

The Sixteenth Conference of the British Society for the Philosophy of Religion
Creativity and Creation
4th – 6th September, 2025
Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford

Thursday 4th September

12.30 – Registration desk opens (Monson Room)

14.00-15.30 – Short paper session 1 (streams)

Stream A – Simpkins Lee Theatre

Chair - Mark Wynn

1. Victoria Trumbull: 'The metaphysics of the creative will'
2. Ivan Broisson: 'Étienne Gilson on the metaphysics of creation'
3. Eric Yang: 'Theological modeling as conceptual artmaking'

Stream B – Talbot Hall

Chair - Simon Hewitt

4. Stephen Cheung: 'Paul, Nietzsche and the creation of the human being'
5. Tomasz Laskowski: 'Let's believe in fantasy: atheists and imaginative immersion'
6. Sylwia Wilczewska: 'God, inquiry and the creation of meaning'

Stream C – Paul Oster Room

Chair - Joanna Leidenhag

7. Victoria Harrison: 'Imaginative hermeneutics as method: A fictionalist approach to religious ontology'
8. Audrey Southgate: 'Towards a philosophy of integrated literacy and creativity'
9. Emil Lusser: 'Theological Creativity and Neurodiverse Creation: Reflections on the Construction of Autistic Theology'

15:30 - Tea and Coffee (Monson Room)

15.50 – Registration desk closes

16:00 – Welcome from the President - **Simpkins Lee Theatre**

16.15 – Plenary session #1 – Simpkins Lee Theatre

Catherine Pickstock: 'Is Creation prior to Being? The Orphic task and the Primacy of Process'

Chair - Clare Carlisle

17:15 – *Religious Studies* 60th Anniversary Reception (all welcome) – **Monson Room**

18.30 – Dinner

20.00 – Plenary session #2 – Simpkins Lee Theatre

Michael Puett: ‘Human and Divine Creativity – in China, for example’

Chair - Victoria Harrison

21.15 – Pub

Friday 5th September

8.00 – Breakfast

9.00-10.30 – Short paper session 2 (streams)

Stream D – **Simpkins Lee Theatre**

Chair - Simon Hewitt

10. Klaas Kraay: ‘Creativity in creation: God’s personality and preferences’
11. Brian Ballard: ‘Creativity is more meaningful if God exists: an argument for pro-theism’
12. Jasmine Frost: ‘Cosmic artwork and the axiology of theism: exploring the prospects for artistic pro-theism’

Stream E - **Talbot Hall**

Chair - Martin Pickup

13. T. Ryan Byerly: ‘From creator theology to pantheism’
14. Monika Morkūnaitė: ‘Should divine creation be bound by classical logic? Meeting the quantum challenge’
15. Robbie Hoque: ‘Ibn Taymiyya and divine creation: grounding a substantive Islamic analytic theology’

Stream F – **Paul Oster Room**

Chair - Tasia Scrutton

16. Mattia Geretto: ‘The creative power of God and human architectural capability according to Leibniz’
17. Sepid (Zahra) Birashk: ‘Recreating creation: The role of human creativity in Schelling’s speculative theogony’
18. Heather Perfect: ‘The role of subjectivity in God’s creative process’

Stream G – **Olga Pocock Room**

Chair - Mikel Burley

19. Mor Segev: 'Maimonides on the Biblical creation account, Aristotle's eternalist cosmology, and cosmic perfection'
20. Johnson Uchenna: 'Creation in African traditional thought'
21. Ho-yeung Lee and Pak-lin Leung: 'Living in an axiarchic world: Lessons from Zhu Xi'

10.40 – Tea and Coffee (Monson Room)

11.20-12.50 – Short paper session 3 (streams)

Stream H – **Simpkins Lee Theatre**

Chair - Mark Wynn

22. David Ellis: 'Wittgenstein and arguments from design'
23. Bartosz Wesół: 'Teleology and creativity: abduction and C.S. Peirce's argument for the reality of God'
24. Nathan Coundon: "'It's all in your head *and it's true*.'" How to create divine attribute concepts according to Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa'

Stream I – **Talbot Hall**

Chair - Clare Carlisle

25. Marco Fiorletta: 'Hölderlin's poetic creativity: writing as struggle and revelation'
26. King-Ho Leung: 'Elena Ferrante on the spiritual experience of freedom and creativity'
27. Nathalia Bell: 'Aesthetic theology: a Deleuzian reading of the Book of Job'

Stream J – **Paul Oster Room**

Chair - Victoria Harrison

28. Simon Hewitt: 'All numbers great and small: a neo-Fregean approach to the creation of numbers'
29. Ian Davies: 'Creation of new souls: do traducianists need to be panpsychists?'
30. Katelyn O'Dell: 'On the possibility of personal knowledge of a creator God'

Stream K – **Olga Pocock Room**

Chair - Mohammad Saleh Zarepour

31. Douglas Hedley: 'Creativity and play: theology and the bowling game in Cusa'
32. Mikel Burley: 'The playful creativity of the divine: the concept of *līlā* in Vedānta theology'
33. Victor Andrei Lambert: 'Human Creativity and the Image of God: Thoughts from Greek Patristic Sources'

13.00 – Lunch

14.00-15.30 – Short paper session 4 (streams)

Stream L – Simpkins Lee Theatre

Chair - T. Ryan Byerly

- 34. Phillip Quinn: 'How can creation be a gift?'
- 35. Ben Page: 'Can God wrong me by ceasing to conserve me?'
- 36. Akumjung Pongen: 'Cooperative creation and the sole-source thesis'

Stream M – Talbot Hall

Chair - Victoria Harrison

- 37. Mina Yi: 'Creation in movements: art-making and world-making'
- 38. Noemi Call: 'A philosophy of landscape: exploring artistic experimentation and religious imagination'
- 39. Gareth Polmeer: 'Image and Likeness: Generation, Imagination and Artistic Creation'

Stream N – Paul Oster Room

Chair - Tasia Scrutton

- 40. James Lorenz: 'Creation, creativity and the grammar of sacramental theology'
- 41. Serafim Seppälä: 'Human and divine creativity in Orthodox theology: conceptual models'
- 42. Davide Zappulli: 'Making Oneself Like the Creator: Creative Agency as a Soteriological Ideal in the Zhuangzi'

Stream O – Olga Pocock Room

Chair - Mikel Burley

- 43. Sasha Lawson Frost: 'Obedience as a creative act: authority and mediation in artistic practice'
- 44. Sayyid Maisam Haider Ali Rizvi: 'Between *technē* and *theia mania*: acts of *mimēsis* and the place of poetic creativity in Al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā's prophetic psychology'
- 45. Errol Boon: 'One Last Miracle: Creativity, Indeterminacy and Artificial Intelligence'

15.40 – Tea and Coffee (Monson Room)

16.00 – General Meeting of the Society - **Simpkins Lee Theatre**

17.00 – Plenary session #3 – Simpkins Lee Theatre

Clare Carlisle: 'The Work to be Made'

Chair - Chris Insole

18.15 – Conference dinner

20:00 – Plenary session #4 – Simpkins Lee Theatre

Jessica Frazier: 'The Lost Attribute: Divine Creativity and Subcreativity'

Chair - Douglas Hedley

21.15 – Pub

Saturday 6th September

8.00 – Breakfast and departure

1. Victoria Trumbull: 'The metaphysics of the creative will'

In his masterful 1907 work *Creative Evolution*, Henri Bergson argues that an examination of the domain of life and biology will reveal a psychological source, comparable to that of our own creative will, at the origin of reality. In this paper, I will examine the ways that both an introspective analysis of the human will and an empirical analysis of natural creation point to the existence of a prior activity at the source of mind and world. If there exists a real psychological causality, then it must be distinguished from physical causality; and it is this psychological causality alone which will provide a model of “creation” properly so called, i.e., the act of producing something that did not exist in its antecedents. According to this perspective, the work of creation itself adds to the initial idea and, by this, gives it a new and heretofore unreached value. I will argue that, by contrast, the Platonic worldview as well as medieval Christian theories of the “divine ideas” threaten to undermine genuine metaphysical creation insofar as, on this account, the product always and necessarily marks a deficiency from its source. The paper seeks to explore and answer the following questions: in what way does the human will at the psychological level reflect or mirror the act of creation on the cosmological level? How does psychological efficacy differ from physical causation? Finally, does creation imply a diminution or compromise of the initial creative spirit?

