

**“Pre- and Postlapsarian Visions of Politics”**

Thursday, November 10, 3:15-4:30 p.m. | ROOM 205 | Chair: Luke Foster (University of Chicago)

“A Political Analysis of Catherine of Siena’s Mystical Dialogues”

Evelyn Behling (University of Notre Dame)

This paper will turn primarily to Catherine’s mystical *Dialogues* to envision how God has created human beings to need each other and to be needed such that their flourishing will be found only by practicing mutual charity. This interdependence is not cookie-cutter, but rather, it takes as many different forms as there are human persons, each of whom is called to be another Christ and in this to be fully themselves. In this, Catherine gives us the resources to appreciate how diversity is needed for unity and authenticity needed for holiness, reconciliations needed to meet the divisions of our time.

Bio: Evelyn Behling is a doctoral student in Political Theory and Constitutional Studies here at Notre Dame and a David Solomon Fellow of the dCEC. She brings ancient and medieval perspectives to bear on social challenges in liberal democracies, with a particular interest in the American case. She is currently also an Adam Smith Fellow of the Mercatus Center at George Mason University. Ms. Behling earned her B.A. with Distinction in Humanities from Yale University in 2017 and worked for the James Madison Program at Princeton University from 2017-2020 prior to her arrival at Notre Dame.

“Politics Without the Fall: Aquinas On Politics and Anarchy in the State of Innocence”

Haidun Liu (Harvard University)

Would there have been politics without the fall? For Augustine and most medieval theologians in the West, the answer was no—coercive authority is a response to original sin. But Thomas Aquinas diverged from this tradition, reviving the Aristotelian notion of politics as founded on nature rather than convention. My talk examines Aquinas’ attempt to reconcile the tradition of prelapsarian anarchism with the thesis of man’s political nature.

Bio: Haidun Liu is a Graduate Student in Harvard’s Department of Government, studying political theory. His main areas of interest are the role that theological ideas play in political thought and political utopianism.



"Cosmopolitan Localism: Augustine on Place and Contingency"

Elly Brown Long (Princeton University)

Contemporary political philosopher Martha Nussbaum looks to Socrates, Diogenes the Cynic, Epictetus, Seneca, and Cicero as live resources for her own cosmopolitan vision. This paper will show that Augustine's thought can ground an attachment to the local that nonetheless maintains universal ethical concerns. Nussbaum sees attachment to particular places as at best only a fulcrum leveraged for universal moral concern, and at worst an obstacle to such concern. For Augustine, however, attachment to place operates under a reverse motivational structure: it is precisely a universal perspective that animates an attachment to a particular place. Augustine sees more clearly than Nussbaum how particular and universal commitments need not be competitive.

Bio: Elly Long is a PhD student in the Department of Politics at Princeton University, where she studies political theory and religious ethics. Her work examines the themes of home and belonging in the history of political thought and contemporary political theory, and her dissertation project develops an Augustinian understanding of home and the local.

**“Who Do You Say That I Am? Creativity and the Arts”**

Thursday, November 10, 3:15-4:30 pm |Room 206/207| Chair: Rev. William R. Dailey, CSC
(University of Notre Dame)

“Re-Creating Humanity: The Hubris of Cloning in Popular Culture”

Richard Doerflinger (de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture)

What the Book of Genesis tells us is the primordial sin – the hubris of accepting the promise “you shall be as gods” – is especially on display in an age dominated by science and technology, as we witness temptations to assume God’s creative power over human life. The landmark narrative here is Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s 1818 novel *Frankenstein*; or, the *New Prometheus*. Victor Frankenstein thinks he can create a living man by assembling body parts from corpses, and infusing them with the spark of life using lightning. His creation turns out to be a violent monster who turns against his creator. The logical conclusion of such control over life was later presented by Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World*, imagining a future society in which artificial reproduction and genetic control allow scientists to assign each person to his or her preordained role in an orderly but soulless society. Now in vitro fertilization, human gene editing, and attempts at cloning to produce genetically matched human tissues and organs are a reality, providing a basis for further imaginative developments.

