

Book of Abstracts

Navigating the Anthropocene: New Frontiers in Environmental and Political Philosophy

(international conference)

24 – 25 September 2025

Bratislava Castle, Bratislava, Slovak Republic



Editors:

**Peter Daubner
Eva Dědečková**

The Future of Nature: An Ethos of Earth and Emergency for the Anthropocene

Hans-Herbert Kögler
(University of North Florida, USA)

To address the major challenge of climate change, many believe that an exclusive focus on nature is needed. Instead, only an enhanced focus on social agency can possibly ameliorate the situation. Central questions today are neither whether climate change is happening nor whether its effects may be catastrophic, but how it's possible that the known dangers are neither fully recognized nor effective countermeasures undertaken. To address this impasse, a radical transformation of social philosophy is needed, encompassing a non-objectifying conception of nature as much as a critical theory of the continued social denigration of its need. The paper claims that such a radical revision must include a holistic perspective on human agency that preserves the insights into its uniquely cognitive and intersubjective features while retrieving a new phenomenological sense and experience of nature (which can be reconstructed by drawing on Heidegger, Mead, and Buber). Second, that an account of the social situatedness of human agency needs to be complemented by the class- and power-defined constitution of background understanding explaining why idealistic value-orientations toward collective and universal interests, such as preserving nature (and humanity as such by means of it), are inaccessible to many. Finally, we need discourse analyses of media representations of both scientific findings as well as political activism concerning the climate crisis that reveal how strategies of displacement, disorientation, and dis-information help undermine the public emergence of a shared and collective sense of urgency. The argument suggests that by reconstructing alternative views of nature as well as the cognitive limitations of understanding via one's habitus and public perception, much-needed cognitive capabilities for a truly encompassing sense of human agency can be cultivated. By showing how self-understanding and agency always entail a holistic embeddedness and understanding of nature, how an instrumentalizing approach to nature as a resource is but one limited way to engage it, and how a sociological habitus hermeneutics entails constraining yet not determining forces vis-à-vis understanding nature, hermeneutic counterforces of self-understanding are activated. They point towards a future vision of nature in the Anthropocene.

Critical Theory of the Anthropocene

Petra Gümplová
(Friedrich Schiller University, Jena, Germany)

This talk offers an entry point into a critical theory of the Anthropocene—understood not simply as a geological epoch marked by human impact, but as a political, economic, and epistemic condition shaped by the histories of colonialism, capitalism, and technoscientific domination. Rather than treating the Anthropocene as a neutral descriptor, the talk critically interrogates a range of interconnected themes that structure the Anthropocene condition: the colonial origins of global environmental change; capitalism's expansion through extractivism and fossil-fueled development; the entanglement of sovereignty, state power, and ecological crisis; the violence and unequal distribution of environmental harm; and the epistemological hierarchies that privilege technocratic and Western modes of environmental governance. The talk also gestures toward political possibilities for resistance and repair, and the role of critical theory in imagining post-Anthropocene futures.

The World of Anthropos

Robert Braun
(Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna, Austria)

The Anthropocene, as originally suggested by Crutzen and Stoermer, revolves around technoscience. They suggested the onset of the planetary ecological crisis at the beginnings of the industrial revolution. Science and Technology studies (STS) has, in the past decades, reflected on the interplay of technoscience and social reality arguing that technological apparatuses do their realities as well as the representations of those realities: technoscience enacts worlds that are fit for its 'methods' of reality enactment. This reality, Robert argues, is constituted by a unique creature emerging in the Greek translation of the Hebrew bible and was a (technoscientific) political program that came to real-ize the world we happen to live in. The creation story that is recounted in Genesis part of the Septuagint is a description of a world founded on sovereign technoscientific power. This world, what Robert terms as the Anthropic condition, is the infrastructure of reality, a hegemonic and universal one-world world (OWW) political ontology: the world in which we live today. What was once one of many different origin stories became a single, dominant worldview, the Weltbild that was to shape past, present and future. The political programme that is the Anthropic condition is an ontology that is inscribed into the very fabric of the world of Anthropos by technoscience, which has now expanded rhizomatically, through violence and domination, across the entire globe. The talk traces the origins of the Anthropic condition to political contestations and ontopolitical resolutions that led to the creation of what may be called cosmocracy: a political program moored in ontopolitical gerrymandering — a term to capture the split or cut between immutable reality and mutable certainty — the cut between Anthropos and the uni-verse constituted through a series of innovations. These include the Greek alphabet, the invention of mathematics in the Pythagorean school of philosophy and the concomitant Platonic innovation of a created uni-verse and its politicization as Anthropic sovereign power in the Septuagint. This talk presents a radical departure from the assumption that our world rests on a modernist metaphysical ontology and argues that the Anthropocene is the political ontology that has been constituted between the 8th and 2nd centuries BCE in Greece through a series of political contestations and had been instituted in alphabetized, mathematized, cosmocratic technoscientific practices and processes inscribing this ontology into the fabric of the world.

