

## Evolution, original sin and the Fall

June 22-24 2020, Saint Louis University, Saint Louis, MO

Organizers: Johan De Smedt, Helen De Cruz (Saint Louis University)

Scientific committee: Johan De Smedt, Helen De Cruz (Saint Louis University), Adam Green (Azusa Pacific University)

This conference will be held online. To register, please email [deeptimemorality@gmail.com](mailto:deeptimemorality@gmail.com) by June 20.

June 22 (All times are CT (Central Time Zone))

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9:50 – 10:00	<b>Johan De Smedt and Helen De Cruz</b> (Saint Louis University) Introduction, with review of the logistics of the conference (e.g., how participants can ask questions)
10:00 – 10:25	<b>David Brown</b> (Queen's University Belfast) Evolution as ontology and original sin: Is there a need for salvation?
10:25 – 10:30	Short break
10:30 – 10:40	Q and A
10:40 – 10:50	Break
10:50 – 11:15	<b>Paul Macdonald</b> (United States Air Force Academy) In defense of Aquinas's Adam: Original justice, the Fall, and evolution
11:15 – 11:20	Short break
11:20 – 11:30	Q and A
11:30 – 12:30	Lunch break
12:30 – 13:10	<b>Plenary talk: Hans Madueme</b> (Covenant College) Sin and Evolution: A theological assessment
13:10 – 13:15	Short break
13:15 – 13:30	Q and A
13:30 – 13:40	Break
13:40 – 14:05	<b>Walter Scott Stepanenko</b> (John Carroll University) Evolution, the Fall, and Christian environmentalism
14:05 – 14:10	Short break
14:10 – 14:20	Q and A

14:20 – 14:30 Break  
14:30 – 14:55 **Janelle Aijian** (Biola University)  
Believing in an interventionist God  
14:55 – 15:00 Short break  
15:00 – 15:10 Q and A

End of day 1

June 23 (All times are CT (Central Time Zone))

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10:00 – 10:25 **Daniel Spencer** (University of Saint Andrews)  
A nonlapsarian Christianity? Philosophical, theological, and exegetical foundations  
10:25 – 10:30 Short break  
10:30 – 10:40 Q and A  
10:40 – 10:50 Break  
10:50 – 11:15 **Julie Loveland Swanstrom** (Augustana University)  
Aquinas on sin, essence, and change: Reflections on essence and evolution in Aquinas  
11:15 – 11:20 Short break  
11:20 – 11:30 Q and A  
11:30 – 12:30 Lunch break  
12:30 – 13:10 **Plenary talk: John Teehan** (Hofstra University)  
Evolution, original sin, and the Fall: A meta-critique  
13:10 – 13:15 Short break  
13:15 – 13:30 Q and A  
13:30 – 13:40 Break  
13:40 – 14:05 **Adam Blehm** (University of Arkansas)  
Does divine perception justify? It depends on the system  
14:05 – 14:10 Short break  
14:10 – 14:20 Q and A  
14:20 – 14:30 Break  
14:30 – 14:55 **Gregory Goodrich** (Maricopa Community Colleges)  
Anticipating Darwin: Presupposition, inference and consequence

14:55 – 15:00 Short break  
15:00 – 15:10 Q and A

End of day 2

June 24 (All times are CT (Central Time Zone))

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10:00 – 10:25 **Cheyne Joslin** (University of South Florida)  
Not the healthy, but the sick: Original sin as contagious egoism

10:25 – 10:30 Short break  
10:30 – 10:40 Q and A

10:40 – 10:50 Break

10:50 – 11:15 **Austin M. Freeman** (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School)  
The story of evolution & the shape of biblical narrative: Consonance or conflict?

11:15 – 11:20 Short break  
11:20 – 11:30 Q and A

11:30 – 12:30 Lunch break

12:30 – 13:10 **Plenary talk: Bethany Sollereider** (University of Oxford)  
The unique desires of love and original sin

13:10 – 13:15 Short break  
13:15 – 13:30 Q and A

13:30 – 13:40 Break

13:40 – 14:05 **Jack Mulder** (Hope College)  
Whiteness and religious experience

14:05 – 14:10 Short break  
14:10 – 14:20 Q and A

14:20 – 14:30 Break

14:30 – 14:55 **Viktor Toth** (Fuller Theological Seminary)  
Evolution and theism

14:55 – 15:00 Short break  
15:00 – 15:10 Q and A

15:10 – 15:20 Closing remarks

End of conference

## **Abstracts (names in alphabetical order)**

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**Janelle Aijian, Biola University**

### **Believing in an interventionist God**

At the heart of the debate over Intelligent Design is the question of whether it is ever justified rationally or scientifically to conclude that a miracle has occurred. If we begin with the supposition that miracles do not constitute a possible explanation for natural events, no amount of abductive reasoning can ever produce the conclusion that a miracle has occurred. Some in-principle reasons for concluding that miracles are impossible include naturalistic accounts of the universe that construe it as a closed causal system, and theistic accounts that regard divine intervention as unworthy of a good creator. However, there are reasons to worry about these in-principle arguments against divine intervention. This article will argue that the “completeness principle” argument against miracles is problematic for intuitive accounts of mental causation, and that there are good responses available to the theistic concern that intervention implies a bad designer.