Email: victoria.gross@oriel.ox.ac.uk

2. Ivan Broisson: 'Étienne Gilson on the metaphysics of creation'

On the occasion of the publication of his complete works, we are currently rediscovering the thought of Étienne Gilson (1884-1978), one of the leading Thomistic philosophers of the 20th century. In contrast to the systematic Thomism of the Roman school, which was dominant at the time, a Thomism focused on foundationalist apologetics, Gilson seeks to situate Aquinas's philosophy in its historical context and takes a non-foundationalist view of the relationship between faith and reason, insisting that Christian revelation has fertilised philosophy on its own level.

This is particularly true of the concept of 'Creation'. Initially a biblical concept, the idea of Creation, based on the text of Genesis, has inspired in metaphysics a strong sense of the contingency of finite beings, and has led some philosophers, including Aquinas, to affirm the primacy of existence over the reality of essences.

Gilson's view of the metaphysics of created existence has a direct impact on his aesthetics. While at the same time Jacques Maritain was constructing a Thomistic philosophy of art that emphasised artistic intuition as a form of knowledge, Gilson, with Aristotle, insisted on '*poiesis*' as the production process of the work of art. Far from being a naive comparison between God's creation and the artist's creative action, Gilson's aesthetics proposes a meditation on the ontology of the work of art, nourished by a very broad culture and including an original understanding of abstraction in painting.

Email: ivan.broisson@uclouvain.be

3. Eric Yang: 'Theological modeling as conceptual artmaking'

The construction of theological models often involves the employment of various philosophical strategies—such as paraphrasing, conceptual engineering, or conceptual analysis—which yield competing theological models, whereby the relative merits and costs of these views are assessed. In this paper, I propose an alternative approach to theological modeling, viz. conceptual artmaking. In developing this approach, I discuss the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and some of the models (e.g., social models, psychological models, relative identity models, etc.) that have been offered in order to illustrate the ways in which many of these models have been developed by utilizing the typical strategies mentioned earlier. In the next section I characterize conceptual artmaking and distinguish it from these other methods, and I show that a conceptual artmaking approach fits well with the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity, especially in light of the apophatic framework that many early Christian theologians held. A conceptual artmaking approach to models of the doctrine of the Trinity will significantly reframe the debate, as these theological models will not be regarded as being competitive with each other with regards to their representational accuracy. Rather, these models creatively or imaginatively emphasize particular aspects of the doctrine for a variety of purposes, including devotional or artistic aims (as well as the usual aim of providing a model that avoids logical inconsistency). Along with logical consistency, creativity and imaginative expansion should be regarded as some of the aims in formulating models of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Email: etyang@scu.edu

4. Stephen Cheung: 'Paul, Nietzsche and the creation of the human being'

'Almost two millennia and not a single new God!' Nietzsche complains in *The Anti-Christ* as he berates his own people for their singular lack of 'talent for religion'.¹ A curious sentiment for an atheist perhaps. But for Nietzsche, to create new gods is to create new values, and to create new values, is to create a new humanity. Reflecting on the future shape of humanity from the first century, the Apostle Paul claims, 'Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything: what counts is the new creation'.²

Though usually perceived as divergent thinkers, I shall argue that Paul and Nietzsche are in fact concerned with the same creative task: that of reopening humanity's future through the re/creation of the human being. Furthermore, I will show that Paul and Nietzsche share an understanding of how such a project might proceed: *First*, they both reject what I characterise broadly as the citizenship strategies of their respective contexts – incapable as these strategies are of providing the aesthetic unity that Paul and Nietzsche expect in the creation of a legitimately human culture. *Second*, each contends for a dynamic collaborative relationship with some God or other around whom our collective lives must orbit.

By reflecting upon the creation of the human being in Paul and Nietzsche, the significance of their respective narratives becomes clearer, mutually reinforcing and clarifying each other, not in a straightforwardly antipodal manner – as might have previously been expected – but rather as narrative structures which bear an unexpected, yet striking family resemblance.

Email: stephenpetercheung@gmail.com

¹ *The Anti-Christ* 19.

² *Galatians* 6:15.

5. Tomasz Laskowski: 'Let's believe in fantasy: atheists and imaginative immersion'

Susan Schellenberg (2013) argued that belief and imagination exist on a continuum, allowing for intermediary states. In cases of deep imaginative immersion, even an atheist might engage with religious ideas so vividly that their emotions and behaviors resemble genuine belief.

In this paper, I will defend an atheistic perspective, maintaining that imagination and belief should remain distinct. However, I propose that atheistic imagination about transcendence can be reinterpreted as imagination without designate — a way of engaging deeply with religious narratives without ontological commitment and ethical commitment. This approach enables atheists to keep their cultural immersion regarding religion and participate in spirituality while maintaining a non-theistic stance.

Furthermore, I will situate this model within Mikael Stenmark's (2021) worldview framework, arguing that this reconceptualization of imagination does not fit the strict distinction between metaphysical and naturalistic worldviews. Religion need not occupy the core of a worldview but can instead exist at its periphery, fostering a more nuanced understanding of religious engagement. Finally, I will explore how this perspective can enrich atheist-Christian dialogue by providing common ground for imaginative participation without necessitating belief.

Email: ta.laskowski@uw.edu.pl

6. Sylvia Wilczewska: 'God, inquiry and the creation of meaning'

At least since Sartre (20-22), it has usually been assumed that, if there is God, humans are not the creators of existential meaning, since what makes a life meaningful is fulfilling the purpose assigned to it by God (cf. Metz 99-104, Cottingham 9-15) – so, on theism, even if one is an agent in the process of making one's life meaningful, the process in question is intrinsically non-creative. The aim of my presentation is to explore the possibility that the meaning of human life is created both by God and by the human who lives it without positioning them as adversaries. In order to do that, I will introduce the concept of *creative inquiry*, using the analogy between the creation of meaning in life and in art and showing that inquiring after the meaning of one's life can be a creative process – a process ending with “a surprising, valuable idea that's new *to the person who comes up with it*” (Boden 30; cf. Nanay 23-26), though not to God. If the aim of inquiry is to answer a question (cf. Friedman 519-523) rather than to acquire knowledge or true belief, and if zetetic norms differ from epistemic norms (cf. e.g. Thorstad 2913), then, given the relationship between reality and God as its creator, one may be able to create the meaning of one's life by inquiring after it – a possibility strengthened by the analogy with art, which on some accounts (cf. Kokkos 24-43) is intrinsically connected to both creativity and cognition.

Email: wilczewska.sylwia@gmail.com

7. Victoria Harrison: 'Imaginative hermeneutics as method: A fictionalist approach to religious ontology'

This paper explores the role of creativity in philosophical method by examining the epistemic potential of imaginative hermeneutics—an interpretive approach that enables access to alternative perspectives without requiring metaphysical commitment. I situate imaginative hermeneutics within a broader fictionalist framework and argue that fictionalism can be understood as a form of philosophical creativity: it allows us to engage seriously with religious and ontological systems by treating them as interpretive fictions rather than as candidates for literal truth. To illustrate this, I consider traditional Chinese folk religion, which posits ongoing, reciprocal relationships between the living and the dead. This ontology raises questions about agency, existence, and ritual efficacy that standard metaphysically realist approaches often struggle to address without distortion. I argue that a fictionalist stance, guided by imaginative hermeneutics, provides a creative yet disciplined way to interpret such practices—one that respects the internal logic of the tradition while avoiding both reductive naturalism and uncritical metaphysical endorsement.

Email: vharrison@um.edu.mo

8. Audrey Southgate: 'Towards a philosophy of integrated literacy and creativity'

What is the relationship between artistic literacy, emotional literacy, and theological literacy (including both biblical and devotional literacies)? How might these literacies, and pedagogies that treat them as intersectional, support education in the context of neurodiversity? I propose to approach these two questions side by side, engaging with recent research in theology, neurodiversity, and the arts, and drawing the cutting edge of insight in these different fields into conversation. To ground my discussion, I will offer a reading of the integrated formation programmes embedded in the very structure of the medieval Psalms manuscripts that have formed the focus of my research to date, identifying a working model of teaching intersectional literacies. My goal is to work towards a more rigorous formulation of a philosophy of holistic education that also embraces neurodiversity and supports a diverse learning community, rooted in historic practice and informed by ongoing progress in medical and social understandings of neurodiversity. At the core of this formulation must be an account of the relationship between literacy – the capacity to receive and interpret – and creativity – the capacity to make. While often treated as opposites, or at least as complements, I would like to make the case for the inseparability of artistic, emotional, and theological literacies from creativity across these different areas, and suggest some of the concrete opportunities this offers in the context of education and neurodiversity.