Nostalgia for the Light: The Ecological Emergency, the Social Sciences, and Human Exceptionalism

Peter Wagner
(University of Barcelona, Spain)

Most insights about the ecological emergency come from the earth and climate sciences as well as from the life sciences, and as such they have upset established certainties in the social sciences and humanities. At the very least, they have forced the social sciences and humanities to refocus their attention on the ways in which human societies are dependent on the condition of planet Earth and of other life-forms on it. This article aims to assess this challenge in the form of an interim conclusion, certainly with a personal taint, to what is an ongoing debate. Towards this end, it will loosely operate with the distinction between planetary history, history of the human species, and global history of colonialism and capitalism, as proposed by Dipesh Chakrabarty in his attempt to assess "the climate of history". By looking separately at these three perspectives on history, one can recognize an epistemological, an ontological, and a world-historical and moral-philosophical question. In the first step, the article will ask how the increased knowledge of the planetary condition impacts on the condition and the results of human knowledge-seeking. The second step explores the relation between the human and the non-human, which was opened up to questioning by, in particular, some strands of research in the sociology of the sciences and technology and in anthropology. Thirdly, the implication of the first two steps for the analysis of social phenomena of large scale and long duration with the tools of historical sociology will be assessed. In conclusion, it will be asked what remains, if anything, of what one may call human exceptionalism, any way in which the human may (still) stand out from the planetary and the non-human.

The Anthropocene Gambit: Stacking Our Future On The Ergosphere

João Ribeiro Mendes
(University of Minho, Braga, Portugal)

This presentation interrogates Jürgen Renn's concept of the ergosphere – developed in his *The Evolution of Knowledge* (2020) as a deliberate rebuttal to Peter Haff's technosphere – and its radical implications for geosustainability. Where Renn's ergosphere emphasizes intentional human agency, knowledge systems, and transformative labor as levers to reshape Earth systems, Haff's technosphere looms as an autonomous, self-perpetuating force that constrains human-environment relations. By juxtaposing these frameworks, the analysis exposes a fundamental tension: the ergosphere's proposition of purposive socio-ecological futures stands in stark contrast to the technosphere's deterministic logic of infrastructural path dependency. The discussion probes both the emancipatory potential of Renn's vision – where collective agency might reclaim governance – and the sobering realities of technological lock-in. Ultimately, the presentation confronts a pivotal question: Can the ergosphere's intentionality withstand the technosphere's inertia, or must sustainability strategies adapt to its dominance?

What Ethics for the Environmental Philosophy? The Perspectives of Rationalism, Sentientism, Biocentrism and Ecocentrism

Francesco Allegri
(Pegaso University of Naples, Italy)

In philosophical reflection, animals and the environment have assumed an important role in a perspective of broadening the moral community, namely the set of entities that have moral importance as such. Since an anthropocentric vision in the 21st century is no longer sustainable, given that it falls into speciesism, what are the possible alternatives? Should we extend intrinsic moral relevance to all rational beings (rationalism), to all sentient beings (sentientism), to all living beings (biocentrism), or to the entire ecosystem (ecocentrism)? In my presentation, I will develop a gradualist version of sentientism, for which the value of sentient beings grows gradually on the basis of their cognitive, emotional, and social complexity. I will argue that this model is adequate even though we were to accept the thesis of biocentrism. In a conception of non-egalitarian biocentrism, if mere life has intrinsic value, in the case in which a being, in addition to life, possesses sensitivity, this gives it a higher value. And indeed, the greater is its capacity to "feel", the greater is its value. Moreover, if, in addition to sensitivity, a being also possesses qualities such as memory, sense of the future, self-awareness etc., its value grows further.