Bio: Richard M. Doerflinger retired in 2016 from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, where he had served as Associate Director of the Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities. For 36 years he prepared testimony and other materials on abortion, euthanasia, human cloning, stem cell research, and other issues. He has published in many journals and magazines, and writes a monthly syndicated column for the *National Catholic News Service*. He is a Fellow at the University of Notre Dame’s de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture, an Associate Scholar at the Charlotte Lozier Institute, and an Adjunct Fellow in Bioethics and Public Policy at the National Catholic Bioethics Center. He holds B.A. and M.A. degrees from the University of Chicago, and conducted doctoral studies in Theology there and at the Catholic University of America. He and his wife live in La Conner, Washington.

“Creative Microcosms in Film: What Hollywood Thinks of God and Man (and Where Hollywood Went Wrong)”

Justin Petrisek (Independent Scholar)



Two decades after John Paul II's Letter to Artists, there remains a desperate need for Catholic thought in the world of film. While Hollywood itself has become an echo-chamber, great works of art continue to emerge. So, when films like *There Will Be Blood*, *Tree of Life*, and *Lady Bird* discuss or even oppose God and creation, Catholics have a responsibility to engage. Film, like other artforms, can captivate and provide an opportunity for philosophical and existential questioning. Perhaps, if nurtured, film can lead to a true embrace of the Creator and help fulfill John Paul II's plea for art and artists.

Bio: Justin Petrisek is a writer and critic based in northern Virginia. He currently teaches at The Catholic University of America where his work focuses on film history, criticism, and creative writing. Justin received his M.A. in Theology from the Augustine Institute and an M.F.A. in Fiction and M.A. in Literature from George Mason University, where he also taught. He has previously worked with FOCUS, The Cardinal Newman Society, and the Charlotte Lozier Institute. He is currently watching all 95 Best Picture Oscar winners for a project entitled "My Year with Oscar." You can read his work on movies and film history at *No Place Like the Movies* or in the Silver Screen Newsletter available online.

"Anything Goes in the Name of Arts and Freedom of Expression?"

Jordi Pujol (Pontifical University of Santa Croce)

Following Aristotle's lead in his treatise *De Poetica*, I will explore how artistic creativity creates a world (fiction) with its own internal meaning that is not real. In this setting, are there any moral limits to artistic expression? The objectivity of morality is not cast aside in the name of art. In contemporary creations like movies, pictures or cartoons, we often see expressions that are more a celebration of hatred and indecency than anything else. Using some examples of obscenity and religious animosity, I will explore some reasons to foster personal and social responsibility, making a point of public morality.

Bio: Fr. Jordi Pujol (PhD) is a Catholic priest and Associate Professor of Media Ethics and Law at the School of Church Communications at the Pontifical University of Santa Croce in Rome. He is originally from Barcelona (1975) and has a masters degree in Law (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain) and in Moral Theology (Pontifical University of Santa Croce in Rome). He has been a Visiting Research Fellow at the Notre Dame Center for Ethics and Culture, and a Visiting Scholar at the Columbia School of Journalism and at the Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society at



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Harvard. He is the Associate Editor of the Journal *Church, Communication & Culture* published with Taylor and Francis on behalf of the Pontifical University of Santa Croce.



“Comedy and the Creative Arts”

Thursday, November 10, 3:15-4:30.p.m. | ROOM 215 | Chair: Ken Hallenius (de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture)

“Creation and Creativity, Or How NFP Made Me a Comedian”

Claire Vaidyanathan, Independent Scholar

In this essay, I discuss how the practice of NFP, with all its strengths and weaknesses (and failures) led me to the pursuit of comedy. I argue that comedy is a religious (and particularly Catholic) endeavor, and uncover three principles that undergird both NFP and good comedy. I conclude with a discussion of what comedy has to teach us about the Christian life.

Bio: Claire Vaidyanathan is the mother of six children, ages 1-13. She has performed stand-up comedy in the US and India. Her sketch comedy videos can be found on YouTube and on Instagram.