However, there is more to the story of materialism than the acceptance of miracles.

Fundamental to this story is also the question of whether our experience of the natural world entails (even forces) belief in God on pain of rational inconsistency. It is a common modern assumption, as exhibited in Descartes and Paley, that in the midst of cultural religious drift, belief in God’s existence can be shored up through rational argument (either ontological or cosmological). Figures like Hume and Darwin stand opposed to the claims that believing in God is rationally necessary, showing that the arguments marshalled to justify belief in God are not inescapable. Pascal paints a different picture, in which our access to the evidence for God’s existence, particularly in the case of cosmological arguments, is subject to divine grace. It takes faith to believe in a miracle, not because miracles are non-evidential, but because seeing rightly this side of the fall is only possible with divine aid. This means that ID arguments can be (and frequently are) means of grace which remove a rational obstacle to belief, but will not serve as irrefutable evidence apart from grace. Hume was correct, believing in miracles does require a miracle – namely, the miracle of divine grace.

**Adam Blehm, University of Arkansas**

### **Does divine perception justify? It depends on the system**

It seems that most epistemologists, outside of the global skeptic, admit that perceptual beliefs are justified beliefs. But what about perceptual beliefs about God? If we can perceive God, can this perception justify beliefs about God? In this paper, I aim to construct an account of divine perception in which beliefs formed through by a reliable divine perceptual system are justified. I begin by analyzing a view of the justification of perceptual beliefs where beliefs are justified insofar as they are produced by a reliable perceptual system. “A perceptual system is, in the first instance, a module that starts with the transduction of energy by some sense organ and produces beliefs or other relatively high-level representations as outputs.” [1] As such, a

perceptual system must account for three things: identifying an isolable cognitive mechanism for divine perception, a sense organ which receives sensory input, and a system which is not under direct voluntary control of the person. I argue that contemporary theories in Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) give us reason to think these components exist for divine perception. I then argue that perceptual beliefs in general, and divine perceptual beliefs specifically, are justified. After establishing that these beliefs should be justified, I will consider possible content of divine perceptual beliefs. Then I consider some potential objections. First, I consider the danger of cognitive penetration. Second, I examine the diversity of religious beliefs. I argue that both cases do not successfully undermine my theory and plausibly, these two worries may even support the theory in important contexts. Last, I end by considering implications of this model for evolutionary history and the Fall. In particular, I follow Lyons and argue that it is possible for perceptual systems to be learned and therefore it may be possible for perceptual systems to be unlearned. This may help to explain many of the noetic effects of the Fall given various theological paradigms. Furthermore, this account opens the door to evaluate how biological and social evolutionary history may have affected justification for our perceptual beliefs about God. Thus, my account may have import for insights from evolution into divine hiddenness discussions.

[1] Lyons, J. (2009). *Perception and basic beliefs. Zombies, modules, and the problem of the external world*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 92.

**David Brown, Queen's University Belfast**

### **Evolution as ontology and original sin: Is there a need for salvation?**

The question of how theologians deal with the challenges and opportunities of evolution is undoubtedly one of the biggest concerns facing theology in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It is not too simplistic to say that, while there are those who reject evolution in its entirety as being incompatible with the Genesis narrative, most theologians who accept evolution see it as a more scientifically sophisticated replacement for the Genesis narrative. God does not create in 6 days, but uses the processes of evolution to create.

However, this is not how biologists understand evolution to function. Biologists – at least the neo-Darwinians – reject the idea that evolution is a temporary process through which the universe goes in order to reach a particular end or goal. Rather, they see evolution as a permanent condition of the way that creatures are. Evolution, then, is not a scientific theory of creation, but a scientific ontology, and the point of connection between theology and evolution is ontology, not creation.

My paper will argue that many theologians miss this understanding of evolution and that by seeing evolution as ontology, there can be significant comparisons made between evolution and the Christian ontology of participation in and imitation of Christ. To be created is to participate in God and evolution becomes the necessary logical consequence of this participation. Both use the language of imperfect replication to understand what it means to be. Evolution is not the way that God creates, but is the logical consequence of creatures' participation in God.

This has significant implications for how original sin is to be situated in an evolutionary paradigm. Certainly the fall as an historical event must be questioned, but this does not mean that the idea of original sin must also be discarded. Many theologians already recognize this.

Teilhard de Chardin, for example, sees original sin as the necessary price for the progress of evolution and Christ as the payment. Others, such as Jürgen Moltmann, see creation as needing to be saved from the whole paradigm of evolution itself.

