysis of time and change in book IV of the *Physics*. A transcendent, absolutely unchangeable God is required explanation for the continued forward motion of time itself, something that no phenomenon within time, including inertia or spontaneous freedom, can explain.

Charles Taliaferro

St. Olaf College, USA

### The Argument from Reason Revisited

There are versions of an argument from reason against materialism / naturalism that have a long history, going back to Plato. I articulate an argument from reason derived from Plato's dialogue the *Phaedo*. I contend that it poses a problem for contemporary forms of naturalism. I conclude by defending the argument in response to objections from GEM Anscombe and others.

Jacek Wojtysiak

Catholic University of Lublin, Poland

### Can Naturalism Explain Religion?

In my paper I discuss different answers to the question 'why does any religion exist at all?' Soft naturalists, in answering this question, cite the explanations given in the CSR framework, but do not address the issue of the ultimate explanation of religion. Strong naturalists take up this problem and believe that the ultimate explanation of religion cannot appeal to supernatural factors. Theists, on the other hand, invoke such a factor,

namely God, in their explanations. To settle the dispute between strong naturalism and theism in the philosophy of religion, I propose to consider two worlds – the naturalist's world (N-world) and the theist's world (T-world) – and wonder which of them is more open to religion. In my opinion, the second world is more open to religion in three aspects: motivation, realization and harmony. In the first world, on the other hand, religion appears only by chance and is an epistemic and practical anomaly. The above comparative procedure leads me to the thesis that strong naturalism, unlike theism, cannot give a good explanation of religion. I supplement my defence of this thesis with answers to several objections against my argument from the T-world advantage. (The most important of these objections is that in the T-world one can hardly expect as much religious diversity as there is in our world). And in conclusion, I try to show that any advocate of strong naturalism in the philosophy of religion is not able to consistently maintain one's position in the practice of life.

## PANEL DISCUSSION

Wodzisław Duch

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun, Poland

Georg Gasser

University of Augsburg, Germany

### The controversy over the naturalistic image of the world and man

The panel discussion focuses on the naturalistic image of the world and man, exploring its specifics, sources, conditions, and consequences. The main question to be addressed is whether naturalism alone is adequate for a philosophical understanding of reality, particularly of man.

# PAPERS IN PARALLEL SESSIONS

**Tuesday, 24.09.2024; 10:45**

**Room 412: Theology facing naturalism**

Stanisław Ruczaj

Jagiellonian University, Poland

## Grace contra Nature: The Cognitive Science of Religion and Theology of Grace

The cognitive science of religion (CSR) seeks to provide naturalistic explanations for a variety of religious phenomena, incorporating insights from evolutionary anthropology, developmental and cognitive psychology, and neuroscience. One of the subjects addressed by CSR is the etiology of people's religious beliefs. In my talk, I will argue that CSR account of how religious beliefs are formed presents a challenge to the important Christian doctrine of the grace of faith (GOF). Already present in an undeveloped form in the New Testament and substantially developed in later Christian theology, GOF states that humans are unable to form core Christian religious beliefs, such as belief in the Trinity or in the divinity of Christ, unless they receive the supernatural gift of God's grace. Thus, there is a prima facie incompatibility between naturalistic and theological accounts of the etiology of Christian religious beliefs: the latter postulates a supernatural explanans for the phenomenon of Christian faith, but the former deems this unnecessary. I will also suggest a possible response that a Christian might use to defend himself against this argument.

Walter Menezes

School of Sanskrit, Philosophy, and Indic Studies, Goa University, India

## Does Naturalism Confront Christianity? A Christian Philosophical Inquiry into Dual Natures via Eastern Ontologies

The Interface between naturalism and Christianity has sparked profound philosophical inquiry, probing the depths of ontology, epistemology, and metaphysics. At the heart of this discourse lies the pivotal question: Does naturalism confront Christianity? This inquiry delves into the intricate interplay between these two worldviews, examining their respective ontological underpinnings and their implication for understanding the dual nature of Christ.

Naturalism, rooted in the empirical sciences, posits a universe governed solely by natural laws, devoid of supernatural intervention. It champions a materialistic worldview, emphasizing the primacy of physical processes in shaping reality. In contrast, Christianity asserts a transcendent framework, acknowledging the existence of a divine realm beyond the material world. Central to Christian theology is the doctrine of the Incarnation, which proclaims the dual nature of Christ—fully human and fully divine. This study embarks on a Christian philosophical inquiry into the confrontation between naturalism and Christianity, leveraging insights from Eastern ontologies to illuminate the discourse. Eastern philosophical traditions, such as Sankhya and Jaina offer unique perspectives on the nature of reality and the self, enriching our understanding of the dual nature of Christ.

Sankhya Philosophy, originating in ancient India, delineates the fundamental principles underlying existence, distinguishing between purusa (consciousness) and prakrti (matter). Through the lens of Sankhya, we discern parallels with the Christian concept of Christ's dual nature, as the union of divine consciousness with human form. Likewise, Jaina ontology elucidates the interconnectedness of all beings and the transcendence of individual identities, resonating with the Christian notion of Christ's unity with humanity. By synthesizing Christian theology with Eastern ontologies, this inquiry transcends traditional boundaries, fostering a nuanced exploration of the dual nature of Christ. It underscores the compatibility between diverse philosophical

frameworks, demonstrating how insights from Eastern thought can enrich Christian philosophical discourse.

Moreover, this study confronts the challenges posed by naturalism to Christian belief, interrogating its implications for understanding the nature of Christ. Naturalistic perspectives often dismiss the supernatural aspects of Christianity, reducing Christ to a mere historical figure of symbolic archetype. However, by engaging in a rigorous philosophical analysis, we discern the inadequacies of such reductionist approaches, affirming the profundity of Christ's dual nature of within the Christian worldview. In conclusion, this Christian Philosophical inquiry into the confrontation between naturalism and Christianity, mediated by Eastern ontologies, offers multifaceted exploration of the dual nature of Christ. It invites scholars and theologians to engage in dialogue across disciplinary boundaries, fostering a deeper understanding of the profound mysteries at the heart of Christian faith

**Tuesday, 24.09.2024; 10:45**

**Room 405: Evolution from theistic and naturalistic perspective**

Christopher Oldfield

The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion, University of Cambridge

**Naturalism Without Content: Where Plantinga's Conflict Actually Lies**

In his 2011 book, *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, Alvin Plantinga developed an argument in support of his overall claim that there is a "deep conflict between science and naturalism." My overall concern in this paper is to show that and why Plantinga's influential style of evolutionary argument against naturalism was misleading: not with respect to the aims and claims of current science or evolutionary theory, but with respect to the nature and content of the naturalism he ascribes. For the sake of argument, Plantinga (2011) takes naturalism to be a complex conjunction of negative existential thoughts and beliefs about what there isn't. "I take naturalism to be the

thought that there is no such person as god, or anything like god. Naturalism is stronger than atheism” (p.ix). The cardinal difficulty, or so I shall argue, is that no-one is, or ever has been or ever shall be, a naturalist in Plantinga's (2011) sense, because there is—there can be—no such thing as naturalism, or anything like naturalism, as Plantinga (2011) would have us believe. “After all, everything resembles god in some respect” (p.319). The problem is that naturalism lacks content: the complex conjunction of negative existential thoughts and beliefs which Plantinga ascribes to his real or imaginary naturalist interlocutors lacked positive propositional contents to begin with. This, or so I will conclude, is where Planting's conflict actually lies. This cardinal difficulty appears to be a feature, not a bug which might be fixed, of Plantinga's (1983) actual way of thinking about theistic belief, and Plantinga's (1974) actualist ways of thinking about the semantics of negative existentials as such. I will show therefore why Plantinga's taking naturalism to include materialism with respect to human beings or belief does nothing to generate a conflict with naturalism, and why the conditional probability  $P(R/N\&E)$  can have no value: not some (vague) range of values, not any (high or low) value, and certainly not one (zero) value, but no value at all. NB the problem is not that naturalism can be either true or false, for my concern is that it can be neither. If I am right then we may follow Plantinga's style of argument from beginning to end without seeing what Anscombe (1981) called "the depth of the problem": since naturalism (N) lacks content, we may accept Plantinga's conclusion and his reasoning, but we must reject Plantinga's first premise.

Piotr Biłgorajski

The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland

### Does evolution undermine naturalism

According to Alvin Plantinga, the conflict between science and religion is superficial, while at a deeper (philosophical) level theism legitimizes science. The situation is different in the case of atheism, whose philosophical background is naturalism. Here, according to Plantinga, the alleged coalition of science and atheism is superficial, while on philosophical grounds the adoption of naturalism undermines the epistemic basis



of science. Plantinga defends his views by proposing the so-called evolutionist argument against naturalism (EAAN). The argument works on the assumption that the reliability of our beliefs depends on properly functioning cognitive faculties, such as perception or memory.