The Techno-Care Dilemma (A “Moral Navigation” in the Anthropocene)

Agostino Cera
(University of Ferrara, Italy)

This presentation deals with the idea of “care” in the Anthropocene, the latter understood no longer as a geological epoch but as the *métarécit* of our age. More specifically, I will outline two interpretations of the neologism “techno-care”, that is, Bruno Latour's interpretation, followed by a critical reading of it. In his 2011 essay *Love Your Monsters*, Latour offers a provocative reading of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as the Modern Prometheus. According to him, “Dr. Frankenstein's crime was not that he created a creature through a combination of hubris and high technology but that he abandoned the creature to itself”. Similarly, our sin is “not that we created technologies but that we did not care for them”. Out of the metaphor, Latour “sees human development not as a liberation from Nature, but as a becoming ever-more intimate with a panoply of nonhuman natures”. Opposing Latour's argument, I read techno-care as a moral oxymoron, i.e. an alibi to establish our “planetary management”. Within the Anthropocene scenario, nature risks being subjected to an unprecedented form of reification: the “pet-ification”. What makes techno-care a moral oxymoron is that we could become earthmasters as caregivers – i.e. not through a “will to power” but through a “will to care”.

Traces of Metaphysics in the Concept of the Anthropocene

Břetislav Horyna
(Institute of Philosophy of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, Slovakia)

The purpose of this study was to highlight the place of metaphysics in Anthropocene environmental discourse. The study demonstrates that a significant portion of the Anthropocene vocabulary, as well as a significant percentage of complex theories of the Anthropocene, are grounded in metaphysics. This is especially true of concepts that operate with terms such as “world image”, “new world”, “Earth system”, etc. The theories that emerge here leave the scientific empirical base and take the path of speculation, which in extreme cases borders on mythicalism (cf. the Gaia hypothesis). This also applies to some fields in the environmental humanities. This situation calls for an adequate response, which will show that the metaphysicality of Anthropocene thinking stems from erroneous assumptions about the null relationship between environmental science (natural sciences and their exact knowledge) and political (philosophical-political) theories of the Anthropocene. In environmental theories of the Anthropocene we need to have a source of necessary and useful newly formulated ontological, epistemological and ethical categories, not a source of metaphysical speculation.

Coexisting with Animals in the Era of Anthropocene: A Realist Approach

Zoltán Gábor Szűcs-Zágoni
(Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary)

Pet-ownership is a fascinating fact of contemporary life but is also problematic. Notably, empirical research on what people value most in the dog/human relations (Turcsán, B., Ujfalussy, D.J., Kerepesi, A. et al. 2025) has shown that people seem to assign a high value to its asymmetrical power relationship character. People seem to embrace the dominating character of pet-ownership and romanticize it as a pure form of unconditional commitment of the pet and the benevolent rule of the owner over the pet (not unlike the romanticized depictions of slavery). A republican critique of this dominating conception of pet/human relations would be an obvious choice. But this paper will argue that the best way to rethink pet/human relationship is to conceive of it as a political relationship between humans and animals and that the vocabulary of realist political theory (the first question of politics, BLD, making sense, etc.) can provide the proper normative framework for it. The basic idea is that humans do indeed exercise power over their pets and that pets are indeed in the power of humans but exercise of power needs legitimation. Both the current practice of pet-ownership and its dominating conception can be rightly criticized on these grounds.

Planetary Defence: Conservation of Extra-Terrestrial Environments

Lukáš Likavčan
(Institute of Philosophy of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, Slovakia)

The issue of contamination of extraterrestrial sites has been one of the prominent topics of space ethics since its inception, thus expanding environmental-ethical considerations about terrestrial environments towards outer space. Accordingly, space ethics frequently advertises a conservationist position, reflected in the tendency to treat extraterrestrial environments as sites that are supposed to be intact to the maximum possible degree. Nevertheless, it is very hard to imagine the practical implementation of total biological isolation of extraterrestrial environments, especially when it comes to landings of robotic probes or future crewed missions to the surface of planets, moons, or asteroids. Similarly, the geological integrity of environments outside our Earth is challenged by sample return missions, but one can argue that the ethical value of exploration outweighs the damage incurred. The premise of this contribution is that it is possible to develop fine-grained ethical approaches that do not invoke the absolute, intrinsic value of extraterrestrial sites, and that instead see human exploration of outer space as constructive action that opens new chapters in the history of our Solar System, ultimately feeding back to how humans address environmental issues here on Earth.