However, both of these approaches assume a time when evolution will not be characteristic of creation and so neither takes seriously the permanency of evolution. Instead, my paper will argue that understanding evolution as a permanent ontology rather than a temporary process sees original sin as simply the necessary consequence of participating in God seen at a 'theological' level and as being part of the same paradigm as evolution, which is understood as participation in God seen as a 'biological' level. Original sin describes the necessary openness to failure that characterizes both what it means to be a creature that imitates Christ and what it means for a gene to replicate.

Original sin, then, becomes something that defines what it means to be a creature, and is not something from which creatures need salvation. This leads to a reinterpretation of Christological categories. Following Duns Scotus and many Patristic theologians, the Christ event is understood as being creative, rather than redemptive, and is the way through which creatures come to participate in Christ.

### **Austin Freeman, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School**

#### **The story of evolution & the shape of biblical narrative: Consonance or conflict?**

Proponents of traditional biblical interpretation and confessionally orthodox theology can often appeal to the shape of the biblical narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration to explain how an old earth and millennia of evolutionary developments are fundamentally in conflict with the biblical picture. The tropes are well-trodden: death is the last enemy, not a natural feature of God's world; the plain interpretation of Genesis excludes evolutionary time scales; human evolution denies human uniqueness in the Image of God. This paper seeks to argue that in fact the evolutionary narrative, properly understood, is to a large degree consonant with the biblical one.

First, I distinguish between Darwinism, as a philosophical interpretation of the data, and evolution as a purely descriptive story. Darwinism denies any telos to creaturely developments, while the biblical picture affirms a deep purpose. I also define the relationship between theistic evolution and Intelligent Design, as this will be important for what follows. Theistic evolution is the belief that God guides the evolutionary process and may even intervene to provide beneficial mutations to organisms, in accordance with His purposes. Intelligent Design is the belief that the appearance of design supplied by evolution can in fact best be explained by reference to a designer rather than to the process of natural selection. Many, but not all, Intelligent Design proponents deny theistic evolution and especially common descent.

In the second part of the paper, I argue that evolution has a plot. This plot is not a post-structuralist imposition onto reality, but an element of reality itself. Engaging with the idea of the "epic of evolution," I assert that, per Vanhoozer, Tolkien, and others, God may be viewed as the Author of reality. God interacts with the world not in a zero-sum game, as a subject among other subjects, but on a higher non-competitive level. As such, the story of the world unfolds in a causally closed system, as a good story does, and yet certain events may act as points of disclosure which reveal the shape of plot more than others. A "chance" event, an unlikely outcome, may lead to highly significant developments which open up the world to new

possibilities and manifestations of meaning. By attending to the way in which reality displays higher-level meaning, we gain insight into the plot of the world's story. The book of nature may be read and analyzed with tools similar to that of literary criticism.

In the paper's third section, I note that the narrative arc and plot structure of the story of evolution is quite similar to that of the Bible. God does not operate in straight lines. There are many stops and false starts in the history of redemption. There is much more waste and death than we would deem strictly necessary. It takes much, much longer than expected for the child of promise to arrive after Adam and Eve fall. The most successful plans from an earthly perspective often founder, and the weak are exalted. As such, the pattern of God's dealing in guiding the evolutionary process demonstrates a character exactly the same to that which is revealed in the biblical narrative.

**Gregory Goodrich, Maricopa Community Colleges**

### **Anticipating Darwin: Presupposition, inference and consequence**

The theory of biological evolution continues to be the most accepted explanation of current phenotypes in the world, and its influence is through but not limited to the western academic disciplines of philosophy, science, and theology. The previous theories of special creation and idealism were usurped by metaphysical naturalism due to the epistemic emphasis upon the assumption that all is natural and explained in virtue of forces remaining constant in kind and magnitude throughout natural history. This naturalism has offered the sciences special privilege in both the epistemic and metaphysical aspects of knowledge claims. Not limited to this, the common western student is well aware this theory is also intended to explain one's own existence and the total historical accumulation of human suffering.

Biological evolution has often been used as an argument against the existence of God, although Darwin did not originally intend this. As the meta-narrative by which all other narratives and sub-narratives are evaluated, evolution is employed to explain religious belief, not the least of which would include the Judeo-Christian doctrine of original sin. Many have questioned whether the neo-Darwinian meta-narrative can accommodate theistic belief qua theistic evolution. Darwin's work did not itself entail anything about human origins, only human races. In light of this, consider the contrasting notion: if the neo-Darwinian narrative turns out to be only possible (or false) and so not meaningful, is it possible that one holding to Judaic or Christian theism prior to Darwin could anticipate the Darwinian framework as a consequent belief occurring in history due to the doctrine of original sin?