According to Plantinga, if one assumes that naturalism is true and that our cognitive faculties emerged through evolution, then the probability of having true beliefs about the world is low. This is because, in the light of naturalistic evolutionary theory, evolutionary processes select according to the best adaptation to the environment. In this context, it would be fair to say that our cognitive faculties evolved primarily as tools for survival, rather than as generators of true beliefs about the world. Plantinga thus believes that a naturalist who accepts the theory of evolution does not have a strong philosophical grounding to regard his beliefs as true. Such a conclusion leads to a paradoxical consequence: a person who accepts both naturalism and evolution must admit that they are probably wrong. According to Plantinga, the way out of this situation is to acknowledge the existence of God who, if exists, has equipped humans with reliable cognitive faculties. Hence, according to Plantinga, the theist is in a much better position, because by accepting the existence of God, he believes in the existence of an entity that cares about people's knowledge of God's Plan and that created them in such a way that their cognitive faculties are reliable. So not only does the true philosophical ally of science turn out to be theism, not naturalism, but naturalism, as such, is a self-refuting position.

The purpose of my paper is to try to defend the consistency of the naturalistic position. Starting from Plantinga's assumptions—degrees of probability of our beliefs about the world in the context of God-unguided evolution—I will try to show that Plantinga's argument can be an equally valid defense of the rationality of the naturalistic position.

Piotr Bylica

University of Zielona Góra, Poland

## In what sense is theistic evolution more rational than naturalistic evolution?

A 1996 study of American scientists found that 95% of biologists who are members of the National Academy of Science are non-believers. This data aligns with many popular works by authors such as Richard Dawkins and other so-called "new atheists," who advocate for a naturalistic worldview, and specifically a naturalistic view of biological evolution. Darwin himself seemed to favor a non-theistic understanding of his theory. However, theistic interpretations of biological evolution emerged immediately after the publication of "On the Origin of Species." These interpretations continue to exist in various forms today. Is the debate between theistic and naturalistic evolution an irresolvable conflict between two metanarratives? Are we dealing here with only a different ordering of the same data, as in the situation known in Gestalt psychology as a "gestalt switch"? If so, the choice between the two options would have to be based on something other than rational grounds. In a rational approach to reality, any concept about the world around us is evaluated based on two main criteria: consistency with empirical data (facts) and consistency with the principles of logic. However, does naturalistic evolution allow us to explain our cognitive abilities and the reliability of rational reasoning? According to the arguments of Clive S. Lewis in his argument from reason and Alvin Plantinga in his evolutionary argument against naturalism, there are good reasons to believe that naturalistically understood evolution contradicts the reliability of human reason. They argue that this problem does not occur in the case of theistically understood evolution. In the naturalistic view of the world, our cognitive powers are the product of a blind, undirected evolutionary process. The value of our cognition is reduced to its effectiveness in the struggle for survival and has no connection with the knowledge of truth as such. In the theistic view, man and his reason are the intentional products of a being whose attributes include the knowledge of truth and who, as Christian theism assumes, created man in his own image, and wanted man to be capable of knowing the truth as well. Theistic evolutionism simultaneously recognizes that biological evolution was the mechanism that God chose to create all

life on Earth, including man. Such theistic evolution would be more rational than naturalistic evolution due to the issue of logical consistency and coherence of both approaches in explaining our epistemic abilities. The decision about the value of the theistic or naturalistic approach would be independent of the empirical data on natural facts. In this way, the adoption of a theistic interpretation of evolution would be consistent with any claims of evolutionism in the empirical realm, just as is the case with the naturalistic interpretation. However, the theistic view of evolution would have the additional advantage of providing a coherent vision of the human reason.

**Tuesday, 24.09.2024; 10:45**

**Room 409: Crucial anthropological concepts**

Norbert Heger

**Bridging the Gap: A Theological and Philosophical Analysis of the  
Concept of Natural Freedom in naturalism and Christian anthropology**

The concept of freedom is a central theme in both naturalism and Christian anthropology, but the two perspectives often seem to contradict each other. Naturalism tends to view freedom as an emergent property of complex systems, while Christian anthropology views freedom as a gift from God. This article aims to bridge the gap between these two perspectives by conducting a systematic and theological analysis of the concept of natural freedom. The article begins by examining the concept of natural freedom in naturalism, arguing that while naturalism provides a convincing account of the emergence of complex systems, it often struggles to explain the subjective experience of freedom. In contrast, Christian anthropology, with its emphasis on the imago Dei, offers a comprehensive understanding of human freedom as a gift from God. The article then turns to a theological analysis of the concept of natural freedom, examining the biblical understanding of human nature and the role of God in human freedom. It will argue that the biblical account of human freedom is not

incompatible with the naturalistic account, but rather provides a deeper understanding of the human condition. The article will draw on the work of theologians such as Karl Barth and philosophers such as Alvin Plantinga to develop a robust and coherent framework for understanding natural freedom in the context of Christian anthropology. The article concludes by highlighting the potential benefits of bridging the gap between naturalism and Christian anthropology. By integrating the insights of both perspectives, we can develop a more comprehensive understanding of human freedom and its relationship to the natural world. This integration can also lead to a more nuanced understanding of the role of God in human freedom that is compatible with a scientific understanding of the world. Furthermore, this article explores the implications of this integration for various fields, including ethics, morality and the humanities. It also examines the potential challenges and criticisms that may arise from this integration and how they can be addressed. For example, the article considers objections from naturalists who might argue that any appeal to divine agency is incompatible with scientific explanations, and how these objections can be addressed from a Christian perspective. The article also looks at the practical implications of this integration for Christian life and witness. It will explore how a nuanced understanding of natural freedom can inform Christian approaches to issues such as moral responsibility, human rights and social justice. The article will draw on examples from Christian history and contemporary Christian thought to illustrate these implications. Ultimately, this article aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the concept of natural freedom and its implications for our understanding of human nature and the world around us. By bridging the gap between naturalism and Christian anthropology, we can develop a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of human freedom based on both scientific and theological evidence. This understanding can inform and enrich our engagement with the world as we seek to live out our vocation as free and responsible creatures made in the image of God.

Przemysław A. Lewicki

Makowski Academy of Reformed Theology, Poland

## An (Un)Desirable Alliance?: Reformed Theology on Free Will and Responsibility Facing Naturalism

Ever since emerging from the tumultuous periods of Reformation and Confessionalisation, Reformed theology has faced significant challenges from both Roman Catholic polemicists and other Protestant theologians. Central to these debates is the reconciliation of high Reformed predestinarianism—strong belief in God's providential sovereignty over human free choices and ultimate eschatological destiny—with the maintenance of human responsibility for sin. With the advent of secular, naturalistic philosophy, some Reformed philosophers perceived it as a valuable tool to support their theological commitments. They believed that secular deterministic thought could bolster Reformed theological positions. One of the earliest debates arising from this intersection of naturalistic philosophy and Reformed theology occurred within the American Reformed context. Here, the theological legacy of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)—a prominent thinker from the period of the First Great Awakening and an advocate of theological necessitarianism—was critically examined by later writers, notably John Girardeau (1825-1898), a minister in the Presbyterian Church in the United States. In my presentation, I will first provide a brief historical overview of the relationship between Reformed theology of the will and naturalistic philosophy of the mind. Following this, I will explore the nature of this relationship, considering it from the perspective of classical Reformed theology. Finally, I will address the desirability of this alliance between naturalism and Reformed thought, an alliance that many continue to perceive as natural, necessary, and useful.

Szilvia Finta

Eötvös Loránd University, Saint Paul Academy, Hungary

## Sources of Emotions. An Antinaturalist Approach

In my presentation I want to address the issue of emotions. Emotions are generally said to be experienced physiologically; to be associated with some kind of evaluation or judgment; and to have a motivational power. There are generally two main ideas about the sources of emotions: one is that emotions are evolutionary, universal, biologically determined phenomena; and the other is that emotions, types of emotions, etc. are socially determined, culturally determined phenomena. In my opinion, emotions are an essential component of human personhood, humanity and moral being. In my presentation, I would like to argue that, although empirical research on emotions is extremely important, such research on emotions does not provide a complete insight into the world of emotions and their functioning. I will examine the issue of emotions from an anthropological perspective. Based on Viktor E. Frankl and integral personalism, I think man is a three-dimensional person—that is, man has physical, psychical and spiritual dimensions –, and like these two theories, I believe that emotions can arise from all three dimensions. We cannot necessarily distinguish emotions on a physiological basis, because even emotions arising from the spiritual dimension produce physiological, psychological phenomena, but it is still very important to distinguish the source of an emotion. If the source of the depression is a physical illness, then medication is recommended, if it is a trauma, then psychotherapy is the primary treatment, while if it is of spiritual origin, medication can at best mask the problem, but it cannot solve it, a spiritual solution is needed. The situation is similar with love: we can only distinguish true, faithful love from physical or psychological attraction if we also examine the source and depth of its creation.

**Tuesday, 24.09.2024; 14:00**

**Room 412: The problem of miracles**

Adam Świeżyński

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, Poland

How to understand God's action in a miraculous event? A basic action  
on the part of God

It has been common for some time to think of a miracle as a natural event possessing a supernatural cause. Such a supernaturalistic account of miracles might be constructed with an eye to apologetic concerns, with the hope that the occurrence of a miracle might provide a defense for theism. The general strategy of such an apologetic appeal is to suggest that a miracle is an event that nature could not produce on its own. It is thought of as an event that is incapable of receiving a natural explanation. Thus the supernaturalist hopes that the occurrence of a miracle will point to the operation of a causal force from outside of nature, i.e. one that is supernatural.