Email: audrey.southgate@ell.ox.ac.uk

9. Emil Lusser: ‘Theological Creativity and Neurodiverse Creation: Reflections on the Construction of Autistic Theology’

Theological creativity flourishes in diverse cognitive landscapes, yet traditional theology has largely overlooked neurodivergent perspectives. This paper explores how neurodiversity reshapes theological discourse by engaging with the work of autistic theologian Ruth Dunster. Drawing on Silberman’s (2015) theory of neurotribes and Swinton’s (2012) disability theology, Dunster (2022) develops a “neurotribal autistic hermeneutic” that reinterprets theology through autistic cognition. Her remythologizing approach challenges deficit-based views of autism and reconstructs theology as a self-referential system, where the “autism of God” (Dunster 2022) signifies a divine presence shaped by neurodivergent perception.

To further develop a theology of neurodiversity, this paper engages Dunster’s work in dialogue with Paul Tillich’s theology of culture. Tillich (1973) conceptualizes theology as the reflexive structure of consciousness within cultural forms, yet his framework assumes a universal model of religious experience. This study reinterprets Tillich’s ideas by integrating the plurality of neurodivergent cognitive styles, using religious communication (Danz 2023) as a means to bridge neurotypical and neurodivergent theological expressions.

A theology of neurodiversity is not merely about discussing neurodivergence but about fostering theological creativity shaped by neurodivergent experiences. By centering autistic voices and rethinking theological categories through neurodiverse cognition, this paper contributes to the construction of autistic theology as a vibrant and generative theological movement.

Email: emil.lusser@univie.ac.at

10. Klaas Kraay: ‘Creativity in creation: God’s personality and preferences’

An influential model of God’s role as creator and sustainer holds that God surveys modal space, and then chooses one possible world to actualize, purely on the basis of its axiological properties. Critics deem this model objectionably *mechanistic*: it turns God into a “cosmic computer”, a mere “dispassionate calculator of intrinsic value” (Leftow 2017). Rival models instead emphasize *divine creativity*, sometimes by likening God to an artist (Pruss 2016), a storyteller (Lebens 2015), a dancer (Pearce 2017), or a chef (Page 2022). Relatedly, some say that God’s creative process is informed by God’s *personality* (Draper 2019; Bailey and Rettler 2024; Seagraves 2025) or *preferences* (Senor 2008; Leftow 2017; Amijee 2022; Wilson 2022). This paper explores whether the appeal to divine *personality* or *preferences* can adequately ground a non-mechanistic account of divine creativity. It delivers a mixed verdict. Suppose, first, that there is (a) one unique unsurpassable world, or (b) an infinite hierarchy of increasingly better worlds. In these scenarios, appeal to divine personality or preferences cannot justify God in making a suboptimal choice. But suppose, instead, that God must choose between worlds that are (c) equal in value, but not duplicates, (d) comparable but ‘on par’, or (e) incomparable. In these cases, a *mechanistic* God would be stymied or would have to choose arbitrarily, while a *creative* God would choose non-arbitrarily, by expressing divine personality or preferences. The paper ends by identifying challenges for accounts on which God’s personality is contingent, or God’s preferences are brute – and tentatively suggests solutions.

Email: kraay@torontomu.ca

11. Brian Ballard: 'Creativity is more meaningful if God exists: an argument for pro-theism'

Many working in the axiology of theism have debated *pro-theism*, the claim that God's existence would make our lives go better. This essay explores the relevance of *human creativity* for this debate. I argue that, given God's existence, acting creatively is a source of greater meaning for our lives than it would be given God's non-existence.

For instance, when we act creatively, we use valuable capacities such as reason and imagination. These capacities are themselves intrinsically valuable. But if God exists and created these capacities, then they are all the more valuable: They would take on a kind of relic status, being things God has made. Using these valuable capacities of ours would thus be like using a paintbrush that belonged to Leonardo Davinci. Just as it would be more meaningful to paint with Davinci's brush, so it would be more meaningful to create with powers made by God.

In addition to this consideration, I present five others: If God exists, then (1) we honor him by creatively using the powers he has given us; (2) we honor him by using creatively the materials that belong to him (wood, paint, etc.); (3) we engage with him by reworking those materials; (4) we can carry out our creative ventures with the hope that God will bring it to something; and (5) in our creativity, we become more Godlike insofar as God has created *ex nihilo*.

We thus have before us a pro-theist argument worthy of exploration, the argument from creativity.

Email: bscottballard@gmail.com

12. Jasmine Frost: ‘Cosmic artwork and the axiology of theism: exploring the prospects for artistic pro-theism’

In some theistic traditions, God is construed not just as the world’s Creator, but as its Artist: on theism, the world is God’s great, cosmic artwork. In such traditions, this construal is also often treated as *axiologically significant for the lives of persons*. Motivated by this intuition, in this paper, I aim to explore the prospects for a new argument for *narrow personal pro-theism* – the view that God’s existence is or would be a *good* thing for the lives of persons in some respect – anchored in God’s role as the world’s Artist. There are different kinds of value that God could contribute to the world that benefit the lives of persons, such as moral value (Penner and Loughheed 2015), epistemic value (Jackson 2025), or derived value (Ballard 2024); to identify the kind(s) of value that God might contribute in his capacity as divine Artist, I take inspiration from what philosophers of art take to be the kinds of value that *human* artwork has for the lives of persons: *aesthetic* value and *cognitive* value. I suggest that we can use this account to formulate *artistic pro-theism* as the view that God gives the world as theists take it to be more aesthetic or cognitive value for persons than the world as naturalists take it to be. I then propose several ways that God could make the world more aesthetically and cognitively valuable for persons than it would be on naturalism, and address possible limitations to their benefits to the lives of persons.

Email: jasmine.frost@torontomu.ca

13. T. Ryan Byerly: 'From creator theology to pantheism'

This paper develops a novel “argument from above” for pantheism (Mander 2023). The argument is based partly on God’s role as asymmetric source of all else as described by “Creator Theology” (Kvanvig 2021). It argues from God’s playing this asymmetric sourcing role to pantheism by drawing upon ideas from the Indian philosopher Śāṅkara, and defending along the way the increasingly popular view among analytic classical theists that God is existence itself (Fuqua & Koons 2023). It directly addresses the BSPR theme question, “How do alternative models of theism conceptualise creation?” The argument runs as follows: (1) God is that which gives existence to everything else but does not derive existence from anything else. (2) Existence is that which gives existence to everything else but does not derive existence from anything else. So, (3) God is existence. (4) The universe is the way existence is. (5) If the universe is the way existence is, then there is a clear and robust sense in which the universe “is” existence. So, (6) There is a clear and robust sense in which the universe “is” God. According to the conclusion, the universe “is” God in much the way that seated Socrates “is” Socrates, *sat*. I respond to objections that creator theology is inadequate, that God does not have a body, that existence is not a feature of things, that the argument requires an implausible metaphysic of “ways”, and that the conclusion of the argument is acosmic or panentheistic rather than pantheistic.

Email: t.r.byerly@sheffield.ac.uk

14. Monika Morkūnaitė: ‘Should divine creation be bound by classical logic? Meeting the quantum challenge’

Some philosophers and theologians have been attracted to the view that divine creation – the act through which God brings the world into existence – should not be viewed as subject to classical logic. One of the key contemporary arguments for this view is that quantum mechanics shows that physical reality does not adhere to classical logic; consequently, it is said that divine creation should not be bound by it either. In this paper, I argue that quantum mechanics *does not* provide sufficient evidence for a model of divine creation unconstrained by classical logic. First, there exist quantum theories (such as Bohmian mechanics) that allow for the retention of classical propositional calculus. Second, even if all conceivable quantum theories required a revision of classical logic, this would not entail that divine creation must also disobey classical logic, because divine creation need not be interpreted as a physical process subject to quantum behaviour. If divine creation is seen as a transcendent source of all reality (including the physical realm), then it can be said that it does not depend on physical principles but rather establishes them, governed by its own meta-logic. I argue that such meta-logic should conform to classical logic insofar as it constitutes the broadest form of rationality. That is, if divine creation is the ultimate foundation of all that exists, then its underlying logic must be maximally comprehensive, and I argue that classical logic best satisfies this requirement.