This paper will be an argument affirming this anticipation is plausible. The narrative of original sin shows that the force of the temptation was due to an emphasis on the empirical aspects of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Appearance aside, the first parents could have known a created being cannot become its own creation. They could not become like God determining good and evil for themselves as humans, by eating of the forbidden tree. Their manifest autonomy showed that they had placed emphasis on the visible. If this can be shown to be a reasonable interpretation of the text, what theory of origins is most suitable in accommodating this intuition? This question presupposes that the Darwinian narrative relies on empiricism to argue for what is possible. As a theory it does not gain its power rationally, through necessary inference. It does not dismiss antithetical notions by showing their logical impossibility. By contrast, this rational inference from what is seen to what is unseen is what

was expected of the first parents (Rom 11:3). It is also what is expected of all those of faith. As such, one who holds to the theistic special creation account, and affirms the human propensity to stop with presumptions based on appearance, would expect that neo-Darwinian beliefs would eventually arise in history as a consequence of original sin.

**Cheyne Joslin, University of South Florida**

**Not the healthy, but the sick: Original sin as contagious egoism**

Over the past half-century, Christian philosophers have made a significant impact on the field by marshalling scientific research in support of the claims of natural theology. In contrast, relatively little work of this kind has been done to bolster our understanding and defence of other specifically Christian doctrines. Perhaps this is understandable, given that many essentially Christian claims such as the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity seem entirely outside the scope of empirical inquiry. Yet, this may not be the case for other important Christian ideas like original sin.

The Christian doctrine of original sin includes several descriptive claims about our basic moral dispositions and behaviors; namely, that human beings are born in a morally defective condition; and that we will, despite our best efforts, inevitably and continually lapse into immoral behaviour as a result. If we think of sin as analogous to a contagion, the Christian tradition holds that while we know the cause of its initial spread: the sin of Adam (patient zero), and we know the battery of symptoms (death, suffering, etc.), it is unclear what the precise target of the contagion is. As one disease may affect the respiratory system, another may affect the nervous system, for example.

Following this analogy: what aspect of the human person is most readily affected by the contagion of sin? The present paper is focused on responding to this question, by arguing that while sin affects both our understanding and will as others in the tradition have stressed, it also crucially affects the initial motivations that drive us to act (and the scope thereof), such that those motivations are ultimately self-centered. To clarify: by scope, I mean the range of immediate motivating attitudes available to humanity in its postlapsarian state. In this way, the contagion of sin afflicts us with some form of psychological egoism. Herein lies the structure of the paper: First, I'll explain the theory of psychological egoism in greater detail, showing how the doctrine of original sin implies some version of this theory of basic human motivation. Secondly, I'll draw upon ancient Christian sources such as St. Augustine, St. Basil of Caesarea, the New Testament authors, and others in order to support such a characterization of the doctrine. Following this, I'll consider recent studies within experimental, evolutionary, and developmental psychology on egoistic and altruistic motivations, to claim that we need not alter our conception of our basic motivations in light of these fields of research. This account of original sin and moral motivation will contribute to the growing project among Christian philosophers of the further development of a distinctly Christian psychology, helping us to better proclaim Christ as the Great Physician, and the Holy Spirit as our Counselor and Advocate.

**Paul Macdonald, United States Air Force Academy**

**In defense of Aquinas's Adam: Original justice, the Fall, and evolution**

Thomas Aquinas holds (as Roman Catholic teaching still holds) that the first human beings



were created in a state or condition of “original justice.” Endowed by God with the gift or grace of original justice—which God conferred on human nature itself—Adam (his reason in particular) was wholly subject to God. Accordingly, Adam was fully virtuous. Moreover, since his body was wholly subject to and perfected by his immaterial and incorruptible human soul, Adam remained immune to bodily corruption and natural death. It is only when Adam sinned that he, along with human nature itself, was deprived of original justice. As a result, all human beings, having received their nature from Adam, are created and born in a state of original sin—so construed as a privation of original justice—and remain susceptible to moral, spiritual, and physical failure (most notably, death) as a result. [1]

Operating from the overarching methodological standpoint that “truth cannot contradict truth,” I show in this paper how we intelligibly can locate “Aquinas’s Adam” (and Eve) within evolutionary history. First, I argue against theologians like John Schneider that Adam, given his sociobiological heredity, must have been a “morally equivocal sort of person.” [2] Even granting that he possessed this mixed sociobiological heredity, Aquinas’s Adam, by virtue of possessing original justice, would have remained immune to any internal disorder or disturbance that would have rendered living the moral and spiritual life difficult. On Aquinas’s view, Adam in effect returned to a purely natural, internally disordered and so morally and spiritually impoverished state—the same state that all of us, as Adam’s progeny, are born into—as a result of the Fall.