My concern is to show the liabilities of such an account of miracles, and to show how our concept of the miraculous may do without it. I offer a non-causal account of miracles as a basic action on the part of God. My motivation, expressed in the broadest possible terms, is to rescue the concept of "miracle" from the quasi-scientific language of the supernaturalist, and to show that the best understanding of a miracle is not one that tries to place it in relation to scientific notions such as that of a law of nature; it is one that understands a miracle to be an extraordinary expression of divine agency—where this need not be understood in terms of divine causality—and as an event that has a role to play within theistic religious practice.

It should be noted that recourse in explaining a miracle to the concept of basic actions, derived from the analysis of human action, is possible when we accept the existence of an analogy between human actions and God's actions. The acceptance of the aforementioned analogy is due, among other things, to the fact that we have no other more adequate point of reference for the representation of God's activity in the

world than human actions. However, it should be borne in mind that every analogy contains a limited similarity between analogs, and for this reason should be used with due caution. In the case of the analogy between basic actions of man and basic actions of God, the element of dissimilarity is revealed in the fact that human actions manifest themselves in the material body of man, while God does not have a body in which his simple actions can manifest themselves. If we reject the concept of the universe as God's body, then we are left to consider that God's basic action means expression of God's will in relation to subordinate nature, which proves immediately and fully effective. In view of this, an irresistible association arises with the creative action of God, who, while "uttering the word" (expressing His will), at the same time makes it "become flesh" (a certain reality appears). One may wonder, then, whether a basic action of God should not be understood as a creative action, an act of creation. If so, then a miracle understood as a basic action on the part of God could be considered a creative action that takes place within an already existing reality.

Mirosław Rucki

Casimir Pulaski Radom University, Poland

### Is a naturalistic explanation of the miracle satisfactory? Example of the man born blind (John 9:1–12)

Naturalism rejects the possibility of something being explained separate from the material reality given in empirical cognition. In particular, miracles have to be explained in a naturalistic way to keep this rejection valid. Nevertheless, it is an empirical experience itself what exactly defines the miracle. English word "miracle" means 'an action done by esp. a holy person that is impossible according to the ordinary laws of nature' (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English), while other languages propose naturalistic definitions of this term. For instance, the Polish word *cud* is described as an extraordinary and amazing phenomenon, which is explained according to religious beliefs by God's action, not by natural laws (Słownik języka polskiego PWN). This sort of understanding suggests that outside a religion, there is no miracle and no need to explain it.



In fact, the Biblical account describes miracles in completely different way. In particular, describing the empirical experience of a whole nation, Hebrew words מִפְתִּים וּמוֹתָאוֹת 'signs and miracles' are used, as follows: "And the Lord shewed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes" (Deut. 6:22, KJV). Notably, these wonders had been announced and performed in the context of survival and death threat of the entire nation. It was not just an exciting show religiously explained, it was the disaster escaped via the strict following the instructions, and the meaning of these 'signs' was explained. No naturalistic explanation of the events seems to be satisfactory.

In this context, healing of the man born blind (John 9:1–12) appears to be another public experience with a verifiable initial state, performed action and the final result. Since it was the sabbath day, and the Jesus' action was intentionally imitating the Creation, Pharisees denied any possibility of God's involvement. Thus, they proposed several naturalistic explanations of what happened, as follows: no healing took place at all, the man had not been blind, Jesus had no power to heal on sabbath, and God was not behind the miracle. Facing the testimony received from witnesses, including the healed man, Pharisees decided that he was a sinner and casted him out. In fact, they themselves did not consider their own naturalistic explanations satisfactory, since it did not match the observed, experienced facts.

Thus, it seems necessary to deal with miracles with a methodology suitable to any sort of scientific research. It is possible to investigate and to verify the initial state, the action, and the final state. The collected evidence must be matched with any sort of announcement and respective semiotic meaning, since there is no point to perform a miracle with no meaning. Thus, even though a miracle is by definition not a repeatable result of a natural law, the accompanying facts are verifiable. This is fully applicable to the past facts, documented in a reliable sources like New Testament books. Contemporarily, having full documentation of the illness Floribeth Mora Diaz before and after healing, and considering the testimonies of her and her husband, no satisfactory naturalistic explanation can be found.

Alexander Barrientos

University of Utah, USA

## Mary Shepherd on Miracles and the Laws of Nature

In this paper, I argue that Mary Shepherd presents a plausible defense of miracles in light of naturalist critiques that appeal to the universality and inviolability of the laws of nature. In her *Essays on the Perception of an External Universe*, Shepherd expounds on her view that nature is governed by “one law which can experience no change whatever; namely, that similar qualities in union necessarily include similar results” (167/334). In other words, the one universal law of nature is that like causes must have like effects. The many particular instances of this law constitute what we typically call the “laws” of nature. These constitute nature’s apparent course, as opposed to the real course of nature encompassed by the one law of nature. From this basis, Shepherd defends miracles as part of her case for the truth of Christianity. Shepherd defines a miracle as “an exception to nature’s apparent course” (168/335). That is, a miracle does not violate the law of nature that like causes must have like effects. Instead, miracles involve alterations to the causes such that dissimilar effects result. Thus a miracle is a “marvelous, because an extraordinary occurrence” (167/332). However, many such events might fall under this category. So, she distinguishes between miracles as merely marvelous events, and religious miracles, which are marvelous events where “the mind is...forced to refer to an adequate cause, and rests in the notion of superior power being present, and in action” (169/338). This superior power is none other than God. Shepherd reminds us, “there is always understood to be a power in some superior influence in nature, in the presiding energy of an essential God, acting as an additional cause, equal to the alleged variety of effects” (166/329). When God works a miracle, it is not as though he violates the law of nature. It is not that like causes are now producing dissimilar effects, but that God is acting as an additional cause, such that we have an alteration in the known causes from which an alteration in the effects is produced. What is unique about Shepherd’s argument is that she can say, along with Spinoza, for instance, that miracles do not violate the law of nature. However, whereas Spinoza concluded that miracles do not occur, Shepherd claims that we understand miracles incorrectly. Shepherd’s approach disarms

naturalist appeals to the universality and inviolability of the laws of nature by showing that, when God works miracles, he works according to the one supreme law of nature, of which all “laws” of nature are but particular instances of. This approach also disarms a posteriori critiques of miracles, such as Hume’s, which rely on the implausibility of miracles given the laws of nature. Shepherd shows that there is no such implausibility since we readily recognize all sorts of events that are exceptions to nature’s apparent course, which, properly speaking, are miracles. The naturalist prejudice lies against religious miracles is not the miracle but the cause: God.

**Tuesday, 24.09.2024; 14:00**

**Room 405: Arguing about God**

Miles Kenneth Donahue

St. Cross College, University of Oxford, United Kingdom

### Theistic Multiverses and the Fine-Tuning Argument

Many contend that the fine-tuning of the universe for intelligent life presents an evidential problem for naturalism. This problem is often cast as an argument for theism: the fine-tuning argument (FTA). To face this evidential problem (and thereby undercut the FTA), naturalists often propose the multiverse hypothesis, the thesis that our universe is one member of a huge, random assortment of universes, such that it is not surprising or unlikely that a life-permitting universe would arise by chance alone. Michael Rota has recently argued that even if true, the multiverse hypothesis does not undercut the inference to a cosmic designer in the face of fine-tuning. Rota distinguishes two types of multiverses: a naturalistic multiverse (NM) and a theistic multiverse (TM). Within NM, life-permitting universes are few and far between in the world ensemble. Within TM, however, life-abundant universes are far more common because God would likely prefer universes with life over those without it. But if we grant that dual-claim, Rota contends, then a life-permitting, fine-tuned universe is still evidence for theism—because it is evidence that we live in TM, not NM.

I analyze this argument under two headings: (1) Does a life-abundant multiverse have a high likelihood conditional on theism?, and (2) If it does, would that fact buttress the FTA against the multiverse objection?. With respect to (1), I argue that the only plausible way to argue that God would likely create a life-abundant multiverse is to argue (i) that a multiverse of universes is the best possible world, and (ii) that such a multiverse would likely feature comparatively many life-permitting universes. While I think (i) is worthy of further reflection and may well be true, I argue that there is insufficient reason to affirm (ii). Regarding (2), I argue that the answer is 'no.' Once we distinguish between claiming that 'this' universe is fine-tuned for life and 'a' universe is fine-tuned for life, it becomes clear that the relevant evidence that TM and NM must be judged against is the fact that 'a' life-permitting universe exists. It will then follow that the fine-tuning evidence, when properly formulated, is equally probable on either hypothesis. The implication is that Rota's attempt to undercut the multiverse objection to the FTA fails. This does not, however, mean that fine-tuning is not an evidential problem for the naturalist, but merely that if theists want to contend that this problem is best solved by relinquishing naturalism, they have to argue against the multiverse hypothesis directly, rather than attempting to recast the FTA in a multiverse setting.