On the Political Economy of a Non-Fossil Society

Vesa Oittinen
(University of Helsinki, Finland)

My contribution will pose the question of the political economy of a non-fossil, degrowth society. It is a widespread opinion that it is capitalism which has given rise to the societies based on the use of fossil energy. While empirically true, this view neglects, however, that the idea of a "fossil society" forms a challenge to received Marxist social theory, too. The reason is simple: the use of fossil energy in the production processes does not seem to presuppose expressly capitalist production relations. A socialist fossil society is thinkable, and in fact the countries of the 'real socialism' which existed until 1989/1991 had traits of just such a society. In my contribution, I will take up a rather neglected category of Marxian critic of political economy, viz. that of the wealth (Reichtum), a category coined by the 18th century classical economists, especially by physiocrats. Marx discusses it above all in the Grundrisse. The concept of wealth is essential in defining the basis of the ways of life of different forms of society. It is, moreover, a methodologically important concept, since it states that it is not the production technology of a society, which determines its way of life. Instead, the determining factor is rather the form of the wealth, which to an important extent dictates what kind of technology and how it shall be used in the material production. Consequently, a degrowth society, which nowadays is seen as an alternative to the fossil consumer societies, must base on a different form of social wealth. The incessant growth typical for fossil societies is a consequence of the fact that their form of wealth is structured by the law of the valorization of capital. The abolishment of the value-based form of social wealth of course does not already as such change the technological basis of the society, but it makes it possible; it is thus a *conditio sine qua non* of a post-fossil society. Indeed, a substantial reduction of the use of fossil fuels seems impossible so long the production rationality of societies is based on the imperative of valorization. The valorization imperative forms, in addition, the material basis of the utilitarian world outlook which has been prevalent in capitalist societies since the 1700s, starting from the works of Mandeville. Utilitarianism – which in political economy is represented in the form of the idea of *homo oeconomicus* -- remains at the core of the present-day neoliberalism, too. In my paper, I will draw on Marx's analyses on Jeremy Bentham and other representants of utilitarianism he presented in *Capital*, and show that a non-capitalist alternative (not to speak of the possibility of a degrowth society!) necessarily presupposes the abandonment of the utilitarian world outlook. Of course, Marx stressed the primacy of materialist interests of the people, and this may be the main reason why the Marxists have not recognized the anti-utilitarian conviction inherent in Marx's theory. But Marx's concept of 'interest' is not utilitarian, which can be shown by a comparative analysis of Marx's texts and the discussions of the Enlightenment era on the "*intérêt bien entendu*". Interestingly, Marx's anti-utilitarianism is a trait which puts him close to Kant's ethics, although these thinkers in many other respects have not much in common.

Adam Smith in the Anthropocene: Matter, Contingency, and the Foundations of a Critical Social Theory

Leo Steeds
(University of Glasgow, UK)

Social theory is undergoing a period of revision in light of the deepening ecological crisis often framed under the rubric of the Anthropocene. While Marx's legacy has been central to recent debates on how best to rethink social knowledge for a world in crisis, the thought of Adam Smith—another foundational figure in social theory—has remained largely excluded, or else cited only in critique as emblematic of the liberal tradition to be overcome. This paper challenges that exclusion. Drawing on recent revisionist scholarship and ten years of my own research into the environmental dimensions of Smith's thought, I argue that Smith can be reread as a resource for critical social theory in the Anthropocene. I focus on three key features of his work: a non-teleological developmentalism grounded in material relations between humans and the earth; a sociologically rooted account of normative judgement; and a radical reflexivity premised on the historical contingency and revisability of knowledge. My contribution will outline a project in development that reconstructs Smith along these lines, aiming to advance a model of social theory attuned to socio-ecological transformation, historical complexity, and the epistemic demands of an age of planetary crisis.

The Complications of Ecological Crimes and Conflicts in Türkiye

Güncel Önköl
(Maltepe University, Istanbul, Turkey)

Considering the historical process of philosophical ideas on nature, it is appropriate to say that understanding the Anthropocene has three basic steps: Firstly a criticism on the core concepts of environmental philosophy, secondly the paradigm shift from environmental ethics to environmental political philosophy, and lastly the expansion of discussions from philosophical level to sociological spaces. All three aspects of the Anthropocene concept are interconnected regarding the illusionary ideas of sustainability: to survive, to be civilized, and development. The complex structure of environmental conflicts can be much more illuminated by a philosophical reflection that focuses on cases. In this way, philosophers will be able to reach new functional concepts and/or groundbreaking discussions such as laborology, care ethics, urban crime, deprivation, deep inequality, the right to life, and the destruction of cultural heritage, etc. through Anthropocene discussions. In this context, my aim is to share and discuss some recent cases of Türkiye's ecological crimes such as deforestation, construction of highways, overgrown conurbations, climate migration, mining accidents, dehistoricization, destruction of agricultural lands, import inflation and the silence of academia which are labelled "successful" examples/models of development in public sphere.