Next, I dispute the claim (advanced by Schneider and others like John Hick, working out of the Irenaean tradition) that Adam only could have fallen if he existed in a state of “original fragility,” or moral and spiritual immaturity. Aquinas’s Adam did not enjoy the beatific vision, which would have prevented him from sinning. Furthermore, Aquinas’s Adam was able, even in his lofty moral and spiritual state, of considering his own goodness apart from God’s, and also freely departing from God’s goodness out of inordinate (proudful) love for his own—which he did, thereby falling (and falling hard).

Finally, I defend Aquinas’s claim that Adam, before the Fall, was not internally susceptible to suffering or death. Affirming this claim does not entail denying that Adam’s evolutionary ancestors in the genus homo, and other hominins amongst whom he lived, were subject to suffering and death. Nor does it require placing Aquinas’s Adam in an Edenic paradise walled off from real dangers, such as natural disasters, that he would have been capable of enduring, exercising (for example) great intellectual ingenuity and physical fortitude.

In the end, then, I conclude the following. What Aquinas, arguing from the standpoint of Christian faith, says about Adam and his Fall may not receive any direct support from modern evolutionary science. But the key details of his account are fully compatible with it.

[1] Or, almost all: Aquinas thinks that Christ and Mary suffered from certain, bodily effects of the Fall (like susceptibility to death) without being fallen, or sinful.

[2] John Schneider, “The Fall of ‘Augustinian Adam’: Original fragility and supralapsarian purpose,” *Zygon* (2012): 949-69, at 953.

**Hans Madueme, Covenant College**

### **Sin and evolution: A theological assessment**

This paper explores hamartiological questions at the intersection of evolutionary biology and theology. Such questions include the problem of evil, the significance of a historical fall within

Christian theology, and the meaning of human sinfulness in light of tensions between modern biology and original sin. I will critically examine some of the leading accounts in the academic literature: Christopher Southgate's compound theodicy, Joshua Moritz's free creatures defense, Gijbert van den Brink's recontextualization of original sin, and Mark McLeod-Harrison's evolutionary hamartiology. Although recent proposals for an evolutionary doctrine of sin have prompted stimulating areas of research, I conclude that the Christian doctrine of sin nevertheless remains resilient despite these revisionist strategies.

**Jack Mulder, Hope College**

### **Whiteness and religious experience**

In this paper I argue that racism's subtle and insidious [1] reach should lead us to prefer an account of religious experience that is capable of reckoning with that reach, an account that, I shall argue, appears in the work of St. John of the Cross. Twenty years ago, Lewis R. Gordon could ask whether, owing to existential realities of masculinity and whiteness, the white man could worship. [2] Gordon's method, however, is somewhat different than my own. While Gordon's existential questions are well taken, I propose to deal with a related question somewhat more theologically. My question is more like the following: given that mystical experience occurs within white people, what might we expect of an account of mystic union that squares with the fact that the same white people have plausibly have not eradicated their own racist biases at the time of their experiences? [3]

In the paper that follows I first discuss how racism can plunge deeply into one's psyche in ways that could have spiritual repercussions (using Frederick Douglass and Frantz Fanon). Second, I will examine how whiteness functions in regard to the reach of racism and its deleterious effects, discussing how racism and whiteness relate to Sartrean bad faith and Charles Mills's understanding of epistemologies of ignorance. Finally, I will discuss what union with God might mean, and why St. John of the Cross's categories of union of will, intellect, and memory form a useful triad for thinking about how one's union with God could be real but nevertheless incomplete in ways that, I think, show the right sort of responsiveness to implicit racist biases that at least some of those on the mystical path plausibly retain.

To illustrate this a bit more, each part of what John calls the spirit (intellect, memory, and will) can insert itself into the process so as to make trouble or move one further along the mystic's path, and this works well with John's insistence (although in a slightly different context) that "one part is never adequately purged without the other." [4] In racist patterns of bad faith, one can lie to oneself in thinking one has moved beyond the question of race (or that society has), and this can blind one to the evils to which a spiritually advanced person should be wide awake. Moreover, even when one's blindness is receding, as James Baldwin notes, "people find it very difficult to act on what they know." [5] The intellect can have many foibles, since in both an epistemology of ignorance and the mystical path, part of the problem is we don't distrust ourselves enough. Where it concerns memory, there may be a spiritually-driven need to turn away from forms of media that portray people of color in one-dimensional or inept ways as minstrelsy might, or forms of media that simply fail to portray them at all. [6] Moreover, if it's true that what the eye can't see, the heart doesn't want, as we've seen John of the Cross says, purging a heart formed in racism of images and impressions that don't do people of color justice, and, in some cases, replacing them with ones that do, may equip the heart to turn away

from the desire for the temporal rewards racism afforded a person in the past. Ultimately, the goal of this paper is to show that there is an account of religious experience that is sufficiently subtle to work with the reality of racism, and that there must be such an account, because one must work against racism within oneself (even if only implicit) as part of the spiritual journey.