Luca Gasparinetti; Margherita Moro

Università della Svizzera Italiana, Switzerland

### Assessing the Atheism of Relational Quantum Mechanics

Philosophers have always been influenced by the scientific view of their time. Immanuel Kant, for instance, was deeply conditioned by the scientific knowledge provided by modern scientists such as Isaac Newton, Galileo Galilei, and so on.

Against the scientific backdrop of their time, they addressed the long-debated questions of philosophy including: what are time and space? what is the mind? Particularly, almost every philosopher, as many people do, struggles with the existence of God. They ask: does God exist?

In this talk, I will assume that metaphysics should be informed by our best scientific theories. Based on this assumption, I will address the issue of the existence

of God within the framework provided by Rovelli's physics, namely Relational Quantum Mechanics (RQM) and Loop Quantum Gravity (LQG) (see Rovelli 1996, 2007) and argue that there is no room for God in Rovelli's physics.

To that end, here is the proposed structure of the talk. In the first part, I will introduce the notion of God as commonly expressed in the philosophy of religion—God is the ontological independent entity—and I will tie it with the metaphysical view called (quantum) monism (see, e.g., Schaffer 2010). In the second part, I will show that according to the anti-monistic view delivered by RQM and LQG (Dorato 2016), there cannot be room for ontological independent entities for all there exist are entities always defined with respect to another (see also Dorato and Morganti 2022). Finally, I will conclude that based on the aforementioned naturalistic framework, despite we have not reached a definitive conclusion on the existence of God yet (perhaps we cannot), we should consider seriously that our contemporary physics—in particular Rovelli's physics—excludes God from the inventory of the world.

**Tuesday, 24.09.2024; 14:00**

**Room 409: Thomistic perspective**

Piotr Mazur

Ignatianum University in Cracow, Poland

**Philosophia perennis in the face of naturalism**

In the philosophical tradition, it has become accepted to regard classical metaphysics as perennial philosophy. Its origins are to be found in Aristotle, and its mature form in St. Thomas Aquinas. Philosophy with metaphysics and metaphysical cognition at its center is also being developed today, as evidenced by the history of the Lublin School of Philosophy, which was initiated in the early 1950s by such thinkers as Krąpiec, Swieżawski, Kamiński and Wojtyła. The sources of classical metaphysics lie in the naturalistic picture of the world proposed by Aristotle. Christian thought, which through

St. Thomas assimilated metaphysics, also adopted Aristotelian naturalism, manifested in realism and genetic empiricism, although it interpreted it differently, influenced by Christian Revelation. Aquinas' thought paved the way for metaphysical cognition and with it naturalism to the extent that it was compatible with Christian orthodoxy. Certainly, there would be no perennial philosophy without Aristotle's naturalism and without his going beyond physics in explaining material reality, which is the starting point for discovering the fundamental and ultimate causes of reality. Nor would there be this philosophy if there had been no discovery of the transcendent reason for the source of reality, which is the First Being—God. Contrary to popular belief, philosophia perennis has never rejected the naturalistic anchor that connects human cognition to material reality. The problem of philosophia perennis is not the naturalism of the detailed sciences, or even philosophical naturalism, insofar as it does not take a form that closes the way to the discovery of the first and ultimate rationales of reality.

Jiří Baroš

Masaryk University, Czech Republic

## The Common Good and Catholic Political Philosophy: Between Trinity and Science

The aim of the paper is twofold: to synthesize the contemporary discourse on the common good (CG) among Christian political philosophers, and to point out two possible directions to follow. First, it argues for a greater engagement with the project of Trinitarian ontology. Second, this deepening of this discourse should, at the same time, lead to a greater connection with empirical science.

In the first part, I will briefly address the two main waves of philosophical interest in the CG in recent decades. The first wave was triggered by the polemics of Ch. De Koninck against personalism; leading Thomists of the time contributed to it (Maritain or Eschmann). A closer connection of this important category with other notions of political thought was offered above all by Y. Simon and today especially by R. Hittinger. The second considerable controversy has been provoked by Finnis' instrumentalist

conception of the CG. Several alternatives have been offered against it, most notably aggregative (Murphy) and distinctive (Duke) conceptions of the CG.

It can be argued that both debates on the CG are, to some extent, at the level of the so-called ideal theory (Rawls). This ignores the darker part of human existence as well as the dynamics of history. Far more sensitive to these factors is the so-called non-ideal theory, which is now gaining prominence. Ideal theory speaks of lofty aspirations but is very far from reality. It offers us an extremely harmonizing vision of the CG, whereas we can only achieve moderate harmony. The interest in non-ideal theories in political philosophy coincides with some of Pope Francis' impulses for Catholic thought. This should be sensitive to all the tensions that occur in political life and focus its attention on the conflicts that constantly arise in the world of politics.

I believe that these harmony and tension-oriented approaches need not be in conflict, but rather that a properly Catholic vision of the CG must embrace both poles. To achieve this goal, there must be an integration of the two approaches: (1) In keeping with the project of Trinitarian ontology, Catholic philosophers should emphasize the dramas and tensions of human life to bring out the sense in which the Trinitarian mystery offers an answer. Hence, we need to connect with history—a dramatic narrative in which reconciliation is ultimately achieved in a universal communion of love. (2) To make this vision convincing to contemporary people, it is necessary to offer empirical examples of when this reconciliation occurs. The role of the empirical sciences in this context will be, first, to analyse the virtuous practices that lead to the (partial) resolution of these tensions; but secondly, it is necessary to focus on all the tensions that arise on the way to the ideal. Although spiritual literature offers various reflections (Varden), Catholic political thought can lose nothing when it draws from the scientific explanation of the mechanisms at play (Elster, Sunstein etc.).

Maciej Jemioł

Ignatianum University in Cracow, Poland

## Christian and non-religious philosophies against naturalism. A difficult meeting place in culture

While the current Christian philosophy and various non-religious philosophies of today are most often seen at odds with other, arguing over both theoretical matters (existence of immaterial, immortal soul) and practical solutions (legal status of abortion), my aim in this presentation will be to demonstrate and explore the possibility of a plausible meeting place between them. This difficult point of convergence between Christian and non-religious philosophies arises from rejection of (or at least some opposition to) naturalism and naturalistic world-view.

Christian doctrine, as commonly understood by its followers, involves by necessity certain forms of transcendence (God, afterlife, immortal soul) that cannot be reconciled with a fully naturalistic position. Although certain Christians do reject such claims of transcendence (for example proponents of the Christ-myth narrative) and some Christian philosophers see value in discussing naturalism in the context of sciences and the like, rejection of ontological naturalism remains one of the main claims of the current Christian philosophy, as described by e.g. Piotr Mazur, Vittorio Possenti or Chantal Delsol. Somewhat similarly, ontological naturalism is also at least partially rejected by non-religious philosophies, including queer philosophy (Sarah Ahmed), postcolonial thought (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak) and modern approaches to humanism (Lewis Vaughn, Austin Dacey) or even critical theory and postmodernism. There, the main point of critique is that naturalism can be linked to such ideas as biological essentialism used in justification of marginalization against non-normative human beings, although there are many other arguments against naturalism arising from such non-religious ways of thinking. Of importance is also how methodological naturalism can be used to exclude humanities from proper science, a repeated sentiment present among Christian and non-religious thinkers alike.

While reasons for opposing ontological and methodological naturalism vary greatly between those two groups and so do methods of critiquing it, there is as we see a shared meeting place of discontent with naturalism among them. My



presentation will be focused on how this place is realized in the current cultural discourse. Drawing from the works of scholars named above I will examine how intersections of anti-naturalistic thought give rise to a cultural mood of anti-naturalism propagated among Christian and non-religious thinkers. Particularly interesting is the possibility of dialogue between them that arises in this common, difficult meeting place in culture, where both their similarities and differences regarding naturalism can be discussed. My hope in this presentation will be not only to assess the many difficulties of this shared anti-naturalism, but also to postulate the possibility of such discussion between two approaches to philosophy that are not often in accordance with each other.

**Wednesday, 25.09.2024; 10:45**

**Room 412: Naturalism and the philosophy of mind**

Antonios Kaldas

University of Notre Dame, Sydney; St. Cyril's Coptic Theological College, Sydney, Australia

### Phenomenal Consciousness: Breaking Down the Wall between the Natural and the 'Supernatural'

In Western thought, physicalism (the view that only physical entities exist, whatever that may mean) and naturalism (the view that only natural events occur, whatever that may mean) have powerfully moulded the contemporary psyche. These leave no room for non-physical minds, or indeed for a non-physical "supernatural" God. The rampant practical success of physics through the twentieth century served to reinforce both physicalism and naturalism. And yet, there are integrity-threatening structural cracks in this edifice. One of these is the apparent impenetrability of phenomenal conscious experience—"what it is like-ness"—to physicalist and naturalist explanation.

I briefly survey the story of the ever-growing mystery of phenomenal consciousness in recent decades and then bring it into conversation with the

metaphysical questions of the validity of physicalism and naturalism. If consciousness does indeed turn out to be, as many now suspect, inexplicable on purely physicalist terms, then the most plausible course to follow is to expand our view of the “natural” to incorporate the non-physical.

