

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR

„Aristotle on Nature”



JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY
IN KRAKÓW

17th April – 18th April 2026



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This conference aims to bring together scholars from philosophy, classics, law, theology, and the natural sciences to explore Aristotle's concept of nature in its multiple dimensions.

Around the 5th century BC, in the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, Heraclitus is said to have deposited a book that summarized his entire body of knowledge.¹ In that book appeared the enigmatic maxim: *Φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ* ("Nature loves to hide"? "That which brings forth is inclined to conceal itself, to perish"? "Form tends toward dissolution"?).² Successive generations, which we may consider the first glimpses of reflection on the mystery of reality, sought to interpret these three words³. However, that may forever preserve its obscurity. Perhaps, like Nature itself, Heraclitus' words love to hide⁴.

So too with Aristotle's words⁵. Mindful of centuries of reconstructing the *corpus aristotelicum* and of the fact that "the history of thought is often the history of misunderstandings"⁶, we seek once more to engage with Aristotle's philosophy of nature.

Aristotle understood nature as the principle of motion and rest, an internal cause of being that develops itself⁷. His conception integrates biological, metaphysical, and ethical-political perspectives: from studies of organisms and the cosmos, through reflections on

¹ Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 1.

² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵ Justin Winzenrieth, *The Textual Transmission of the Aristotelian Corpus*, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2025 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-text/>.

⁶ Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 17.

⁷ Aristotle, *Physics*, ed. and trans. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), 2.1, 192b20–23.

causality and purpose, to considerations of communal life and the role of man as a naturally political being⁸. We therefore wish to approach nature interdisciplinarily, through both the scientific (“Promethean”) and the metaphysical (“Orphic”) methods⁹.

The conference builds upon this Aristotelian legacy while also confronting it with modern science and philosophy. It is of no minor philosophical significance that pioneers of molecular biology and Nobel laureates in medicine, such as François Jacob and Max Delbrück, recognized in Aristotle’s concept of *εἶδος* features that we now attribute to the genetic program¹⁰. Similarly, in ethics, philosophy of law, and politics, contemporary authors explicitly drawing inspiration from the thought of the Stagirite constitute central - albeit often opposed - voices in the debate. To mention only a few: Hannah Arendt, Eric Voegelin, Leo Strauss, Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Sandel, Martha C. Nussbaum, William Galston, and Tibor Macha¹¹.

The organizers also do not wish to remain indifferent to questions concerning the relation between Aristotle’s philosophy of nature and religion. “The Bible does not know the concept of nature”¹², wrote Leo Strauss, who emphasized that Mediterranean civilization was shaped by the continuous conflict of its two pillars: Athens and Jerusalem¹³. We wish to inquire into this conflict also under contemporary conditions through the prism of Aristotle’s thought. At the same time, we intend to consider the philosophical reception of the Stagirite not only by Christian thinkers (e.g., Boethius, Isidore of Seville, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Siger of Brabant), but also by Jewish thinkers (e.g., Saadia

⁸ See: Antonis Ragkousis, *Aristotelian Themes in Critical Ethical Naturalism*, “Cambridge Journal of Economics” 47, no. 4 (July 2023): 853–880., Emanuela C. Fieconci, *Elements of Biology in Aristotle’s Political Science*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle’s Biology*, ed. Sarah M. Connell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 211–227.

⁹ Terms coined by P. Hadot. See: *The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 155.

¹⁰ François Jacob, *La Logique du Vivant* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p. 9., Max Delbrück, *Aristotle-totle-totle*, in “Of Microbes and Life”, ed. Jacques Monod and Ernest Borek (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), p. 50–55. Ernst Mayr, *The Idea of Teleology*, “Journal of the History of Ideas” 53, no. 1 (January–March 1992), p. 117–135.

¹¹ Fred D. Miller Jr., “Aristotle’s Political Theory,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2022 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-politics/#ArisModePoli>

¹² Leo Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity: Essays and Lectures in Modern Jewish Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 381.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 139.

Gaon, Maimonides) and finally by the Islamic tradition (e.g., Al-Kindī, Al-Fārābī, Avicenna, Averroes).

Finally, we wish to explore the context of another pillar — Roman law — which Strauss appears to have overlooked. We remain open to attempts at comparing and identifying correlations between Aristotle’s concept of nature, his philosophy of natural law and Roman law, as well as its later reception in European and global legal systems. It will be particularly useful to analyze the role that nature played in the thinking of jurists and in relation to law dependent on convention, as well as to analyze the extent to which nature was a point of reference in the formulation of rules.

The deadline for submitting abstracts (maximum 300 words) is October 31, 2025. Notification of acceptance will be provided by the end of November 2025. The deadline for full paper submission is March 31, 2026. We also consider publishing a volume on Aristotle and nature based on the best papers presented at the conference and other invited contributions. More details will be provided after the conference.

Please send submissions (abstracts with your affiliation, academic title/position, and contact details) to the research ass. Szymon Gawor at szymon.gawor@student.uj.edu.pl and in CC to Prof. Marta Soniewicka at marta.soniewicka@uj.edu.pl with the subject line “Aristotle on Nature”.

Conference Organizing Committee:

Prof. Marta Soniewicka (Jagiellonian University)

Prof. Diego Poole (Universidad Rey Juan Carlos)

Research ass. Szymon Gawor (Jagiellonian University) – secretary