“Beyond Satire: Cultural Engagement with our Ridiculous Reality”

Dorian Speed, University of St. Thomas, Houston

Catholic writer Muriel Spark asserted that only one instrument remained for the Catholic literary physician: satire. “The rhetoric of our times should persuade us to contemplate the ridiculous nature of the reality before us, and teach us to mock it,” she argued. Today, a cycle of instantaneous snark and dismissal pervades our cultural discourse. What must we remember when we confront our culture through satire, and what risks do we run when we look upon one another through this lens?

Bio: Dorian Speed is currently an MFA candidate at the University of Saint Thomas and is working on her first novel.

“Can We Still Make Satire? ‘Little Independent Systems of Order’ Amid Metaphysical Hysteria”

Alexander Taylor, University of Dallas

Is satire still possible today? Examining Evelyn Waugh’s theory and practice as a satirist aimed at exposing metaphysical folly reveals his work (particularly his novel *A Handful of Dust*) to be a fictional counterpart to the more rhetorical satires of John Henry Newman, especially “Tamworth Reading



Room.” My reading of Waugh’s novel and Newman’s letters to the editor of *The Times* will critically examine their satirical practice so as to seek in and through them new principles for satire in a time when both the grammar of creation and the grammar of language are hotly contested.

Bio: Alex Taylor is a PhD Candidate in Literature in the Institute for Philosophic Studies at the University of Dallas, where he received an MA in Literature and a BA in History. While serving as the Cowan Fellow for Criticism and Institutional Strategist for the Donald and Louise Cowan Archive, he is at work on a dissertation which unearths the shared political vision of two 20th century Catholic novelists, Flannery O’Connor and Evelyn Waugh, through an examination of the way in which their imagined modern cities lack civic friendship and *xenia* (hospitality classically understood), as reflected in their refiguring of the Western literary tradition.

“Creating Man Anew”

Thursday, November 10, 3:15-4:30 p.m. | ROOM 216 | Chair: Bill Hurlbut (Stanford)

“The Genesis of Engineered Life: Co-Creation and the Culture of Bioengineering”

Megan Levis (University of Notre Dame)

Are we reconstructing natural law when we tinker with bioengineering? In *Ethics of Health Care*, Benedict Ashley, O.P. and Kevin O’Rourke, O.P. discuss how genetic engineering can be seen under the light of stewardship and creativity. Genetic engineering and bioengineering more broadly can then be seen as cooperating with God the Creator. This talk aims to uncover the criteria of reconstructing the human experience as co creators. How can we improve the human condition without promoting a worldview where one sees persons as objects? The modification of life requires knowledge and virtue. Does society have the wisdom to undertake such projects?

Bio: Megan Levis is a Postdoctoral Fellow in Computer Science and Engineering at Notre Dame’s Technology Ethics Center. Her research relates to questions concerning how biotechnology shapes cultural understanding of what it means to be human. Along with developing a number of tech ethics courses, Dr. Levis is also researching the creation of virtuous social technologies using Catholic Social Teaching. Dr. Levis completed her Bioengineering Ph.D. at the University of Notre Dame in 2021.

“Human-Animal Chimeras and the Embodied Mind”

Dillon Stull (Stanford University)

Neural human-animal chimeric organisms promise to be useful laboratory models of neurodevelopment. But their production raises fundamental questions about organismic identity, how it is recognized, and what is its moral meaning. This paper proposes a framework for estimating the mental properties that can be credibly attributed to interspecies neural chimeras, especially human and animal. Early laboratory observations and philosophical principles both ancient and contemporary suggest the necessity of a broader vision of organismic complexity and unity that recognizes the meaning of biological functions, including those undergirding mental operations, within their context in the whole organism and its environment.



Bio: Dillon Stull is a medical student at Stanford Medical School. He completed his undergraduate studies in the Baylor University Honors College and earned a Master of Arts in Christian Studies at Duke Divinity School through the Fellowship in Theology, Medicine, and Culture.