As it happens, there is already a strand of thought in Christian philosophy that does not concede a stark distinction between the “natural” and the “supernatural,” expressed by (among others) Vladimir Lossky, Alexander Schmemmann, and C.S. Lewis, and more recently David Bentley Hart and Peter Harrison. All the cosmos is nothing more than a miracle we have become accustomed to and therefore no longer consider to be miraculous. The mystery of consciousness leads us to conclude that all things and all events—including both physical brains and non-physical minds—are “supernatural” in the sense that they emanate from and subsist within the transcendent love and grace of God. And they are equally “natural” in the sense that God’s variegated creation is essentially a single interconnected whole—physical and non-physical—as the revival of Russellian Monism and the encroachment of conscious perception into quantum physics illustrate.

Krzysztof Pięta

University of Warsaw, Poland

Qualia and the transcendence of God: how the course of the debate about qualia in contemporary philosophy of mind shows that the naturalist cannot be neither an empiricist nor a hedonist?

I shall argue that the debate about qualia in contemporary philosophy of mind provides us with a clear indication that the last word of naturalism is the eliminativist stance, according to which qualia do not exist. On this interpretation eliminativism is not a temporary aberration, which differs from more standard versions of naturalism by its odd radicalism. Its main merit consist in articulating the truth present implicitly in previous versions of naturalism since Democritus to J.J.C. Smart, namely that the existence of qualia is incompatible with a naturalistic ontology.

If it is true, the naturalist cannot be neither an empiricist in epistemology, nor a hedonist in ethics. It is problematic, since the main source of pride of the naturalist is her conviction that she is able to provide an ontological basis for both an empirical investigation of the natural world and an ethical system grounded on a correct evaluation of sensual pleasure and distress. But if naturalism implies the denial of qualia her ontology stands in contradiction to her epistemic and ethical commitment to the world of things “that can be seen and touched.”

I shall argue for both of these theses by evaluating the implications of naturalism in the context of Jackson’s argument from knowledge, which can be formulated as follows:

- Mary knows everything about the physical world.
- It is not the case that Mary know everything about the world.
- Therefore, knowledge about nonphysical things exists.

Usually, the naturalist criticize the second premise, but it is the first premise that is problematic, since if Mary accepts it she will have no reason to leave her room in order to make attempts to falsify theories, which she learns when she was locked. The acceptance of the qualia-thesis is thus the necessary condition to convince Mary to leave the room and confront her theories with the empirical world. Therefore, naturalism is incompatible with a minimal version of empiricism, which consist in an invitation to take into account empirical experience in scientific investigations. Furthermore, the naturalist also assumes that the only reason for Mary to leave her room should be a lack of knowledge about the physical world. But life cannot be reduced to knowledge: it also has to be about the experience of various things. The naturalist though is unable to provide a justification for this intuition: if Mary know everything about orgasm from a physical point of view, there is no need for her to experience orgasm. Therefore, naturalism is incompatible with a hedonist axiology.

In the remainder of my presentation I shall evaluate the connection between antinaturalism and theism within Berkeley’s metaphysics. The upshot of this analysis will be as follows: a) ontological naturalism is internally incoherent; b) methodological naturalism implies theism. I will also try to suggest that assessing Berkeley’s system in the context of the qualia-issue could serve to show that Berkeley’s system, far from being a kind of idealism, is maybe the only coherent form of an authentic realism.

**Wednesday, 25.09.2024; 10:45**

**Room 405: Philosophy facing naturalism**

Andrzej Zabołotny

University of Lodz, Poland

**Essential Steps from Methodological to Ontological Naturalism**

Is it possible to retain methodological naturalism and reject ontological naturalism? This question stated as relating to the “main problems and questions worth considering” seems to have an obvious “yes” answer. But—does it?

Taken literally methodological naturalism as one of the characteristics of science is just a limitation imposed on the way scientists carry out their mission, without any personal ontological commitments. As scientists they look for natural causes and explanations and ignore potentially possible supernatural phenomena, as being outside of the scope of science. Let philosophy or theology deal with them. But considering the prestige of science, its access to finances, dominance in education—it promotes the atheistic “scientific worldview.”

There is another principle usually added to the methodological naturalism, which may be called totalitarianism or the aggressiveness of science. It demands that the scientist never give up looking for a natural explanation of the phenomenon under study. According to this rule providing a supernatural solution would be a “science stopper.” Any naturalistic explanation—even a „just-so story”—is better than a supernatural one. Still there is no ontology included—just an agreement of scientists how they limit their field of activities.

But now we are one step away from another rule: the completeness of naturalistic science. It means that every phenomenon, at least in principle, is subject to the scientific method. But this claim—even if it seems very similar to the previous one—is clearly ontological, and here a crucial step toward ontological naturalism is made. This is because as a direct corollary we obtain the causal closure of the physical world principle.

It means that there is no place in the natural universe for the direct actions of any supernatural being such as God. If he exists, he may just sustain the world in

existence and be the source of rationality, meaning and perhaps morality, without empirically detectable effects of action. So there is no empirically distinguishable ontological differences between such version of theism and ontological naturalism. Why then not choose the simpler version of ontology?

This four-step procedure from methodological to ontological naturalism will be related to Alvin Plantinga's "Simonian science" and the evidence base idea (Alvin Plantinga, *Gdzie naprawdę jest konflikt. Nauka, religia i naturalizm*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2023). By Simonian scientific theories he understands the ones which contain elements contradictory to the traditional Christian beliefs—and the evidence base of a theory is a set of convictions underlining it.

Methodological naturalism imposes limitations on the evidence base any scientific research—it cannot include convictions relating to the supernatural sphere. Plantinga divides methodological naturalism into a weak one and the strong one. The evidence base of the weak one does not contain any of the supernatural claims of Christianity, but of the strong one does include statements which are contradictory to them. These ideas will be compared to the principles discussed and the possibility of the "Non-simonian science" will be considered.

Piotr Duchliński; Jarosław Kucharski

Ignatianum University in Cracow, Poland

## Two models of christian ethics and naturalism

Christian ethics seem to be a philosophical theory that examines moral norms, virtues and justifications rooted in Christian theology. One of the main concept in Christian ethics is "human nature." This concept was developed through ages, using theological, philosophical, traditional and naturalistic investigation. Those areas were crucial to establish as precise as possible meaning of "human nature." Nevertheless contemporary Christian ethics seems to end this cooperation with naturalistic part of human knowledge. The nature human nature is seen by Christian ethics as well established and well-known. Therefore, as it may be observed, it states demands from modern naturalistically, especially empirical sciences, like neurobiology or psychology,

to confirm already accepted set of beliefs. In our opinion this is wrong direction. Christian ethics cannot ignore the results of modern scientific research. It cannot also decline to recognise them, as incompatible with traditional view on human nature. In the paper we are presenting a series of challenges (with the importance of emotions in the first place) that can lead Christian ethics to redefine traditional notions of human nature.

Guido J.M. Verstraeten

Satakunta University of Applied Sciences, Finland

### Transpersonal Self-Identification transcends Naturalism and implies an inherent ethical status of Human beings and an inherent ontological status of God

Transpersonal Self-identification is entrenched in an alternative conception of Space and Time as scientific framework of nature, landscape and biotic life. Therefore we adopt Aldo Leopold's Land-Ethics, applied to a particular ecosystem of which human beings are not at first glance stewards, but participate to the common Space and Time together with other biotic life. In addition the common occupied Space and Time is no Newtonian spacetime-like container of scientific facts experienced by biotic life as a space and time of fear (topophobia) but a friendly life and times produced by the equilibrium balance of all biotic participants (topophilia) ( Bachelard and Yi-Fu-Tuan) in a Space and Time without absolute 'here' and 'now' according to the Leibnizian world of monade. Though the former Newtonian space and time is deeply adopted by the scientific society since the Enlightenment, it gives the reflexive observer an alienating extra space-time status of subject outside nature of objects.

Contrary topophilia creates the essence of all participants from creating a dynamic system inside every particular natural world. It is out of the question to define human essence outside the particularity of this world since human essence, like other biotic or abiotic units, depends on complete ensemble of any possible internal spatial and temporal interaction. However, any particular Leibnizian world get its essence by recognizing the reality that is behind. A corollary is the complete absence of any intrinsic

value of any nature but a particular inherent value generated by internal nature's creative power. Moreover, the inherence of all beings is the consequence of the organic essence of nature, as homeland of self-understanding, security and integrity. Obviously we adopt Warwick Fox' claim that self-identification of any individual with Nature exceeds personal identification and will be extended to the particularity of the land and all its participants. Transpersonal self-identification of any subject reaches more self-understanding, the more he stands in mutual relationship with his environment. But by discovering his identity as a self-reflective being he is faced with his power over non-reflective beings and landscapes. Ethical care for those non-humans is a question of mastering human power that gives more insight in human propensities to create and to destroy. Morality is balancing between these human powers and the more objects of moral care, the greater insight in human self-understanding and individual identity. The homeland as the synthesis of participating communities and individuals, however, creates a moral gauging of the social public area of all communities, while the integrity and autonomy of the homeland is the a priori condition for its function as gauging authority.