[1] George Yancy writes, commenting on his earlier work, “etymologically, the word ‘insidious’ (*insidiae*) means to ambush.... This is partly what it means to say that whiteness is insidious, that it is not ‘fixable’ through micromanagement, though vigilance is indispensable. The moment that a white person claims to have ‘arrived,’ to be self-sufficient or self-grounded in their anti-racism, she often undergoes a surprise attack, a form of attack that points to how whiteness insidiously returns, how it ensnares, and how it is an iterative process that indicates the reality of white racists relational processes that exceed the white self” (see Yancy’s introduction to Yancy, ed., *White self-criticality beyond anti-racism* (Lanham: Lexington, 2015), p. xiii).

[2] In Gordon’s chapter six of *Existentialia Africana* (New York: Routledge, 2000), tellingly titled “Can Men Worship,” he notes that the white man’s existential situation “is that he cannot be saved as a white man” (p. 132) because he envisions salvation as the entering of God into a person and the white man, as white man, is seen as closed. He writes “Yet a man qua his masculinity appears unequivocal. He is solid. He fills things. Nothing enters him. He is closed” (p. 124). He also brings in Fanon’s discussion of blackness as absence and whiteness as presence to suggest that the white man is particularly imperiled in the religious sphere. While there are certainly ways in which masculinity can mirror the discussion in this paper, I will focus on the issues of race and whiteness in this paper.

[3] I am suggesting that white people are particularly problematic in this way, but I am not suggesting that white people are the only ones with racist biases, implicit or otherwise.

[4] *The dark night*, 2.3.1, p. 333.

[5] Baldwin, *The fire next time*, p. 9.

[6] See Taylor, *Race: A philosophical introduction*, p. 152.

### **Bethany Sollereeder, University of Oxford**

#### **The unique desires of love and original sin**

In this paper I will present a suggestion that offers a theological perspective on original sin that defends human uniqueness and the structural reality of original sin in light of human evolutionary development. I propose that the evolutionary desires that we inherit are neither excess baggage that needs to be shed for us to enter into proper humanness, nor are the evolutionary desires twisted by humanity so that the goal is to recover a more primitive form. Instead, I suggest that evolutionary desires are the raw ingredients of love and that they need to be transformed in the soul by participation between God and people. When that cooperation goes wrong, by human rejection of God’s transformative work, sin is the result.

### **Daniel Spencer, University of Saint Andrews**

#### **A Nonlapsarian Christianity? Philosophical, theological, and exegetical foundations**

Recent decades have given rise to a number of constructive theological proposals which seek either to ‘reinterpret’ the doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin in dialogue with evolutionary biology, or else deny their validity outright. Unsurprisingly, an equally forceful reaction from

more conservative scholars has produced an array of considered—and oftentimes ingenious—defenses of these doctrines along more traditional lines. Implicit in such defenses, I would suggest, is the worry that to abandon the Fall and Original Sin is necessarily to compromise at least *some* essential component of the Christian faith. Indeed, such a worry is eminently justifiable, as, more often than not, scant attention is paid to the preservation of orthodoxy in these reconsiderations of Original Sin. In this paper, then, I discuss the philosophical, theological, and exegetical considerations which must be addressed *before* the Fall and Original Sin can be reinterpreted or abandoned by the Christian theologian. In other words, what are the prerequisites necessary for a ‘nonlapsarian’ project to get off the ground?

I begin with the assumption that the realities which the Fall and Original Sin are intended to explain can be fully accounted for in sociobiological terms. Enslavement to sin, death, alienation from God—all of these can, I think, be secured without recourse to Original Sin. Supposing this to be the case, however, why might a Christian be reluctant to accept this theoretical possibility as a reality? Four concerns come especially to mind.

First is the problem of ecumenical consensus. While some have been keen to keep Original Sin and Eastern Orthodoxy at arm’s length, it is clear that even the Orthodox understanding of ‘ancestral sin’ belongs firmly within the general family of Original Sin, and so we can say, with N. P. Williams, that Original Sin certainly forms a part of the Vincentian Canon. I briefly discuss this concern, arguing that it is reasonable to sidestep this constraint if no other components of the Christian faith are compromised.

Secondly, there is the objection from Scripture. Surely, the thought runs, Original Sin is taught in Gen. 2–3, Rom. 5, or 1 Cor. 15? Here I indicate some potential strategies for overcoming this exegetical constraint, a task made somewhat more difficult by the fact that St. Paul’s mind *does* seem to be much closer to Original Sin than is popularly supposed. All the same, I argue, the objection from Scripture is not insurmountable: Original Sin is, at best, *incidental* to the primary thrust of biblical teaching, and so need not be a dogmatic obstacle to a nonlapsarian project.

Third is what I find to be the most common concern, namely, the theodicy worry: does rejecting Original Sin make the Problem of Evil more problematic? Is God not now responsible for sin? I outline a response to this objection to the effect that Original Sin is, plausibly, no less problematic than an evolutionary account of sin’s origin.