Bodies of Water; Water Protection Through Redefinition of Relation Human to Water

Andrea Gogová
(Comenius University, Bratislava, Slovakia)

Earth is a sympoietic holobiont, interconnected by a network of ecological, social and other relationships that co-create life. Sympoiesis is the principle of becoming-with, in which no entity can exist in isolation. As Braidotti and Haraway proposed 'we have never been human (only)', but an assemblage of organisms and matters. Despite this fact, man, the most environmentally influential species of the epoch, which is called the Anthropocene, negatively enters natural processes through his actions. It is in this dominant position that human uses nature, while not perceiving him or herself as a part of it. The subject of the project's research is water – the medium of life, the link between inter and intraaction, a cultural phenomenon. Water as an environmental problem is then solved by an approach that intertwines the nature-culture relationship, by which human is defined. The aim of the project is to redefine water from the position of utility to the position of the ontogenic necessity, based on the equal need of every biotic and abiotic entity. Through an interdisciplinary approach of Art and Science, encompassing environmental and cultural-philosophical perspectives, the project calls upon the new materialist feminist approach presented by Irigaray, Alaimo, Neimanis, Barad, as well as the actor-network theory of Latour and fluidity as multiple and nonlinear view of historical time of Michel Serres. The result of these investigations ultimately leads to the creation of a narrative representing a posthuman perspective establishing a sustainable human approach to any water on planet Earth.

Environment as a Thing That Matters: Notes on Charles Taylor's Concept of Background

Jan Géryk
(Institute of State and Law, Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague, Czechia)
&
Andrej Virdzek
(Independent Researcher)

According to the philosopher Charles Taylor, one can define his/her identity only against the background of things that matter – be it history, the needs of our fellow human beings, the call of God, or demands of nature. Considered as "a thing that matters", our (natural) environment could be understood as an objective background of not only our identities, but even of our societies, even though they are deeply pluralistic and increasingly polarized. Environment is endowed by meaning, by something that goes beyond mere functionality and short-term temporality. We will show that even though it has a certain degree of objectivity, Taylor's conception does not consider background as static. Thus, it is consonant with theories of the Anthropocene that argue that our natural environment ceases to be a mere "backdrop" (in Peter Sloterdijk's words), i.e. "largely immobile scenography that simply provides the staging for human political drama". Finally, we will present Taylor's environmental thought as a call to overcome instrumental character of some branches of environmentalism. Through instrumental languages, we become aware only of a limited variety of our obligations to nature. Hence the important position of poetry in Taylor's thought, which could reshape our obligation towards nature in multiple ways.

The "Axiomatic Anthropocene": Can There Be Logical Foundations for the Anthropocene as a Historical Construct?

Katarína Podušelová
(Institute of Philosophy of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, Slovakia)
&
Jan Makovský
(Center for Theoretical Study, Prague, Czechia)

The presentation focuses on whether, and to what extent it is possible to speak of a "logical basis" for the Anthropocene analogous to a formal theoretical system. The point of departure is a philosophical reflection on the Anthropocene not only as a historical epoch or concept of the Earth System, but also as an axiomatic field in the sense of Deleuze and Guattari's axiomatics of capitalism. The formal requirements of a closed deductive system are contrasted with the operative and open-ended nature of what the authors call the "axiomatic Anthropocene", formation that absorbs heterogeneous discourses (scientific, political, ethical) and transforms them into strategic instruments. The underlying assumption is that the axioms of the Anthropocene are not neutral foundations but the products of historical and power-laden discursive operations, with far-reaching ethical implications. The authors argue that the Anthropocene, as a historical formation, also functions as a flexible regime of re-axiomatization, in which statements such as "humans are a natural force" or "human activity is changing the Earth System" serve as axiomatic plateaus, enabling the discursive development of specific regimes of thought, power, and action.