However, Transpersonal Self-identification is also challenged by 'windows' to the alien reality behind the safe space and time of the homeland. . It is precisely the reality beyond the window that transcends man's homeland and his Transpersonal Self-Identification. The latter is not based on rationality but challenged by an attracting hole on the roof of his particular world that finally will be the highway to the ultimate horizon (de Caluwe, Verstraeten). The ultimate horizon is presented by the hypothetical cosmological rebounding horizon (Verstraeten&Verstraeten) that is symbolizing the inherent relationship between God and His Creation. As any care for non-human biotic life and a-biotic land evolves from its inherent value, so God's ontological status is a consequence of His inherent relation with His Creation. Finally the Land's transpersonal self-identification of human lives are constituting the words with which the Creator write His Ultimate Story.

**Wednesday, 25.09.2024; 10:45**

**Room 409: Inspirations from Wittgenstein**

Carl Humphries

Ignatianum University in Cracow, Poland

Wittgenstein and the Challenges to Religious Belief: From Scientistic to  
Temporal-Axiological Naturalism

The later Wittgenstein offers a distinctive way of answering the challenge that science-based epistemological naturalism appears to pose to mainstream forms of religious belief (e.g. those associated with Christianity). He takes the claim to an enhanced evidential status that motivates explanatory theorizing in the natural sciences to have no critical implications for religious belief, on the grounds that beliefs of the latter sort are not validated empirico-factually. Instead, like bedrock certainties, their positive significance for us comes from the form of life they indirectly make possible, whose value rests on a holistic structure of commitment that we are not ordinarily in a position to systematically doubt—since it corresponds to what is presupposed by the overall way in which we are living our lives (and the value we implicitly attach to the latter). Viewed from this sort of Wittgensteinian perspective, the naturalist stance that holds all forms of belief to be validated in strictly empirico-factual terms can therefore be rejected as manifesting the sort of dogmatically unfounded assumptions typical of scientism.

Nevertheless, I will argue that this sort of scientistic naturalism is not the only form that the challenge posed by naturalism to mainstream forms of religious belief can take. Another distinct challenge comes from what I propose to call “temporal-axiological naturalism”—a position that takes the way value shows up as relating to temporality in the context of our understanding of the natural world as furnishing a general paradigm for how we should think of relations between value and time. In this latter context, it is less clear whether Wittgenstein’s conception of religious belief can be called upon to furnish a satisfactory basis for a defence of religious belief systems such as Christianity—at least where these involve forms of ethical understanding that grant contingently occurring historical events a defining role.



Ines Skelac

Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Zagreb, Croatia

## Language as a Divine Gift: A Theological and Naturalistic Synthesis

According to the Bible, God created human language, which aligns with the monogenetic hypothesis of language development. This theological stance posits that language, a unique human faculty, is divinely instituted, forming a crucial part of human nature as envisioned by God. St. Augustine viewed language as a divine gift essential for human communication and understanding. In his "Confessions," he describes how infants learn language through interaction, observing and imitating adults, which allows them to express their desires and thoughts. Augustine's view integrates a divine element in language acquisition, implying that understanding and communication are rooted in a God-given faculty.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his "Philosophical Investigations," critiques Augustine's view as overly simplistic, but which at the same time presupposing a kind of a language of a thought, which Wittgenstein denies. Further, he suggests that language is not merely a tool for naming objects but a complex form of life intertwined with social practices.

Jerry Fodor defends an innate understanding of language, aligning with Augustine. Fodor's critique of Wittgenstein centers on the idea that linguistic competence involves inherent mental structures, or a "language of thought." He suggests that the mind has an innate capacity for language, resonating with Augustine's view that language has a fundamental (in Augustine's approach: divine), basis in human cognition.

This talk argues that the divine creation of language offers a robust framework for integrating naturalism with theism, positioning God as the initial creator of human language, either specific natural language(s) or a language of thought as a possible first language. Dante Alighieri suggests that angels do not possess language in the human sense, as they, as pure spiritual beings, are capable of direct and immediate knowledge and communication. This immediate form of understanding might be "language of thought." Therefore, it can be concluded that God created at least the first language as a language of thought, but humans, because of their bodily-spiritual

nature, need speech to convey thoughts and ideas, so they from one language derived multiple languages. The argument aligns with Christian theology by positing that God created language and bestowed this capacity upon humans, facilitating a synthesis of divine creation with natural processes. This perspective maintains that God endowed the universe with natural laws, including human cognitive faculties and linguistic abilities. Consequently, naturalism is complementary to theism, operating under divine orchestration.

Recognizing language as a divinely instituted faculty affirms the special ontic status of humans. It underscores that human beings are uniquely equipped with capabilities that reflect God's nature, particularly rationality and communicative power. Engaging with contemporary cognitive sciences can enrich Christian theology by providing deeper insights into how God's creation operates. It bridges faith and reason, showing that scientific discoveries about the mind and language are part of understanding God's creation.

Christian Kanzian

Department for Christian Philosophy, University of Innsbruck, Austria

### Facing Naturalism

"In the announcement of our conference the organizers characterize naturalism as a theory that "rejects the possibility of something existing, being known, or being explained that is separate from the material reality given in empirical cognition. [...] this tradition appeals to the solutions and methods of domain-specific form of scientific inquiry, relying on them for its own authority."

In my contribution I would like to present a fundamental critique of naturalism, in the mentioned understanding, focusing on the existence-aspect. My concern is (meta)ontological. The main point will be that the "domain-specific form of scientific inquiry" to which naturalists refer to, this is standardly natural science, is no authority in existence questions. That is why naturalism insofar as it regards ontology as "a posteriori" discipline relying on the findings of natural science, fails.

Being aware that this is a little bit dangerous for an ontologist, I would start with Tractarian Wittgenstein and his (sometimes underestimated) insight that natural science, in TLP 6.341 he mentions explicitly Newtonian mechanics, “brings the description of the universe to a unified form.” That “asserts nothing about the world” (6.342). 6.371 regards it therefore as an illusion that natural laws are able to explain the natural phenomena—as it is pretended by the “modern view of the world.” Natural science brings empirical data, and their descriptions, in an utmost usable form. But—and this is the crucial point—it does not tell us, what the world is or consists of. It has no relevance for existence-questions.

In both continental and analytic traditions, we find influential proponents of this idea. I will only mention later Husserl's reflections on the Crisis of the European Sciences, in which he explicitly points out that it is a serious misunderstanding of the sciences that they are authorities on questions of being and existence; and also Strawson's conviction that it is the conceptual scheme of our "normal" thinking that covers the basic structures of reality, not the methodologically limited conceptual schemes of natural science.

I do not intend to do history of philosophy in my paper, but to use these framing insights in the context of contemporary meta-ontology and ontology: The no-authority claim can be reformulated as the assumption that theories in the natural sciences do not commit ontologically, in the strict and proper sense. Ontologically, the theoretical objects or "posits" of the natural sciences, including quantum physics, are not entities but "quasi-objects." I will try to explain this by bringing together some of Eli Hirsch's meta-ontological reflections on improper ontological speaking with Jonathan Lowe's ontological interpretation of the term "quasi-object." This contrasts with the view that the objects posited by the natural sciences are entities that constitute our everyday life-world from the "bottom up," as naturalistic ontologies presuppose.

The main aim of my paper is critical, as the title suggests. But I should also mention the alternative to naturalistic ontologies, that I think is promising. It is a neo-Aristotelean “descriptive” (Strawson) approach to ontology, which also takes up ideas from Husserl’s “Lebenswelt”- concept. Hylomorphic substances are the *prote ousia*, the basic elements of the everyday’s life world. As Christian philosophers we do not need naturalistic ontologies, whose presuppositions are highly problematic. Aristotelean hylomorphism is much more promising for a “top down” understanding of reality, as we can find it in our best traditions.

**Wednesday, 25.09.2024; 15:45**

**Room 412: Many faces of the debate between naturalism and  
supernaturalism**

Marcin Podbielski

Ignatianum University in Cracow, Poland

**Newton between Hermes and Plotinus: A Nature That Is Not, and also Is  
God**

A scholar studying the reception and radical transformation of late ancient metaphysics that took place in the context of Christian theological debates, finds themselves at odds with the conceptual world of contemporary physical and naturalist accounts of reality. This is not, however, the case for the philosophical considerations of Isaac Newton that open and close his “*Philosophiae naturalis principia mathematica*” and that he put forward in a short manuscript “*De gravitatione*.” On the one hand, Newton makes it clear that his “*Principia*” are not a work of physics, but of rational mechanics, and that his aim is to derive the phenomena of nature from mechanical principles through propositions that use the language of mathematics. Neither can this “experimental philosophy” study the substance of things nor can it present us with a rationale of the existence and nature of gravity. On the other hand, the so-constructed first modern scientific enterprise, discussing space, time, matter, their quantities, and “affections,” is given by Newton a metaphysical justification that cleverly combines various ideas present in Christian philosophical tradition. In “*De gravitatione*,” Newton deduces his absolute and infinite space and time from a view of divine simplicity that echoes Plotinus’ understanding of the One and of the emergence of intelligible matter. All the same, he strays from tradition by distinguishing matter from space and temporality. This makes it possible for Newton to address the uniquely Christian problem of individuality as opposed to the universality of form. God establishes being in a free creative act, consisting in setting up impenetrable boundaries in the potentiality of space and time. Those boundaries can be amounted to a form, while the quantified space and time serve as the principle of individuation. It is this metaphysics that makes it possible for the theological reflection offered in the “*Scholium generale*” that

concludes the “Principia.’ Unfortunately, one issue breaks up the consistency of the “Scholium.” The question of the ontic status of the force, as the cause of motion, and especially of the omnipresent force of gravitation, is treated reluctantly by Newton in terms that, as suggested by some scholars, are owed to a Hermetic inspiration. Force can be viewed as a manifestation of divine creative power, and perceived as similar to the soul of the Universe. Indeed, in line with “De gravitatione,” force has to be tantamount to God’s direct physical action, as he destroys and re-creates a body in subsequent parts of space and time. The concept of force does involve Newton, in fact, in a theology that denies God’s transcendence. Furthermore, as I shall argue, especially when one overlooks Newton’s philosophical and theological comments, while asserting the reality of facts spoken of in the language of mathematics, one does find themselves in the pagan conceptual world of the Hermetics, in which the abstract form of the law is also a creative and divine power, immanent to the universe. Does one, thus, become a pagan by reading the “Principia’ through the lens of naturalism?