Email: monika.morkunaite@yahoo.com

15. Robbie Hoque: 'Ibn Taymiyya and divine creation: grounding a substantive Islamic analytic theology'

A substantive approach to Islamic analytic theology aims to deduce novel theological content rather than merely clarify existing ideas. Surprisingly, the thought of the 13th century traditionalist Ibn Taymiyya seems less of a barrier to such inquiry than the rationalist theology of Ash'arism, the predominant school of kalam in Sunni Islam, at least with respect to two subjects, theodicy and the nature of the afterlife. I argue his dynamic conception of God eternally creating for wise purposes provides space for philosophical talk about whether God could have made a better world and how an afterlife might serve divine aims, in a way precluded in Ash'arism because it denies that wise purposes and creativity can be essential and eternal attributes of God. Ibn Taymiyya's opposition to this view arises from his rejection of the kalam cosmological argument and the influence of Aristotelian ontology and linguistic theory on Islamic thought. However, to coherently ground constructive research on theodicy and the afterlife his account of God's inner life needs strengthening with insights from Paul Gould's theistic activism to resolve an apparent tension between the deliberateness of divine rationality and the originality of divine creativity. The resulting framework suggests how Islamic analytic theologians can engage contemporary debates on God, evil and the afterlife in a way that is both substantive and plausibly Taymiyyan.

Email: r.hoque@london.ac.uk

16. Mattia Geretto: 'The creative power of God and human architectural capability according to Leibniz'

The starting point of my contribution is the clear distinction made by Leibniz between what is within the reach of human creative genius and what constitutes God's creative action. In the *Monadology*, Leibniz says that on one hand, every rational soul is like "a little divinity," capable of imitating God Himself (§ 83); on the other hand, however, he argues that there is an insurmountable limit to human constructive art: natural bodies, which for Leibniz represent a marvelous example of God's constructive art. Organic bodies in nature can never be constructed by human genius, because every organic body is infinitely organic, even in each of its constituent parts (§ 64). This aspect, along with other cornerstones of Leibniz's conception of the living being will be considered in order to emphasize the metaphysical assumptions contained in the current "promises" of a potentially unlimited improvement of the human being, promises propagated by the current transhumanist movement. In transhumanist thought, which implicitly or explicitly advocates a strong materialistic reductionism, any distinction between divine constructive art and human creative art disappears, as life and living beings are framed purely as an aggregation of parts, whose manipulation is seen as something that, sooner or later, will be within human reach. This is why, in transhumanism, there is a tendency to establish a fundamental equivalence between man and God. My Leibnizian metaphysical clarifications aim to keep alive the limits of this supposed equivalence, also highlighting the limits of a naive yet no less dangerous technological *hubris*.

Email: geretto@unive.it

17. Sepid (Zahra) Birashk: 'Recreating creation: The role of human creativity in Schelling's speculative theogony'

Friedrich Schelling's *Weltalter* project presents a radical reconfiguration of divinity, breaking with ontotheological tradition by positing God not as a static unity but as a dynamic interplay of opposing forces. His provocative assertion that "man makes God in his own image" signals a reciprocal process: humanity continuously reshapes itself through the image of its God. Yet, for Schelling, the dominant theological tradition has severed itself from the creative depths of existence by suppressing what he calls "the barbaric principle"—an obscured yet vital force essential to divine and human life alike. This suppression leads to the paradox of a "dead God," necessitating the remembrance and reactivation of the primordial, creative element of darkness.

Schelling's *Weltalter* thus rejects a purely paternal vision of God, introducing the maternal principle as the necessary counterpart within divinity itself—the "necessity in God" that precedes spirit. This duality transforms the act of creation from an *ex nihilo* event to an ongoing, participatory process. In this presentation, I will explore how Schelling's conception of divinity not only rethinks the nature of creation but also extends an invitation to human creativity—particularly in philosophy, literature, and the arts—as an active force in the world's becoming. By situating Schelling's theologonical vision within the broader discourse on human and divine creation, I argue that his speculative philosophy offers a profound response to the modern crisis of meaning in expressions of creativity.

Email: zahra.birashk@fu-berlin.de

18. Heather Perfect: 'The role of subjectivity in God's creative process'

Leftow (2012) argues that God must possess knowledge of phenomenal experience—such as what pain feels like—otherwise he created in ignorance (p. 286). More recently, Zagzebski (2023, p.82) proposes that all subjective states pre-exist in divine consciousness, suggesting that God not only understands pain but also understands my pain from my first-person perspective (Zagzebski, 2024).

This paper examines a tension between two claims. First, the notion of *psychophysical harmony* (Cutter & Crummett, forthcoming) suggests that God requires perfect knowledge of subjective experiences to ensure subjective and physical states align in creation (Keller, forthcoming), preventing the conclusion that God created in ignorance. Second, given that subjectivity involves an individual's first-person perspective (Zagzebski, 2023, 2024), it seems only the individual experiencing a state can fully grasp its content—meaning God, unless “identical” to a subject, cannot perfectly grasp subjectivity (Zagzebski, 2024).

I argue these claims are not necessarily in conflict. *Psychophysical harmony* may still be possible even if God lacks direct first-person knowledge of subjective states. My task is to determine what degree of divine knowledge upholds *psychophysical harmony* while avoiding the problematic implication that God created in ignorance. I will show that, whilst God cannot perfectly grasp creaturely subjectivity, this limitation may be beneficial. It offers a coherent explanation for why God's understanding of Christ's subjectivity differs from his knowledge of my subjectivity and may clarify why union with God is meaningful—granting God access to something previously unknown.

Email: heather.perfect@york.ac.uk

19. Mor Segev: 'Maimonides on the Biblical creation account, Aristotle's eternalist cosmology, and cosmic perfection'

In *Guide of the Perplexed* II.17-18, in the context of arguing against Aristotle's view of the world as eternal (*a parte ante et post*), Maimonides appeals to various Jewish sources, including the Hebrew Bible, Midrash, and the Talmud. This paper analyzes Maimonides' discussions of some of these sources in the *Guide* by comparison to relevant parts of Aristotle's corpus and argues as follows. Maimonides uses the creation account in Genesis, as well as verses in Deuteronomy and Psalms overtly describing God as located in or above the heavens, to counter Aristotle's assumptions concerning cosmic perfection and his consequent views on the relation between God and world and the duration of the cosmos. Indeed, Maimonides' use of the Hebrew Bible (and Talmudic debates concerning it) in this context suggests that, in his estimation, assessing and responding to Aristotle's view of cosmic perfection is of paramount importance toward a proper criticism of Aristotle's stance on the eternity of the cosmos (this despite the fact that cosmic perfection is only explicitly invoked once in Maimonides' list of Aristotelian arguments for cosmic eternity in *GP* II.14, and in a formulation of an argument that he ascribes to later Aristotelians at that). Finally, Maimonides also uses the Bible as evidence against Aristotle's claim that there is universal consensus concerning cosmic eternity, and implicitly appeals to Talmudic standards of reasoning to challenge Aristotle's views on the reliability of "reputable opinions" (*endoxa*).

Email: morsegev1@gmail.com

20. Johnson Uchenna: 'Creation in African traditional thought'

A significant majority of traditional African peoples believe that the world and all its inhabitants, including humans, were created by a Supreme Being. This belief is deeply embedded in the spiritual fabric of diverse African cultures, which recognize a divine presence responsible for the universe's existence and everything within it. African cultural traditions abound with myths, proverbs, and symbols that reinforce this creationist perspective, showcasing the rich tapestry of thought that characterizes the continent's philosophical landscape. The narratives surrounding creation not only illuminate the understanding of existence but also reveal ethical implications and the interconnectedness of life. The stories often emphasize balance, harmony, and respect for the natural world, suggesting a holistic approach that somewhat differs from many Western philosophies. This paper aims to explore the concept of creation within African traditional thought and assess whether this conception can contribute to broader philosophical discourse. Ultimately, this exploration seeks to articulate how traditional African views on creation can enrich contemporary philosophical discussions, offering new perspectives on existence, morality, and the relationship between humans and the cosmos. In doing so, we aim to highlight the enduring relevance of African philosophical thought in the global dialogue.