“The Thomistic Metaphysics of Creation as a Corrective to Transhumanism’s Technocratic Paradigm”

Fr. Michael Baggot, LC (Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum)

The philosophical insights of the virtue ethics tradition on the wise use of emergent technologies risk distortion if not ultimately metaphysically grounded. This article examines the Creator as the rationally knowable author of the natural moral law and the end of the creature’s striving for perfection through biotechnological enhancement. It advocates for an appreciation for creaturely finitude and finality as a corrective to transhumanism’s technocratic paradigm. While secular transhumanism correctly encourages individuals to seek a higher form of life beyond mediocrity, its project will achieve only a partial improvement of humanity so long as it excludes the person’s transcendent dimension.

Bio: Fr. Michael Baggot, PhD is currently an Assistant Professor of Bioethics at the Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum in Rome, Italy. He is also a Research Scholar at the UNESCO Chair in Bioethics and Human Rights. He was an Adjunct Professor of Theology at the Christendom College Rome program from 2018-2022. His writings have appeared in *First Things*, *Studia Bioethica*, *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly*, and *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy*. He is the chief editor of and a contributor to the book [*Enhancement Fit for Humanity: Perspectives on Emerging Technologies*](#) (Routledge, 2022).



“To What End? Meaning in Creation”

Thursday, November 10, 3:15-4:30.p.m. | ROOM B01 | Chair: Santiago Legarre (Catholic University of Argentina)

“Is Beauty a Purpose in Nature? Darwin, Soloviev, and Portmann”

Susan Waldstein, Franciscan University of Steubenville

The paper compares the neo-Darwinian account of beauty in the appearance of organisms with the converging accounts given by philosopher Soloviev and zoologist Adolf Portmann. For many biologists, plant and animal bodies are just “physiological sacks.” Organisms developed their shapes and colors by chance mutations through natural selection. An obvious difficulty is the extraordinary beauty of many animals. Darwin’s answer is sexual selection. Soloviev argues that the driving force of evolution is rather the desire of the cosmic Artist to embody spirit more perfectly in matter. Adolf Portmann also looks for a correlation between appearances and hierarchy of animals.

Bio: Susan Waldstein teaches theology at Franciscan University of Steubenville. Her area of special interest is the interface of theology and biology in such topics as evolution and hierarchy in nature.

“The Return of Teleology to the Natural Sciences”

Brian Miller, The Discovery Institute

Since ancient times, philosophers have debated whether everything seen in nature is solely the product of physical laws, chance, and time or the creation of a mind. The former view grew to dominate the mental landscape of Western culture during the period of modernity. Yet, over the past century discoveries in the natural sciences reaffirm the Catholic tradition that nature resulted from the will of God. Research in cosmology demonstrates that the universe had a beginning and that the laws of physics were carefully designed to allow for life. And investigations in biology, thermodynamics, and engineering reveal that the origin of life points to the activity of a mind. These discoveries point to a creator that is both transcendent and immanent in harmony with Catholic theology.

Bio: Dr. Brian Miller is the Research Coordinator for the Center for Science and Culture at Discovery Institute. He holds a B.S. in physics with a minor in engineering from MIT and a Ph.D. in physics



from Duke University. He speaks internationally on intelligent design and the impact of worldviews on society. He helps manage the ID 3.0 Research Program, and he was a primary organizer of the Conference on Engineering in the Life Sciences (CELS). He also has consulted on organizational development and strategic planning. He is a founding member of an innovation consortium that developed into TheStartup, a virtual incubator dedicated to bringing innovation to the marketplace. In addition, he has contributed to multiple books and journals covering the debate over intelligent design, including *The Mystery of Life's Origin: The Continuing Controversy*, *The Comprehensive Guide to Science and Faith*, and *Inference Review*. And he is a regular contributor to *Evolution News & Science Today* and the *ID the Future Podcast*.