Robert B. Tierney

University of Houston, USA

### Venerated Objects: Neither Idols nor Mere Symbols

This paper provides a naturalistic account of the veneration of sacred objects that shows these practices to be non-idolatrous while, at the same time, revealing such objects to be more than mere symbols. The account begins with secular objects of a kind designated as personally significant objects. Such an object typically either (i) plays a significant part in the life of one person and then is passed (e.g., as a gift or bequest) to someone with whom he or she had a significant relationship or (ii) currently plays, or formerly played, a special role in an activity important to the relationship between two or more persons. An example of the first type might be a locket always worn by a mother who bequeats it to her daughter. From this description we see that a personally significant object has value that arises from its relational properties rather than its non-relational (i.e., internal) properties—that is, it has extrinsic value. But extrinsic value is not instrumental value. Thus, something that is extrinsically valuable

may be appropriately treated as an end (i.e., have final value). Such is the case with personally significant objects.

The kind of care and respect appropriate to a personally significant object does not involve using it instrumentally. Neither, it will be shown, is it a way of evidencing or of symbolizing care and respect for the other person to whom the object relates. What remains is that one is literally enacting care and respect for the relevant other when enacting care and respect for (i.e., cherishing) the personally significant object.

This explanation also applies to sacred objects (i.e., objects toward which veneration is appropriate)—though, of course, the relevant other is not an ordinary human person, and so a different kind of care and respect are appropriate. For example, a relic may come to play a particular role in one's relationship to a saint and, through that saint, to God. The role of sacred objects in religious practice makes evident a further feature of the account. That is, relating to a person through an object in this way requires that it be some particular object. It must be a material focal point in the relationship. In the secular case, the natural salience of the object in the relation was so obvious and natural that it went unnoticed. However, religious practice provides for the intentional designation of something as focal point in a relationship, so as to be a sacred object, through consecrating that object (or structure or place).

This naturalistic account can make the nature and importance of sacred objects and their veneration intelligible to those without supernatural metaphysical commitments. But it is not meant to be a debunking explanation. For Christian metaphysical commitments arise from other sources, though the implications of those commitments may play out in the practice of veneration. Moreover, the success conditions for such veneration include the actual existence God, to whom one's care, respect, awe, and reverence are ultimately directed.

Evelina Deyneka

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## From human uniqueness toward humanness: a common ground or a new battlefield for Christian theology and natural sciences?

Since religion and science operate ontologically different modes of cognition, the centuries-old debate between naturalists and anti-naturalists (both Christian and non-Christian) is akin to figuring out what is more sour—gray or long? As rightly noted by Józef Bremer: ‘Even the most sophisticated neuroscience cannot therefore tell us anything about God, as the object of brain research is humans, not God’ (Józef Bremer, *Interdyscyplinarne znaczenie neuronauk*, 2016, s. 32). Similarly, no science and religion can discuss among themselves the nature of man in its relation to the animal and the divine, as the ontological foundations of scientific and theological a priori postulates are logically incompatible. The dilemma of the relationship between the animal and the divine in human nature is only resolvable on a philosophical level, which involves understanding the dialectical connection between the presence of God concepts in collective consciousness and the fact of being human.

The current shift in philosophical debates from the search for signs of human uniqueness (cf. Paul M. Bingham, “Human uniqueness: a general theory,” 1999) to determining traits specifically characteristic of human self and environmental relations (cf. French-language neological concept of *humanitude* referring to the ability of a human being to become aware of their belonging to the human species as a full-fledged member: Freddy Klopfenstein, 1980; Albert Jacquard, 1987; Yves Gineste, Jérôme Pellissier, Rosette Marescotti, 2008) reflects a relative synchronicity of the evolution of spirituality and scientific materialistic thought in modern societies. In simpler terms, there is a shift from contrasting statements such as ‘God created man’ versus ‘man originated from the animal world through evolution’ to a universally acceptable synthetic thesis: ‘man was created by his ability to think about God’ (cf. Agustín Fuentes, *The creative spark: How imagination made humans exceptional*, 2017).

This entails a departure from purely theological anti-naturalistic dogmas as well as from strictly physicalist approaches to defining humanity. Humanness understood

as quality or condition of being human offers much more pragmatic paradigm of dealing with 'divinity' and 'animality' in human nature, opposed to rigidly ontological (idealistic or materialistic) distinctions between God, human, and animal.

With such a framing of the question, it is no longer a matter of determining whether God created a human-like ancestor separately from the ancestors of other animals, or if humans descended from apes without divine intervention. Also, it is no longer a matter of determining whether the differences between humans and non-human animals are qualitative or merely quantitative. The essence of the question shifts to a plane shared by sciences, religion (Christianity), and (Christian) philosophy: what conditions, qualities, properties, actions, perceptions, features, abilities, etc., do we today consider as human, and what consequences does our current understanding of humanity have for ourselves and for our (physical, mental, spiritual) environment?

The subject of discussions within this new problem field becomes various forms of anthropomorphizing (animal rights problem; attitude to AI and various robotic entities...) and dehumanizing practices (discrimination based on racial, ethnic, sexual, or religious grounds; mistreating physically disabled, mentally handicapped, socially vulnerable individuals...).

**Wednesday, 25.09.2024; 15:45**

**Room 405: Ideas from the history of philosophy**

Oskar Lange

Ignatianum University in Cracow, Poland

**Taylor and Rorty facing Naturalism**

In recent times, there has been a noticeable increase in philosophical critiques of naturalism, not only from those aligned with Christian thought but also from secular viewpoints. Two prominent thinkers at the forefront of this discussion are Charles



Taylor and Richard Rorty. In this presentation, I will explore how these philosophers define and critique naturalism in their respective works.

Firstly, I will delve into Charles Taylor's critique as presented in his influential work, 'Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity.' Taylor argues that naturalism fails to accommodate the inescapable conceptual frameworks that underpin human identity. He contends that naturalism contradicts the experiential realities of everyday life and falls short of fulfilling the criteria of what he terms the 'best account' or BA.

Following this, I will outline the main features of Richard Rorty's neopragmatism, focusing on its positioning towards naturalism. Rorty's approach redefines philosophy as a pursuit of self-construction and a tool for enhancing community life, within which naturalism plays a complex role. I will discuss how naturalism is integrated into Rorty's broader philosophical project and what implications this integration has for understanding human experience and societal improvement.

In the concluding section of the presentation, I will compare and contrast Taylor's and Rorty's perspectives. This comparison will highlight the nuanced ways in which contemporary philosophers engage with and challenge the naturalist paradigm, offering insights into the broader implications for philosophical inquiry and practical ethics.

**Bartosz Wesół**

University of Warsaw, Poland

## Pragmatist Christian Philosophy Beyond Naturalism

Thinkers associated with pragmatism, who directly addressed religious questions, usually fall into two branches of the movement initiated by two great pragmatist figures: William James and John Dewey. But these two traditions, although they may understand the concept differently, both share certain essential features of naturalism. In my presentation, I want to propose a third alternative and sketch an account of pragmatic Christian philosophy not built upon naturalistic foundations.

In the first part, I will start by investigating how some of the fundamental assumptions of pragmatism are, often implicitly, intertwined with naturalism. Especially, I will examine Peirce's "pragmatist maxim," which involves the notion of "the effects [of an object of our conception], that might conceivably have practical bearings," and analyse how this articulation provoked naturalistic interpretations of the whole pragmatic approach. At the same time, I will discuss Peirce's own views on religion which unavoidably collided with his appreciation for science. Next, I will briefly sketch the philosophies of religion of James and Dewey. Because the views of the latter were explicitly naturalistic, I will more closely look at the former and investigate how his empirical convictions rendered a kind of naturalism (what from the Christian perspective can be seen as a significant limitation for applying James' philosophy).