Email: j.ozio@urbaniana.edu

21. Ho-yeung Lee and Pak-lin Leung: ‘Living in an axiarchic world: Lessons from Zhu Xi’

This article explores axiarchism through the philosophical lens of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), the eminent Southern-Song Neo-Confucian Chinese thinker. Axiarchism, often posed as an alternative to theistic and atheistic explanations for cosmic fine-tuning, maintains that the world exists and is the way it is *because* it is good for it to be so (Parfit, 2011; Leslie, 1989; Goff, 2023; Mulgan, 2017). This article argues that axiarchism serves as a useful model for interpreting Zhu’s philosophy. After providing an axiarchic reading of Zhu’s metaphysics, we highlight how Zhu’s thought can provide important insights even for non-Confucian axiarchists on the underexplored question of how one should live in an axiarchic world.

We argue that Zhu’s metaphysics is a form of formal axiarchism. Central to Zhu’s philosophy is the concept of *li* 理 (‘principle’ or ‘pattern’), an inherently ethical, creatively effective principle underpinning the world’s existence and order. *Li* ensures the world is conducive to continuous, harmonious life generation, inherently embedding moral qualities into the fabric of reality. Zhu’s metaphysics faces a version of the problem of evil, and we show that Zhu’s response parallels axiarchic attempts (e.g., Goff, 2023) to reconcile the world’s fundamental goodness with observable imperfections.

Finally, we discuss core ideas in Zhu’s practical philosophy. Zhu emphasizes the investigation of things (*gewu* 格物) as a way to attain moral virtues: We should study the world to discern the content of the axiarchic requirement and consider reorienting one’s life to prioritize activities that embody the values that align with it. This provides concrete, practical, and fresh insights on how individuals can lead meaningful lives in a purposeful, non-theistic world.

Email: ho-yeung.lee@oriel.ox.ac.uk & paklin@link.cuhk.edu.hk

22. David Ellis: 'Wittgenstein and arguments from design'

Among the most popular arguments for God are those from design, which draw from science to argue that the universe is so finely tuned for life that it implies the existence of a designer. Wittgensteinians reply that although such arguments can convince a person that a creator exists, they do not necessarily lead to a religious belief. Wittgensteinians explain that a belief is religious because of what it is like, not what it is about, and what it is like is an aspect of a form of life. Convincing a person that a creator exists is not the same as changing their life religiously. Since arguments from design focus on the former over the latter, they often fail to develop religious beliefs. If this is convincing and such arguments aim to develop religious beliefs, supporters should reconsider the design of arguments from design. That said, Wittgensteinians are vocal in their complaints about the failures of arguments but quiet when asked to specify what a successful argument would look like. In this paper, I motivate the Wittgensteinian case against arguments from design and then outline what a successful argument needs to achieve and how it could be achieved. In doing so, this paper highlights the importance of changing lives alongside minds and encourages reflection on how arguments from design can be designed to do so.

Email: d.ellis@leedstrinity.ac.uk

23. Bartosz Wesół: ‘Teleology and creativity: abduction and C.S. Peirce’s argument for the reality of God’

The close relationship between the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* and human freedom was already pointed out by Augustine: “[*Initium*] *ut esset, creates est homo*” (“That a beginning be made man was created”). The intuition being that any genuine act of freedom is a beginning of something completely new, not determined by anything preceding.

In my talk, I will follow this intuition and argue that what connects God’s and human creativity is the teleological structure of free acts. Moreover, I will try to show how this structure plays a vital role in any novel scientific discovery, following the philosophy of Charles Sanders Peirce.

I will start with a few remarks on Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgement* where he develops the conception of *reflective judgements* which enable one to judge without any given universal rule or concept. Next, I will show how Peirce’s notion of abduction resembles a similar structure to reflective judgements at the same time transcending the scope of Kantian critical philosophy.

For Peirce, abduction is the only mode of reasoning that can produce any genuinely new piece of knowledge exactly because it is not guided by any existing theory. Scientific progress requires a radically new beginning, a specific type of creativity in formulating novel hypotheses. Furthermore, what Peirce tries to show in his *A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God* is that the fact that humans are able to develop new scientific theories gives a positive reason for believing that God is real.

Email: b.wesol@uw.edu.pl

24. Nathan Coundon: “‘It’s all in your head *and it’s true.*” How to create divine attribute concepts according to Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa’

In this paper, I engage with recent work on the fourth century theologians Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa to show that the thesis that human creativity mediates the formation of concepts for God is compatible with the view that those concepts capture the objective truth about God. Thus, I propose that forms of theism categorised as ‘theological nonrealism’ by Crisp (2009) and anti-realism by Chignell (2009) can be contrasted with an ‘objectivist’ approach to the human construction of concepts for God espoused by the Cappadocians Basil and Gregory.

Basil and Gregory argue that our grasp of the divine attributes is derived from the human construction of conceptual portrayals of God called conceptualisations (‘epinoia’). Indeed, for Gregory, Scripture itself is a tapestry of divinely authorized human representations of God. Despite emphasising the human construction of concepts, Basil and Gregory show that theological subjectivism can be avoided because the mind operates in a *receptive mode* when forming concepts for God. Our intellects form predications guided by God which correctly represent God’s activity towards human beings (the proposition ‘God is merciful’ means ‘God relates mercifully to us’) as well as privative predications about God which involve reference to the human epistemic standpoint (the proposition ‘God is invisible’ means ‘we cannot see God as we can physical objects’). If human concept formation is responsive to the reality of God, an emphasis upon the creative activity of the mind in theological epistemology need not be seen to entail subjectivist and anti-realist conclusions.

Email: nathan.coundon@trinity.ox.ac.uk

25. Marco Fiorletta: 'Hölderlin's poetic creativity: writing as struggle and revelation'

Friedrich Hölderlin's poetic practice is deeply intertwined with the philosophical and theological question of creation. His understanding of the philosophy of religion brings together a transcendental reflection on the divine with an inquiry into how human beings conceive of and relate to it. This dual perspective reveals both a human and a divine aspect of creativity, positioning poetry as a crucial site where these dimensions intersect.

In my contribution, I aim to show how Hölderlin's poetry presents the divine as both immanent within the text and emergent through the act of writing. His poetic language is not merely a representation of a transcendence but a space where the divine manifests itself. The difficulty of poetic composition mirrors the challenge of religious experience: just as the divine remains elusive yet potentially revealing, poetry struggles with but also gestures toward revelation.

This perspective is particularly evident in Hölderlin's most important manuscript, the Homburger Folioheft, where language itself oscillates between struggle and revelation. I aim to analyse two key moments: the first is the note on page 4, "wie kann ich sagen?", which reflects a poetic and theological crisis of expression. The second is the fragment on page 40, "Und der Himmel wird...", a passage not written with ink but carved into the paper, highlighting the material dimension of poetic writing. Viewing in backlight allows the divine to emerge within the very act of writing as in-scription.

Email: marco.fiorletta@univie.ac.at

26. King-Ho Leung: 'Elena Ferrante on the spiritual experience of freedom and creativity'

This paper offers a philosophical reading of the contemporary Italian author Elena Ferrante's writings in conversation with Kant's aesthetics in the *Critique of Judgement*. It argues that the two main characters of Ferrante's bestselling *Neapolitan Novels*, Lenù and Lila, respectively represent what Ferrante theorizes as 'compliant' and 'impetuous' modes of writing and artistic creation in her nonfictional work. Whereas Lenù is a writer whose style of writing complies to social norms and pre-established aesthetic expectations, Lila is depicted as a genius whose impetuous writing expresses a creativity and freedom that reflect the rebellious personality of the character of Lila herself. This paper suggests that Ferrante's portrayal of the 'compliant' and 'impetuous' characters of Lenù and Lila bears a strong resemblance to Kant's account of the beautiful and the sublime in the third *Critique*. However, whereas Kant's account pertains chiefly to aesthetic experiences, this paper suggests that Ferrante's typology of 'compliant' and 'impetuous' extends Kant's aesthetic insights into theories of creation and creativity. Identifying this resemblance between Ferrante and Kant can not only help us better appreciate Ferrante's aesthetic theorization of 'compliant' and 'impetuous' creativity, but also recognize how key moments of Ferrante's *Neapolitan Novels* can be understood as portrayals of quasi- if not outright spiritual experiences of radical freedom and creativity, which in turn fosters a new interpretation of Ferrante's popular and influential novels as a 'spiritual but not religious' phenomenological exploration of how experiences of freedom and creative inspiration may relate to theological and philosophical conceptions of the divine.