Finally, I conclude with soteriology. One might well object that a nonlapsarian Christian faith will necessarily require some tinkering vis-a-vis our understanding of atonement and salvation. I shall argue that this is not necessarily the case: while abandoning Original Sin might cast doubt on some traditional models, an orthodox soteriology is emphatically available for a nonlapsarian theology. Thus do I reach my ultimate conclusion: a nonlapsarian theology is indeed an option for the orthodox Christian, but *only* once the necessary philosophical, theological, and exegetical foundations have been laid.

**Walter Scott Stepanenko, John Carroll University**  
**Evolution, the Fall, and Christian environmentalism**

Much of the philosophical work on evolutionary theory and its compatibility with the biblical account of the Fall has focused on work in cognitive science of religion (CSR) and its implications for the reliability of human cognition. For example, Peels, van Eyghen, and van den

Brink (2018) argue that orthodox theists can advocate for the view that human animals emerged in evolutionary history in a morally perfect state, and that due to their own moral error, God withdrew His presence from the human community, leaving individual humans with cognitive tracking processes that became less reliable insofar as they were now functioning in an environment they were not selected for, namely, an environment from which God withdrew His presence. According to Peels, van Eyghen, and van den Brink, this account squares the biblical account of the Fall with results from CSR that suggest human beings have inherited hyperactive agency detection devices that predispose individual humans to recognize false gods.

In this paper, I argue that there is a more pressing problem evolutionary theory presents for the Christian environmental philosopher, namely, a problem stemming from the doubt evolutionary theory casts on the possibility of suggesting a link between the human moral evil exemplified in the Fall and the natural evil of suboptimal ecological niches, or ecologies in which individual nonhuman animal flourishing comes at the expense of other nonhuman animal flourishing. I argue that Isaiah 65 and other passages force the Christian environmental philosopher to take the existence of suboptimal ecological niches to be instances of genuine natural evil, but that the antecedent existence of suboptimal ecological niches before the emergence of *Homo sapiens* suggests the implausibility of the Fall as an actual historical event linking human moral evil with general natural evil.

In response, the Christian environmental philosopher may wish to adopt De Cruz and De Smedt's (2013) Irenaean view of the Fall, in which humans inherited an unreliable cognitive disposition for which they were not morally responsible, but such a view clearly does little to re-establish the link between human moral evil and general natural evil. The Irenaean view also squares poorly with the evolutionary hypothesis that bipedalism facilitated the development of an ecologically sensitive diet of dry fruit and legumes, a commitment the Christian environmental philosopher likely wishes to embrace insofar as it encourages a view of *Homo sapiens* as a non-violent steward species.

As a result, the Christian environmental philosopher faces a dilemma. Either they must give up the view that the Fall establishes a link between moral evil and natural evil, or they must give up the view that suboptimal ecological niches are genuine instances of natural evil. However, both options are in tension with Genesis 1:29-30, Isaiah 65, and other passages central to Christian environmentalism. For this reason, I conclude that the Christian environmental philosopher must embrace heterodox accounts of the Fall, or advocate for science fiction solutions, such as backward causation, that create considerable tension when combined with evolutionary theory.

### **Julie Loveland Swanstrom, Augustana University**

#### **Aquinas on sin, essence, and change: Reflections on essence and evolution in Aquinas**

Essential nature is supposedly an impediment to Aquinas's philosophy being compatible with evolutionary theory, but this objection misunderstands Aquinas's approach to essential nature as exemplified in women, people with disability, and mules. Presenting essential nature as universal and static obfuscates the complexity and range of instantiations of humanity, instantiations that Aquinas insists all count as members of 'humanity'—defective, deformed, or otherwise. Close attention to Aquinas's discussions of women and those with disabilities

reveals that human nature is instantiated in a range of ways. Humans express great variety. While Aquinas explicitly states that the ongoing effects of original sin explain some of the variation in humans, specifically variation in physical disability, not all variation is due to sin. In the case of women, Aquinas asserts that women vary from the ideal human configuration, but this variety predates sin. So, not all variety among members of the human species is due to sin. Furthermore, Aquinas expressly disavows of the notion that species are absolutely unchanging. Aquinas discusses new kinds arising, saying that if such new species were to arise, they would arise from existing causal powers. “Matter participating more or less perfectly in the form” explains variation. [1] Variation alone (which is still described as general adherence to a thing’s form), then, does not disprove whether essentialism is compatible with evolution by natural selection. Accordingly, a flat denial that essentialism precludes any affinity between Aquinas’s thought and evolutionary theory is incorrect. In my paper, I explore what Aquinas says about variety within a nature and apply that breadth of nature to evolutionary thought. I highlight how Aquinas specifically endorses variation within nature and even—in the pesky case of mules—the development of new natures from blending creatures of disparate natures by discussing women, people with disabilities, and mules. Aquinas provides an explanation of women’s difference from men that is not due to sin, and the effects of original (rather than particular) sin explain physical disabilities in humans; the production of new kinds come through the causal processes with which God has equipped creatures, causal powers that Aquinas ties to natures. Aquinas’s use of essential natures does not itself preclude connections between his thought and evolutionary theory, and variation among instantiated natures is not limited to variation caused by sin alone. The variety of instantiated members of a kind—before and after original sin—when coupled with Aquinas’s discussion of the production of new kinds suggests a way to connect Aquinas’s thought with evolutionary theory without defaulting to original sin as the explanation for variation or change. Though Aquinas’s explanation of the relationship between essence and (secondary) causal power complicates the discussion, the variety of instantiation within kinds and the possibility of the production of distinct kinds suggests the navigability of some of these difficulties.