In the second part, I will first argue that pragmatism is in itself independent of naturalism. I will show that the discussed pragmatist assumptions can be reconciled with a non-naturalistic worldview. In particular, I will provide a non-naturalistic interpretation of the pragmatist maxim by expanding the scope of the notions of "effects" and "practical bearings." I will also refer to Peirce's original arguments against nominalism. Then, I shall present a few consequences of such an interpretation focusing on the nature of religious beliefs. Especially, based on Kantian "primacy of practical reason," I will introduce a notion of "practical reality" which can be applied to nonempirical objects. Finally, I will turn to Christianity and try to sketch a possible way of developing a pragmatic Christian philosophy free from naturalistic assumptions.

Tymoteusz Mietelski

Catholic Academy in Warsaw, Poland

### Sofia Vanni Rovighi. Italian neo-scholasticism and phenomenology towards naturalistic anthropology

I propose to present a paper on the anthropological views of Sofia Vanni Rovighi (1908-1990). She was an Italian philosopher, professor of the history of medieval philosophy, the history of philosophy and theoretical philosophy at the Catholic University of Milan. Speaking about the most important philosophers in her scientific curriculum, she

mentioned two philosophers. The first is Amato Masnovo, a significant figure in Italian neo-scholasticism. The second is Edmund Husserl, about whose views she wrote the first monograph in Italy.

In her anthropology, she considers rationality to be a characteristic feature of man in Thomism. Rationality, on the ground of ontology, is a 'differentia specifica'. On the ground of gnoseology, however, it is the ability of man to recognize the requirements of his nature. As such, Thomistic anthropology presents man as irreducible not only to matter, but also to the spiritual dimension: man has a soul and is part of the natural world.

Whereas she considered Husserl's philosophy as a contemporary return to classical philosophy. She appreciated the theory of intentionality and analyzes carried out von unten, not von oben. She did not accept phenomenology as her philosophy, but as a direct interlocutor of neo-scholasticism.

Vanni Rovighi maintained that philosophical anthropology is possible and that the humanities could not replace it. It should proceed in two moments: a phenomenological description that goes beyond empirical description and a metaphysical inference about the nature of man. This nature consists in the unity of man, his spirituality, and freedom. Unity and freedom are explained at the phenomenological level, and the existence of the soul is shown through experience and metaphysical inferring.

In the paper, I would like to present the anthropological views of Sofia Vanni Rovighi, an Italian philosopher unknown in Poland, in a historical and philosophical context: in particular, her interpretation of naturalistic anthropological concepts and her view of who a human person is.

**Wednesday, 25.09.2024; 15:45**

**Room 409: Toward transcendence**

Jacek Surzyn

Ignatianum University in Cracow, Poland

## Heidegger's "Only God Can Save Us": A Cry for Transcendence, Not Theism

Martin Heidegger's famous quote, "Only a god can save us," is often misinterpreted as a call for a return to traditional theism. However, a closer look reveals a deeper meaning that points towards a more agnostic stance.

Heidegger's concern lies with the perilous state of humanity in the face of modern technology and its potential to dehumanize us. He critiques the instrumental rationality that reduces everything to a means for control and efficiency. This, he argues, leads to a sense of meaninglessness and a loss of connection with the world.

His use of "god" is not literal. It represents a transcendent force, something beyond the human that can restore meaning and guide us towards a more authentic existence. This "god" could symbolize a rediscovery of our connection to nature, a reawakening of our creative potential, or even a shift in consciousness.

This interpretation aligns with Heidegger's broader philosophical project. He emphasizes the importance of questioning Being itself, the nature of existence. The "death of God" signifies the end of traditional metaphysical frameworks that provided meaning. We are left to grapple with the question of Being in a world devoid of absolute truths.

However, Heidegger doesn't advocate for complete nihilism. He sees art, with its ability to reveal new possibilities and inspire creation, as a potential path forward. Here, agnosticism comes into play. We might not have the answers about the nature of this "god" or how to achieve salvation. But by acknowledging the limitations of human reason and seeking a connection with something beyond ourselves, we can begin to navigate the complexities of the modern world.

In conclusion, Heidegger's "god" is not a call for blind faith but a recognition of the need for something more. It's a yearning for a transcendent dimension that can guide us towards a more meaningful existence in an uncertain world. This aligns more

with agnosticism, acknowledging the limits of knowledge while searching for answers beyond the human.

Finley I Lawson

Canterbury Christ Church University, United Kingdom

## A Naturalist Theology: Christianity Within a Holistic Paradigm

The root of the narrative that places naturalism in opposition to the central tenants of Christianity resides in the perception that a “naturalist” account of reality has no space for the immaterial/transcendental. This perceived dichotomy embedded in Christian anthropology and cosmology, this paper will argue, resides in a categorical error about the nature and number of things in reality. The apparent conflict assumes that one faces a binary choice of matter versus not-matter, where the first falls under the remit of investigation by the natural sciences and the latter falls outside and therefore places theology at odds with a naturalism.

In contrast to this dichotomous account, the scientific holistic ontologies proposed by Michael Esfeld (philosopher of science) and Hans Primas (quantum chemist) provide a radically different account of foundational reality in which one can argue that there is no requirement to reconcile two fundamentally different kinds of “stuff.” The contradiction between naturalism and Christianity is only apparent and based in our presuppositions about the world described by science, and the nature of personhood.

Hans Primas and Michael Esfeld propose two very different pictures of holistic reality (despite both drawing on a holistic account of reality grounded in quantum theory), however they are united in providing the theologian with nuanced and deep metaphysics that speaks to our need for an ontology that has space for transcendence (although neither takes this step themselves). Esfeld’s and Primas’ accounts provide promise for a coherent metaphysics either offers an alternative to the matter-transcendence dichotomy seen in much theological discussion (Primas) or challenges our conception of the nature of ontological dependence between objects and the relationships they stand in (Esfeld).

This paper does not claim that scientifically informed holism “solves” the naturalism versus anti-naturalism debate, and indeed it may raise wider theological challenges, however it does provide a way to integrate naturalistic (scientific) metaphysics into our Christian thought. It also serves to remind us that whilst reductionism can be a valuable methodological tool it must not be mistaken for ontology. Esfeld’s account provides a metaphysics which challenges the assumption that relata must exist independently to the relationships in which they stand. Instead, the relata are ontologically co-dependent with the relationships—this shift to a co-dependence model provides a useful theological framework for examining how naturalism and Christianity may be brought into profitable dialogue. Primas presents an alternative model in which the foundational ontology is marked but a unified *Unus Mundus* that has no ontological division. The accounts differ in the fact that Esfeld’s holism allows for the existence of ontological distinct individual objects whereas Primas’ does not allow ontological distinction. However, they are united in providing the theologian and philosopher with holistic ontologies that support the theologian to reconceptualise transcendence in a naturalistic framework.

Andrzej Karpiński

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## Can Philosophy Ever Be Fully Naturalistic? The Curious Case of G.W.F. Hegel’s True Infinity

Christian philosophy and theology rarely attends to G.W.F. Hegel’s treatment of Logic and Nature. Yet, as I intend to stipulate in this paper, Hegel’s insights concerning the relationship between nature and its rationally intelligible structure can provide for an interesting possibility of relating naturalism and Christianity. Hegel thought radical empirical naturalism to be a naïve position. A belief that not only all being, but also all explanation can be reduced to the outcomes of scientific discourse ignores the crucial role of philosophy as providing a conceptual framework within which the scientific perspective on the world can be espoused and developed in the first place. Yet

precisely this structure of logical intelligibility of nature, as I intend to argue, is for Hegel systematically both immanent and transcendent to the sensibly accessible world.

The paper will be divided into four main parts. In the first one, I present a commonplace perspective on Hegel, according to which he is espousing a neo-Aristotelian 'liberal naturalism'. As such prominent interpreters as Terry Pinkard would argue, what Hegel's idea of Spirit essentially amounts to is a meticulous delineation of the 'space of reasons' commonly discernible in the functioning of nature, society, morals, religion, etc.

A misinterpretation that those scholars commit to, however, is to think that this structure which progressively reveals itself as Spirit is nothing more than a collection of Spirit's instantiations. At the core of Hegel's entire system stands the idea that reality (as a composition of external reality and thought in oneness) always transcends itself to be fully itself. If we think about finitude and infinity as opposed to each other, this amounts to setting a false limit on infinity itself. Instead, the finite and infinite can only be understood in mutual dynamism and relationality. This 'True Infinite', as Hegel calls it, can never be 'ultimately' denoting a self-relation of a finite reality.

In the third part of the paper, therefore, I argue that if we presume that there is a fundamental commonality between thought and external reality, then a non-reductionist account of explanation has to imply a non-reductionist ontology. Put differently, the fact that we think about the 'space of reasons' as different from scientific actuality in the first place, testifies that nature itself stands for us in a need of an ultimate explanation transcending it. We can only understand finite nature as an intelligible whole if we automatically, and implicitly, relate it to the infinity of the Absolute Idea as a condition of possibility for the finite to be finite.

Finally, I present the case that for Hegel Christianity most perfectly represents this very conceptual and fundamental logical coherence (Absolute Spirit). Hegel would incentivize us to think about Christianity, and religion more broadly, not as a set of beliefs opposed to naturalism, but rather as a real expression of naturalism's grounding in infinite reason. The downside of such an approach, however, is that we can possibly compromise on the orthodox doctrine of absolute distinction between Creator and creation.

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Fot. Piotr Krochmal