Email: king-ho.leung@kcl.ac.uk

27. Nathalia Bell: 'Aesthetic theology: a Deleuzian reading of the Book of Job'

Gilles Deleuze's philosophy champions works of art as a generative way to inhabit and think through philosophical problems. Moving away from a metaphysics stuck in rationality, Deleuze, in *Difference and Repetition* (1968), calls for a vitalistic philosophy of play, performance, and intensities, positing theōria as theater, a theatre of philosophy. Taking inspiration from Deleuze's Kierkegardian reading of Job as a hero of authenticity, God's response in the Book of Job to the philosophical paradox of the problem of evil can be read through a Deleuzian lens as an aesthetic theodicy which refuses rational solutions.

Unlike Job's friends, in Job 38-41, God responds to his cries for an answer with an aesthetic display of reality and creation in all its terrifying grandeur, speaking from a whirlwind that unfolds a Deleuzian chaosmos affirming the complexity of existence. In this way, God seemingly refuses to engage in representational logic, such as a theodicy or a traditional justification of himself. Instead, like an exhortation for belief in this world, a Nietzschean amor fati, where life is affirmed and justified as an aesthetic phenomenon, if one applies Deleuzian tools, the problem of evil becomes the problematic of evil, serving as a fulcrum for generative thought. God's speaking out of the whirlwind reflects an aesthetic participation in the problematic by re-presenting reality in and of itself as something unfathomable, in fact beyond representation; reality as an art piece that defies fixed meanings, resting in the tensions and paradoxes of existence rather than flattening it with solutions.

Email: nbell9@lion.lmu.edu

28. Simon Hewitt: 'All numbers great and small: a neo-Fregean approach to the creation of numbers'

There are, it seems, numbers and other mathematical objects. Does God create these? According to Peter van Inwagen, God does not: the numbers are necessary beings not dependent on God for their existence. According to William Lane Craig, God does not: numbers do not exist and apparent reference to them ought to be given a nominalist paraphrase.

This talk provides an alternative. Deploying a neo-Fregean 'minimalist' ontology I argue that there is *no more*, e.g., to the number one existing than there being one thing to number. This being so, God in creating concrete entities thereby also creates the numbers as numbering the concrete entities. (I explain mathematically how creating solely one concrete entity is sufficient for creating a countable infinity of numbers).

An important conclusion follows. In theistic perspective, mathematical ontology is not necessary. It is, however, *nearly* necessary. There is, to deploy the possible worlds framework, only one world in which the numbers do not exist, namely the world where God does not create. If God creates anything, God creates the numbers.

Contrary to this, it might seem that God is available to be numbered in every world. I counter this suggestion by appealing to the doctrine of divine simplicity. It follows from this doctrine that God does not fall under any sortal and so is not numerable. God's oneness, as Aquinas insists, is not the oneness which is 'the principle of number'.

Email: s.hewitt@leeds.ac.uk

29. Ian Davies: 'Creation of new souls: do traducianists need to be panpsychists?'

The two main theories of the origin of the human soul are creationism and traducianism. Creationism holds that God creates a new soul for each person, while traducianism holds that new souls are propagated. Creationism tends to be favoured by theologians—arguably due to the influence of the theory of evolution, which seems to permit solely material propagation. However, recent work in the philosophy of mind has led some philosophers to advocate the view known as *panpsychism*, i.e. the idea that reality is fundamentally conscious, which suggests that propagation may not be just material after all.

In *The Origin of the Soul: A Conversation*, Joanna Leidenhag argues for a view that she calls *panpsychist traducianism*. Panpsychism, she says, is consistent with the views of Tertullian, Gregory of Nyssa and Leibniz amongst others. So, if everything is made of “souls/soul stuff” this can be combined and decombined in such a way as to account for the traducian account of the origin of human souls.

In my paper, I examine Leidenhag’s responses to objections raised against panpsychist traducianism, particularly the combination problem—how is it that conscious micro-subjects can combine to form a conscious macro-subject? Leidenhag makes a good defence of her position, suggesting that micro-subjects are unified by their informational structure. I argue, however, that information is both immaterial and fundamental and it is the structure of information that gives rise directly to the macro-subject. This avoids being committed to the existence of particles with conscious properties, while still supporting traducianism.

Email: rid143@student.bham.ac.uk

30. Katelyn O'Dell: 'On the possibility of personal knowledge of a creator God'

Divine transcendence is commonly taken to put limits on what we might know about God by, for example, constraining the reach of natural theological reasoning. But recent work in epistemology has increasingly taken note of kinds of knowledge besides propositional knowledge, including non-propositional knowledge of persons. This paper takes up the question: what limits, if any, does divine transcendence put on such personal knowledge of God?

One limit on our abilities to know other people, it has been argued, can be found in the fact that people, in addition to being creatures, are also self-creators. In some sense, it is true that we are creating ourselves constantly. But in whatever sense it is true that people create themselves, such self-creation isn't traditionally predicated of an unchanging God. Limits on our abilities to know God personally, I argue, can be found in God's creativity, but not (necessarily) God's self-creation. Instead, attention to divine transcendence brings out a distinct way in which creaturely, personal knowledge of God is limited. Non-propositional knowledge of a person, I suggest, commonly involves some knowledge of what it is like to be that person. But creatures can never fully take the perspective of their own creator; they can't know what it is like to create themselves in the way God creates them. The paper responds to an objection ("But there is a sense in which creatures know what it is like to create themselves!") and concludes that creatures may know their creator personally, but never fully.

Email: kodell2@nd.edu

31. Douglas Hedley: 'Creativity and play: theology and the bowling game in Cusa'

Whereas the Western tradition has marked out reason as mankind's distinguishing attribute, Nicholas of Cusa views creativity as humanity's distinctive characteristic. He claims in *De Ludo Globi* or *The Bowling Game* that creativity most closely reflects the image and likeness of God. game itself: "I thought to invent (invenire) a game of wisdom (ludum sapientiae). No beast has the power of inventing a new game.): Cogitavi invenire ludum sapientiae [. . .] Nulla bestia talem habet cogitationem inveniendi ludum novum. The unpredictable turns of the lawn game described by the Cardinal becomes an image of the ludic and creative nature of the human mind and the spiritual journey of the soul in its return to God. In my paper, I explore the Cusan thesis and its significance for the philosophy of religion.

Email: rdh26@cam.ac.uk

32. Mikel Burley: ‘The playful creativity of the divine: the concept of *līlā* in Vedānta theology’

The concept of *līlā* is of deep significance in Hindu mythology and cosmogonies. It is normally translated into English as ‘play’ – the effortless play of the divine. Its locus classicus as a theological concept is the *Brahma-sūtra* (c. 400 CE), which is one of the foundational texts of Vedānta philosophy and theology. Responding to the problem of how the supreme and self-sufficient Lord could have any motive to create anything at all, the *Brahma-sūtra* states laconically that creation is the Lord’s *līlā*, similar to what we see ‘in the world’. But how are we to make sense of this assertion? Traditional commentators have proposed various analogies, such as that of someone dancing exuberantly but without any specific purpose. Yet these analogies are not obviously compatible with the view, shared among commentators, that the Lord’s creative activity is constrained by the need to apportion enjoyment and suffering in accordance with the law of karma. This paper examines the relevant textual passages and the intriguing arguments in traditional commentaries. It reaches the conclusion that playful creativity can indeed be compatible with the law of karma, provided that this law is itself deemed to be a divine creation. A consequence of this conclusion is that the Vedāntic theology under discussion involves, in effect, accepting a version of one horn of Plato’s famous Euthyphro dilemma – namely, the horn that affirms that what counts as good or pious is precisely what is determined to be so by the divine.

Email: m.m.burley@leeds.ac.uk

33. Victor Andrei Lambert: 'Human Creativity and the Image of God: Thoughts from Greek Patristic Sources'

Christian theology has expressed the relation between humans and God with the phrase 'image and likeness' (Gen. 1.26). It has also affirmed that God is Creator, though not in the same way that humans make things. Is human creativity, then, a reflection and analogue of divine creativeness, to be included in the meaning of 'image and likeness'? I wish to pose this question to the Christian philosophers of Greece, Egypt, and Asia Minor of the 3rd to 6th centuries. Philosophers of religion may find stimulating material in a culture where Platonist and biblical notions of creation came into vigorous dialogue.

