
This book contains thirteen papers that were delivered during the Colloquium “Nature et Surnaturel” (Luxembourg 2008). The variety of topics that emerges from the contributions is much greater than one would expect by simply looking at the introductory note, with which the book opens. Still, the short preface suffices to provide *Nature et Surnaturel* with its thematic unity and the reader with a specific point of departure. In the wake of Immanuel Kant, philosophers started questioning the legitimacy of rational explanations of the ‘supernatural’ and its relation to nature. As heirs to that tradition, the editors maintain, thinkers are nowadays hardly willing to deal with the ‘supernatural’; wherever that category is still invoked, it happens only so as to draw the line between it and nature, to define the latter as the field of our experience and to exclude the former from any positive philosophical system. Our current state of affairs would, however, appear quite upside down when viewed from the seventeenth and eighteenth-century perspective on the ‘natural’ and the ‘supernatural’. As *Nature et Surnaturel* shows, philosophers at that time were busy thinking about the relation between God and nature and worked out extremely different solutions to that problem.

Stephan Schmid considers Spinoza’s ontology and the extent to which this philosopher’s monist framework allows to use teleological explanations. Schmid argues that the Dutch philosopher gave room to theoretical teleological patterns within a mechanistic world. Spinoza’s monism, along with Leibniz’s harsh opposition to it, stands at the center of Pedro Stoichita’s contribution. The author offers us his interpretation of Spinoza’s reasons in favor of monism, a reading of Leibniz’s arguments contra and a critical analysis of a paradoxical outcome: Leibniz’s proof of the existence of God in fact served the purposes of Spinoza’s monism. As Andreas Blank shows in his own chapter to this volume, a form of divine immanence had previously been considered, though not embraced, in Jean Fernel’s *De abditis rerum causis* (1548).

Paolo Rubini, in turn, draws the reader’s attention to Pietro Pomponazzi’s *De incantationibus*, reminding us that the Renaissance concept of the ‘supernatural’ was also connected with discussions on miracles and all sorts of rather exotic phenomena (from healing virtues of plants to the deadly look of the basilisk). But was it really the task of natural philosophy to deal with all those phenomena? Rubini analyses the history of that question and studies Pomponazzi’s original answer to it.

From a triptych of papers it emerges that a number of seventeenth-century philosophers and scientists regarded the realm of the ‘supernatural’ as irreducible to nature, though reachable through knowledge of the natural world. Dana Jalobeanu reads Francis Bacon’s first part of *Novum Organum* from the perspective of the *cultura animi* rather than from an epistemological standpoint: that discipline, she proposes, could provide us with methods and techniques for freeing our mind from the passions and idols to which we are fettered in our fallen state. The very practice of science, if conducted properly, could place us in a better position for receiving grace. This Baconian
stance became a standard theme in authors such as Thomas Sprat and Robert Boyle, contributing to the shaping of a new philosophical persona, the Christian virtuoso. Boyle's work is indeed characterized by the intertwining of a physical investigation and a theological experience of the world. Sorana Corneanu illustrates how Boyle's “education of the mind” relies on the conception of “right reason,” according to which correct ratiocination entails both the unravelling of divine works and the building-up of a virtuous mind. Remarks on the usefulness of natural philosophy for the moral aspects of human life are also found in the Jesuit context. It is in this light that Adina Ruiu reads Jacques Lambert’s Les réflexions du sage, in which the defense of Jesuit doctrine is rendered possible through instruction in natural philosophy. A further example of Jesuit ideas concerning reality as a trace of the Creator and of man as naturally driven to knowledge of God is provided in Adrien Paschoud’s chapter on Jesuit Relationes in New France.

From the Jesuits, we turn to Descartes. Lucian Petrescu argues that the Jesuit ratio studiorum, and with it the Thomistic idea of the soul as a substantial form, played a crucial role in Descartes’ anthropology: both enabled the philosopher to render his substance dualism consistent with the official Catholic definition of the soul. Géraldine Caps analyses the role of Descartes’ metaphysical principles in his mechanistic views of bodies and interprets the origin of a mechanistic medicine as the aftermath of the acceptance, by Cartesian physicians and notably by Henricus Regius, of Descartes’ model deprived, however, of its metaphysical grounds.

An attempt at understanding animal bodies in a mechanistic key but in accordance with a metaphysics of activity was, according to Justin Smith, undertaken in Leibniz’s Corpus hominis et uniuscuiusque animalis est machina quaedam: his study of biological species enabled Leibniz to render a mechanistic theory of animal body consistent with his conviction that the ‘body-machine’ is best understood in terms of its final causes.

The editors complete their book with their own contributions, which handle the problem of Nature et Surnaturel in terms of the relation between natural and theological knowledge. Drawing on rarely studied fragments by Descartes, Vlad Alexandrescu documents the philosopher’s way of dealing with problems that arose from his own views on substances and qualities with respect to the Thomistic doctrine of transubstantiation. Alexandrescu proposes a historical reconstruction of the problem of the Eucharist in Descartes’ work, providing an interpretation of the philosopher’s ideas concerning the “Glorious Body of Christ” as well as an analysis of the implications of these theological issues for Descartes’ theory of the individuation of physical bodies. Robert Theis proposes a study of two versions of Kant’s physico-theological proof of the existence of God, presented respectively in the Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels (1755) and in the Einzig möglicher Beweisgrund (1763). Having shed light on several scientific, philosophical and theological sources of these Kantian works, Theis argues that the results of both the Einzig möglicher Beweisgrund and the Allgemeine Naturgeschichte should be interpreted as two sides of a broader project, namely the reform of physico-theology in a way that would render onto-theology and natural philosophy consistent with each other.