“A Guided Tour through the Amphitheater of Creation”

Terrence Ehrman, C.S.C. (University of Notre Dame)

The first article of the Christian Creed professes belief in God the Creator. However, the contemporary scientific and cultural worldview poses challenges to encountering and understanding the world as created by God. I address three aspects of being formed uncritically in a scientific worldview that contribute to this theological myopia: a faulty understanding of the relationship of divine and natural causes, a deficient epistemology, and scientific reductionism. Culturally, we live in an age characterized by a lack of awareness and experience of the natural world that can result in what has been termed “nature-deficit disorder.” Many Christians have, thereby, lost a sacramental vision of the world. St. Basil the Great of the fourth century preached to his Christian flock on the scientific and cultural obstacles of his day to acquiring a sacramental vision of reality. To recover a sacramental vision and relationship with God the Creator, I reflect theologically on a pedagogical experience from my university theology course that is a contemporary application of St. Basil’s fourth century guided tour of the amphitheater of creation that restores true vision.

Bio: Fr. Terry Ehrman, C.S.C., is an assistant teaching professor in the Department of Theology at the University of Notre Dame with a concurrent position in the Department of Biological Sciences. He investigates the relationship between theology and science, particularly the life sciences of ecology and evolution. He has a B.S. in biology from Notre Dame, M.S. in aquatic ecology from Virginia Tech, M.Div. from Notre Dame, and a Ph.D. in systematic theology from The Catholic University of America.



“Before Me Nothing But Eternal Things Were Made”

Thursday, November 10, 3:15-4:30 p.m. | ROOM B02 | Chair: Jason Baxter (University of Notre Dame)

“Nature’s Rhetoric: The Language of Creation in Phaedrus”

Catherine Kuiper (Hillsdale College)

Phaedrus is remarkable for its attention to writing and speech, especially in the context of one of Socrates’ most famous myths—the winged soul. Even more remarkable, however, is the role the natural world plays in the dialogue, where it moves from a position of apparent insignificance to one of central inspiration and divine contact. This paper discusses the connection between language and the natural world, the divine power of discourse, and the possibility of creative participation.

Bio: Catherine Kuiper has a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Notre Dame and is an Assistant Professor of Education at Hillsdale College. She specializes in early modern Spanish and English political thought.

“Dante and the Architecture of Creation”

Abe Schoener (Scholium Wines)

In this paper, I will explore two topics whose connection is not immediately clear: the biology of the unseen world of the soil, with especial connection to the farming of grape vines; and the metaphysics of Dante’s placing of the eternal Inferno in the physical underworld, with special reference to Satan’s position at the center of the physical universe.

Bio: Abe Schoener was a philosophy professor at St John’s College in Maryland. He took a sabbatical to work at Stag’s Leap in Napa, back in 1998, and eventually gave up the day job. He made his first wine to sell in 2000.

“Simplicius and Philoponus on Creation: Discussions between Christians and Pagans in Late Antiquity”



Alberto Ross (Universidad Panamericana)

The aim of this paper is to offer an overview and a reconstruction of some of the most relevant arguments and discussions on Creation in Late Antiquity. I will concentrate my attention on the reception of the Platonic and Aristotelian theologies in the Greek Commentators of the 5th century. The revision of these authors is crucial for comprehending the origin of the philosophical concepts and arguments that supported the development of the posterior Abrahamic theologies. I will explain that a common reference point is the Aristotelian doctrine of the eternity of motion.

Bio: Full Professor of Philosophy and Humanities at Universidad Panamericana (Mexico). He received a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Universidad de Navarra, and held a postdoctoral position at the Université de Paris IV-Sorbonne. In the academic year 2021-2022, Dr. Ross was visiting scholar at the Harvard Center for Hellenic Studies and the University of Notre Dame. His works include *The causality of the Prime Mover in Metaphysics A*, *Causality, nature and fate in Alexander of Aphrodisias*, and *The causality of the Prime Mover in Simplicius*. Recently, Dr. Ross co-edited the volume *Time and cosmology in Plato and the Platonic Tradition* (2022) published in Brill's Plato Studies Series.