Most Christian philosophers of this period would say that humans are made in God's image because of their intellect, virtue, freedom, or dominion over the world. Each of these traits invites further probing as to how far they might include a creative dimension. In this paper my focus will be on the Antiochene theologian Theodoret of Cyrus (d. 458AD), who explicitly affirmed that humans are in God's image insofar as they create artefacts. Theodoret goes so far as to describe the human mind as a 'new and small kind of demiurge'. Such intriguing claims must be placed within the broader Antiochene emphasis on the image of God as worldly dominion—an act which is perhaps inherently creative.

Email: andu.lambert@gmail.com

34. Phillip Quinn: 'How can creation be a gift?'

Historically, many Christian thinkers have claimed that one can rightly give thanks to God for creating one, or giving one existence. Despite that fact, contemporary Anglophone philosophical theology has given comparatively little attention to what such a claim involves. In this paper, I begin to rectify that. In particular, I explore (a) what such a claim presupposes about divine pre-creation intentions towards creatures and (b) the considerable difficulties that arise from such a claim when it is combined with a commitment to the idea that God makes his creatures from nothing. My paper comprises three sections. In the first, I attempt to characterize the thanksgiving or gratitude at issue, claiming that it presupposes an intentional act with the recipient as its object. In the second section, I set out the difficulties involved in maintaining such a view, noting in particular the difficulty in saying that God somehow intends as his beneficiary a creature whose existence is (presumably) logically posterior to his creating it. I also note the stakes: if one cannot say that God intended *you* to have existence, it is hard to say how you could rightly give him thanks for your creation in the relevant sense. Finally, in the third section, I suggest a very tentative solution.

Email: phillip.quinn@theology.ox.ac.uk

35. Ben Page: 'Can God wrong me by ceasing to conserve me?'

Often my students seem to imply that God owes it to us to keep us in existence, or to keep us in existence for a specific length of time, and that if God doesn't do this then He has wronged us in some way. I'm inclined to think that this concern can be overcome by noting that divine conservation is an act of grace and acts of grace can be distributed as one wishes, even unevenly, since they are never owed. For as I tell my students, I owe it to you to mark your work, but there are various things I don't owe you, and so I don't do wrong if I don't do them, and also don't do wrong if I do some things graciously for some students and not others. But my students protest, if God loves us there wouldn't be any uneven distribution for He couldn't show favouritism. Further, God is taken to be Father, but surely I do wrong if I give substantially greater gifts to one of my children and not the others, since Fatherhood may bring with it additional obligations. Isn't God subject to the same duties? Additionally, surely the way God distributes or ceases to distribute the gift of conservation matter. For if humans are inherently valuable, then shouldn't God continue to conserve them, for, to take an illustration from Thomson's famous paper on abortion, God, if anyone, is surely the being who should act like a good Samaritan. Thinking about how to respond to these questions, and others, is what this paper aims to address.

Email: ben.page@pmb.ox.ac.uk

36. Akumjung Pongen: ‘Cooperative creation and the sole-source thesis’

The paper concerns the puzzle of genuine secondary causation and the sole-source thesis which states that God is the sole cause of all that exists. The problem is that if genuine secondary causation exists then it seems to impinge on God’s supreme causal authority. To resolve this, I do two things: I ask the question of what the nature of divine creation is. I discuss John Olson’s (2024) claim that God’s creation is best understood in terms of John Haugeland’s (2007) model of letting-be as *enabling*, in which what is created are conditions of possibility rather than determined outcomes. I then transpose this interpretative framework into the context of human creation: how do we understand human creation in light of God’s letting-be as *enabling*? To investigate this, one example that I look at is the opening lines of the preces of an Anglican service of choral evensong which say, ‘O Lord, open thou our lips; and our mouths shall shew forth thy praise,’ to argue that human creation is grounded in God’s enabling creative powers. I then probe the question of the relationship between human and divine creation, suggesting that the relationship is one of co-creation, much like how congregational/chorale singing is co-creative among singers. I then argue that the argument from music shows that this enabling-view suggests a cooperative picture of causal influence (Quinn 1983; 1988) thereby assuaging the worry about whether there is any genuine secondary causation if God’s creative powers are the preconditions for any human creation.

Email: akumjung.pongen@chch.ox.ac.uk

37. Mina Yi: 'Creation in movements: art-making and world-making'

This paper explores how modern abstract landscape paintings reimagine human-making as an act of participation in the ongoing, dynamic movements of divine creation, viewed through the lens of Tim Ingold's theories. Rather than depicting the world as a completed event, Wassily Kandinsky's early abstract landscapes and Arthur Dove's nature-inspired abstractions demonstrate how artistic practice engages with the world's continuous unfolding, aligning with and responding to the rhythms of the living world.

Through Ingold's concepts of *lining* and *weathering*, this paper considers how these artists' works visualize human-making as an embedded, relational practice. For Ingold, *lining* describes the traces of movement through the world. Lines are not static outlines of objects, but dynamic paths formed by ongoing processes. Accordingly, *weathering* refers to how materials are shaped through interactions with the atmosphere over time. This is not merely erosion, but an active, reciprocal process. Within these concepts, things are ever-becoming—shaped by the world while simultaneously shaping it. Kandinsky's early abstract landscapes trace the vibrations of the world and the atmospheric qualities of color. Resonating with them yet differently, Dove's landscapes capture the force of movements, following the motions of wind, wave, and even sound, allowing their compositions to register motion and change as integral to their making. In both cases, world-making reveals how human-making participates in the world's ceaseless becoming.

By bringing modern abstract landscape paintings into dialogue with anthropological thought, this paper argues that Kandinsky's and Dove's works embody creation as an open-ended, participatory process. Their paintings suggest that human-making is not an act of imposing order but of engaging with the ongoing process of forming and reforming the living world, as a practice of becoming-with divine creation.

Email: myi@ses.gtu.edu

38. Noemi Call: ‘A philosophy of landscape: exploring artistic experimentation and religious imagination’

Drawing on Hans-Dieter Bahr’s philosophy, this presentation explores the intersections of artistic experimentation and religious imagination in a philosophy of landscape conceived as the imaginary space of the “guest”. Bahr’s work, particularly *The Language of the Guest* (1994), presents the “guest” as a moment of openness that can disrupt established orders, thereby opening new possibilities for creation. Within this framework, God – like the “guest” – resists fixed identification and invites encounters to redefine orders. This idea is reflected in the name YHWH: an identity revealed yet hidden – of encounters understood only in hindsight (cf. Ex 33:18-23).

The project presents an artistic experiment exploring landscape as a space of the “guest”. Through video collages of digitally manipulated mountain landscapes, the research examines how artistic gestures transform landscapes into hybrid spaces, revealing their ephemeral and multilayered nature. Inspired by Bahr’s philosophy, the project understands landscape as a continuous interplay of visibility and transience. In these transformations, the imaginative power of religion is mirrored: both religious imagination and a philosophy of landscape can invite us to dwell in spaces that can be known but never entirely determined – similar to what it means to be a guest – creating meaning through the interplay of presence and absence.

Ex-perimentation, ex-ploration, ex-perience: The prefix “ex-” signifies something emerging from and passing through another, suggesting a sense of excess. This artistic experiment, intersecting Bahr’s philosophy and religious motives, does not mark a conclusion but is an invitation to aesthetic experiences evolving through further exploration.

Email: noemi.call@univie.ac.at

39. Gareth Polmeer: 'Image and Likeness: Generation, Imagination and Artistic Creation'

The poet and theologian Philip Sherrard writes that '...by virtue of the fact that man is created in the image of God, he is also a creator, a maker, an artist. Indeed, this is his distinguishing role, that which is capable of making him holy.' In this paper, I will discuss some theological differences between the image and likeness to God, exploring ways in which the latter is developed through human artistic activity, in its desire for upward creative movement.

My considerations on the theological differences between image and likeness will be drawn from the writings of artists, figures such as St. Augustine and selected texts from the *Philokalia*. In the latter, St. Diadochos of Photiki writes of how '...we should realize that grace is beginning to paint the divine likeness over the divine image in us.'

As a practising contemporary artist, working with modern means of production, such as computers, I will also discuss the process of 'becoming like' in relative terms, insofar as the development of divine likeness through artistic creation can be realised through different creative means, and in different forms of revelation. The digital art of the modern world can be a place for spiritual realisation and understanding, as much as traditional artistic forms.

The overall aim of my paper is to demonstrate the essential unity of theological reflection and contemplation with the contemplative nature of artistic creativity, and of how both offer perspectives on human creativity and divine creation through likeness.