[1] Aquinas, *In Meta VIII* L3: C 1727.

**John Teehan, Hofstra University**

### **Evolution, original sin, and the Fall: A meta-critique**

The aim of this presentation is to analyze the conditions that underlie the debate over the compatibility of evolutionary and Biblical origin stories through the lens of cognitive science – specifically, an enactive model of human cognition. This approach to cognition and the larger field of the cognitive science of religion, more generally, are grounded in a pragmatic epistemology in which beliefs are intimately related to pragmatic concerns. That is, we believe something because that belief “works” in such a way as to address some problematic situation. Such situations can be practical, moral, emotional, intellectual, to name just a few. The “truth” of a belief is therefore judged by its success in resolving specific problematic situations. From this perspective, the very fact that one might see the compatibility of evolutionary and Biblical accounts as an issue to be analyzed (i.e. as a problematic situation to be resolved) can itself be analyzed. What is it about these accounts that constitutes a problematic situation for any

particular inquirer? Furthermore, as it is the problematic situation which sets the conditions that constitute a successful resolution, it is imperative to determine the specific nature of the problematic situation that drives the inquiry: Is it religious? Moral? Rational/Logical? Scientific? A clarification of these conditions will not in itself determine any specific resolution of the controversy but will provide greater clarification of the nature of the controversy the topic generates.

### **Viktor Toth, Fuller Theological Seminary**

#### **Evolution and theism**

The doctrine of Original Sin and its anthropological consequence in the West is overwhelmingly influenced by the theological work of Augustine of Hippo. On the one side, this approach is based on a literary interpretation of the third chapter of the book of Genesis, and on the other, on a Platonic, partitive anthropology with the emphasis on cognition and on the “will” as a faculty. It is hard to reconcile this interpretation with the theory of evolution. However, there are alternative interpretations in the wider Christian world. The Eastern Orthodox view of the Genesis text, as the failure of humanity to fulfill its primordial, God-given potentials, provides a better complementary to the evolutionary approach. My focus is to parallel this interpretation with the most recent findings of paleoanthropology.

Paleoanthropology is among the fastest changing disciplines today. One of the most fascinating thought is that morphological and behavioral modernity could have been decoupled along the evolution of *Homo sapiens* and that “modernity” developed not as a single package but as a combination of characters evolved in different times and places. Instead of the classic view, which favors cognitivism (i.e., brain growth) and individualism, it seems likely that the origin of the modern human lineage may have predated the origin of many aspects of the modern human brain. There are an increasing number of fossil records which suggest that the development of the *human face* played an equally important role. The significance of such findings (e.g., Jebel Irhoud, Morocco) is that they show that some of our ancestors had an “archaic” (non-modern *Homo sapiens*) brain, but an indistinguishable *human face*. This is not only in odds with the Platonic-Cartesian perception according to which human intelligence is primarily based on cognitive capacities, but also begs the question of why the *human face* is so important.

From paleoanthropology I turn psychology and child development to answer this question. For example, it turns out that face-to-face contact, especially in the first two years of the human life, is incredibly important for proper brain development. The first two years provide a narrow window for the basic elements of social cognition to be developed. While cognitive capacities can be improved during the whole lifespan, it seems to be impossible to acquire these basic emotive structures later in life. I argue that there is a parallel between the evolution of *Homo sapiens* as a species depending on communal living and the uniqueness of human child development. Living in community is not only an option for us but an evolutionary necessity for our wholeness.

This approach enriches hamartiology in many ways. The story of the first chapters of the Genesis is a story about relationships and infidelity (involving God, humans, animals, and the even the soil). If we consider “wholeness” as the final victory over sin, then the fact that humans evolved to reach wholeness living in the right relationship with each other, with the

planet, and ultimately with God, is a very important notion. It leads away from a cognitivist-individualistic understanding of sin toward a more wholistic interpretation. Furthermore, the Hebrew word *pānîm* (routinely translated as “face”) is a very important notion of the *Tanakh*.