Email: gp515@cam.ac.uk

40. James Lorenz: 'Creation, creativity and the grammar of sacramental theology'

In an enigmatic passage of his essay 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence', the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes the work of a painter as something like a sacrament. Designating the painter's art as "a response" to the corporeal data of her existence, Merleau-Ponty lists a range of quotidian phenomena "which might suffocate her work" ("the body, the life, the landscapes, the schools, the mistresses, the creditors, the police, and the revolutions") and then describes these phenomena sacramentally, as "the bread her work consecrates."³

This paper takes its lead from Merleau-Ponty and considers the vocation of human creativity through the grammar of sacramental theology. The first part of this paper follows various other theologians and philosophers (especially Jean-Louis Chrétien) in arguing that human creativity can become a site for participation in the divine act of creation. Then, drawing on the sacramental theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet, who articulates a "fundamental theology of sacramentality,"⁴ and on the sacramental poetics of Richard Kearney,⁵ I suggest that the nature of this participation is fruitfully explored through the sacramental idiom.

By conceptualising human creativity through the grammar of sacramental theology, the spiritual vocation of the artist can be understood as that of tending and attending to the gift of creation, through the gift of human creativity. The artist creates, consecrating the 'bread of the world' through her work, and making a sacrament of the corporeal phenomena she witnesses.

Email: j.lorenz@yorks.ac.uk

³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs* (Evanston: IL, Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 64.

⁴ Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995), p. 548 (see also pp. 159-160).

⁵ Particularly in *Anatheism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2011).

41. Serafim Seppälä: ‘Human and divine creativity in Orthodox theology: conceptual models’

In modern Eastern Orthodox theology, creativity is regarded as one of the divine attributes reflected in human beings (*imago Dei*), with artists often mentioned as exemplary cases of this phenomenon. This is typically discussed within a simplistic *ex nihilo* framework.

Three key issues arise: (1) While Orthodox theology boasts a Greek patristic foundation, the patristic understanding of artistic creativity differs significantly from the post-Renaissance Romantic notion of artists as autonomous creators producing works *ex nihilo*, as if their ideas emerge from nothing in moments of near-magical inspiration. (2) In patristic theology, creation was not necessarily understood in a simplistic *ex nihilo* sense; more nuanced models include *ex Deo* creation—with or without Neoplatonic influence—, along with varying speculations on the relationship between immaterial and material creation. (3) Modern Orthodox theologians, operating within dogmatic frameworks, often overlook the insights of actual artists regarding their creative process. For example, the composer Arvo Pärt, a practising Hesychast, describes his creative method as a process of eliminating the unessential to uncover the essential. Some scholars have therefore characterised his view of creativity as Neoplatonic.

I seek to establish a shared conceptual ground between issues (2) and (3) by outlining three patristic models of creation and estimating how they parallel with artistic creation as understood by creative artists themselves. To what extent do the views of artists such as Wassily Kandinsky and Arvo Pärt parallel the patristic conceptions of divine creativity?

Email: serafim.seppala@uef.fi

42. Davide Zappulli: 'Making Oneself Like the Creator: Creative Agency as a Soteriological Ideal in the Zhuangzi'

This paper offers an original interpretation of the soteriology of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子. According to the proposed reading, creative agency counts as a soteriological ideal in the text by virtue of being interpreted as a state of union with ultimate reality, which is Dao 道. The paper is structured as follows. The first section extracts from the work of John Hick a model of soteriology based on three components: (1) a defective condition; (2) an ideal; (3) an explanation of why the ideal is such based on its relation to ultimate reality. Section two identifies the defective condition in the *Zhuangzi* with a state in which agents are constrained by rigid conceptual schemas, and argues that such a state amounts to a lack of creative capacities. Section three identifies the ideal condition with a state in which one's mind has been emptied from such schemas and is thereby able to respond adaptively to circumstances. Moreover, it argues that the ideal condition amounts to a state of maximal creativity. Finally, section four makes the case that there are two reasons why the ideal state counts as a soteriological ideal: first, that the functioning of ideal agents is isomorphic to the agency of Dao itself and, second, that such isomorphism is interpreted by the text as a full-fledged union with Dao.

Email: zappulli.davide@gmail.com

43. Sasha Lawson Frost: 'Obedience as a creative act: authority and mediation in artistic practice'

The language of obedience and discipline often describes the ways that artists dedicate themselves to their work, by following rules and techniques in order to learn how to perform a craft. Some philosophers also use this language of obedience in art to take on a further spiritual dimension, where great artists are obedient to the ideals of their craft in a way that goes beyond following the existing rules and conventions of that practice. For example, Iris Murdoch describes how “the true artist is obedient to a conception of perfection to which his work is constantly related and re-related in what seems an external manner”.

In this paper, I want to explore the ways that this understanding of obedience in artistic practices is rooted in some ideas in Christian philosophy (particularly drawing on Thomas Aquinas and Herbert McCabe). In this context, obedience is often framed as a virtue that fosters one's spiritual development through mediation with God: by following the rules of a superior, I am able to put aside my own will and desires and look to God as my true guide and leader. I suggest that this model of obedience can illuminate the way we might understand obedience in artistic contexts: just as obedience in the Christian tradition mediates our relationship with a divine will, obedience in art can facilitate a deeper understanding of reality and the art form itself.

On this reading, I argue, artistic obedience is not a suppression of creative freedom, but something liberatory.

Email: slawsonfrost@outlook.com

44. Sayyid Maisam Haider Ali Rizvi: 'Between *technē* and *theia mania*: acts of *mimēsis* and the place of poetic creativity in Al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā's prophetic psychology'

When it comes to poetic creativity, one encounters two divergent positions: one views poetry as a craft (*technē*) requiring rigorous training and practice, thereby situating it firmly within the bounds of “human” endeavor, whereas the other deems it as an act of divine inspiration (*theia mania*), rendering it as a phenomenon of “supernatural,” “meta-humanly” origin. Yet, in the Arab-Islamic philosophical poetics, there emerges a possibility to mediate these two disparate positions. For this purpose, I particularly focus on al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā's Prophetic soul (nafs/ψυχή), with an emphasis on what they recognize to be its distinctive act, i.e., *muḥākāt*—an Arabic modulation of Greek *mimēsis*. I tease out how *muḥākāt* as a poetic praxis bears the potential to bridge the divide between *ṣinā'a* (craft) and *'ilhām* (inspiration). Meditating on how al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā construe the most perfected level of the faculty of Imagination (*al-quwwa al-mutakhayyila*) as being prophetic, this paper underlines how the philosophers understood the faculty of imagination as innately gradational, encompassing various degrees of perfection. Consequently, its distinctive act, i.e., *muḥākāt*, was understood as inherently gradational as well. I argue that such an understanding allows us to see *craft* and *inspiration* not as opposites but rather as varied level of poetic creativity that are not at all mutually exclusive. This paper illustrates how, for al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, the best of the poetic creativity essentially emerges from the harmonious interplay between the two, that is, craft and inspiration.

Email: mali044@ucr.edu

45. Errol Boon: 'One Last Miracle: Creativity, Indeterminacy and Artificial Intelligence'

The rise of generative artificial intelligence has brought renewed urgency to the old question of the ontology of creativity. In contemporary analytic philosophy—through figures such as Boden, Carvalho, Buckner, Livingston, and Gaut—there is a growing inclination to attribute forms of creativity to generative AI. As a result, creativity is increasingly assumed to be a calculable, formalizable process of rule-following. Although these rules may be in fact unconscious or untraceable, they do exist in principle.

Consequently, proponents of the idea of artificial creativity often reject classical accounts that ground creativity in an inexplicable or ontologically indeterminate element—such as theories of divine inspiration, unaccountable ingenuity, or spontaneous natality. For thinkers like Boden, such notions only "mystify" creativity instead of trying to understand it. Yet rarely is the epistemic function of this indeterminacy seriously examined.

This paper explores three classical accounts of creativity—Plato's concept of divine inspiration, Kant's theory of genius, and Hannah Arendt's notion of natality—to examine why each considers ontological indeterminacy indispensable for understanding the creative act. I argue that these thinkers do not deny the presence of rules in creative processes; rather, they insist that creativity requires an *unruled relation* to rules. Ultimately, I contend that this classical perspective challenges us to either accept the reality of ontological indeterminacy or to forgo a meaningful concept of creativity altogether.

Email: errol.boon@fu-berlin.de