

What is  
Nature?

# Genesis 9

‘God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.”’

# Psalm 8

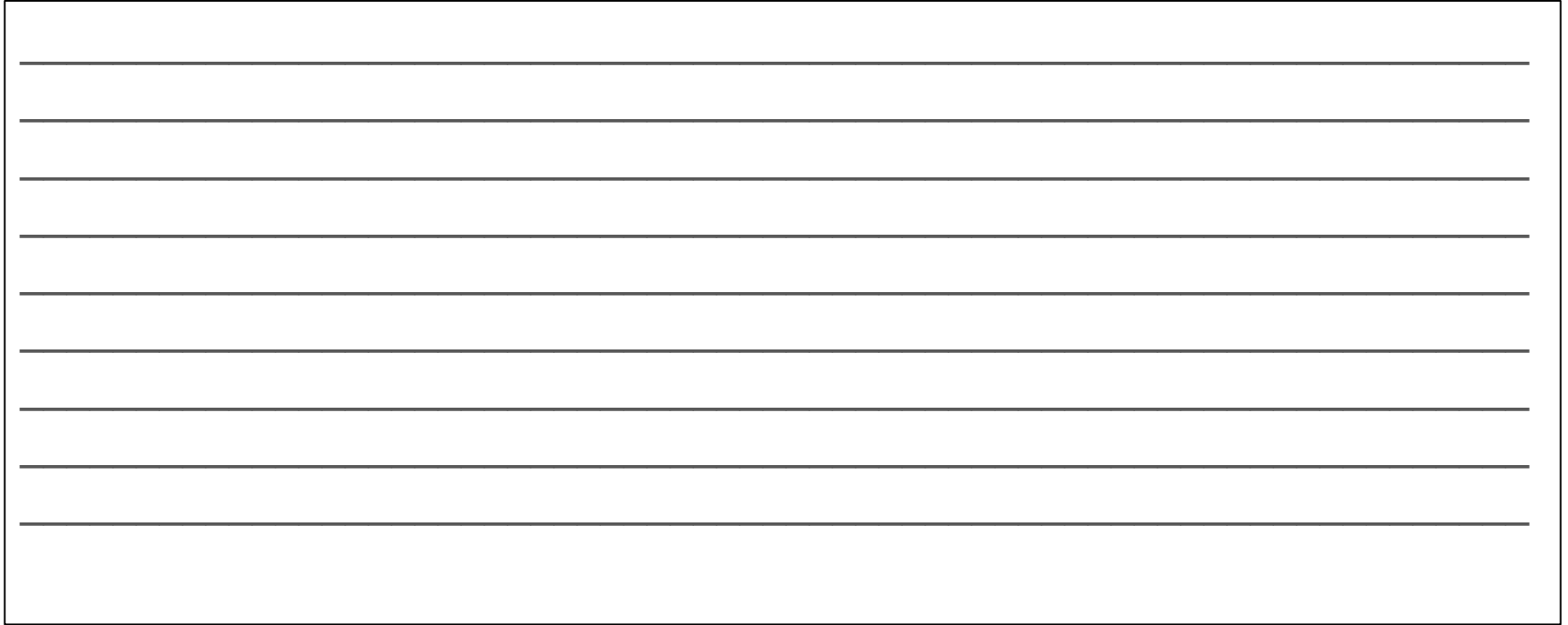
“When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their[g] feet: all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.”

# Aristotle

“Plants exist for the sake of animals, and brute animals for the sake of man — the tame for his use and food, the wild, if not all, at least the greater part of them, for food and for the provision of clothing and various instruments. Now if nature makes nothing incomplete, and nothing in vain, the inference must be that she has made all animals for the sake of man.”

- Politics

Is Anthropocentrism a Natural tendency of human beings?



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# Erasmus of Rotterdam

"Do not pick your teeth with the point of your knife, nor with your finger-nail, as dogs and cats do, nor with your napkin ; make use of a splinter of wood, or a quill, or of those small bones which are found in the legs of fowls."

"Some people, no sooner than they've sat down, immediately stick their hands into the dishes of food. This is the manner of wolves."

"Don't smack your lips, like a horse; don't swallow your meat without chewing, like a Stork; don't gnaw the bones, like a dog; don't lick the dish, like a cat."

- *On Civility in Boys*

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# Richard Baxter

“He that hath well learned in the alphabet of his physics, wherein a man doth differ from a brute, hath laid such a foundation for a holy life, as all the reason in the world is never able to overthrow. For by knowing his faculties and capacities, he will quickly know their end and use; and his relations to his Creator, his efficient, dirigent, final cause: that his nature was formed to be holy, even to know, and love, and serve his Maker, as truly as the lower creatures are formed for our service. That to love God all, and to serve him with all our powers and gifts, is as unquestionably the duty of man as it is the use of a horse to carry us, or of a knife to cut, and much more, because the aptitude and obligation were more essential to us.”

- *Letter to Robert Boyle, 1665.*

# Michael Wigglesworth

Beyond the great Atlantic flood  
There is a region vast,  
A country where no English foot In  
former ages past;  
A waste and howling wilderness,  
Where none inhabited  
But hellish fiends, and brutish men  
That Devils worshiped.  
This region was in darkness placed  
Far off from heavens light,  
Amidst the shadows of grim death  
And of eternal night.

For there the Sun of righteousness  
Had never made to shine  
The light of his sweet countenance,  
And grace which is divine:  
Until the time drew nigh wherein  
The glorious Lord of hosts  
Was pleased to lead his armies forth  
Into those foreign coasts.  
At whose approach the darkness sad  
Soon vanished away,  
And all the shadows of the night  
Were turned to lightsome day.



# Francis Bacon

“The end of our foundation is the knowledge of causes, and secret motions of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible.”

- *The New Atlantis.*

# Romano Guardini

“Universal in scope the symbolism created by the Christian cult of medieval man thus covered and permeated the whole of being. Life was seen as a rich and diversified hierarchy; every class in society and all things in nature had their beginning and their origin and their fulfillment, their departure and their return. Every least and greatest thing in being was led back to its source in eternity... But in the modern world... a new picture of reality came into view, dominated by a number of conceptions, the most important of which was the modern view of "Nature." It had come to signify whatever was given immediately to the mind and sensibilities of man. It was all those things which existed in the world prior to anything man did to them; it was also the sum total of energy, matter, essences and natural laws. Thus "Nature" was readily made a matter of value in itself. It became the norm which guided man in action and in reason toward whatever was right or healthful or perfect. The constant norm was simply the "natural." From this attitude grew a new ethic; the man who was morally good was the "natural" man; so too was the "natural" society or form of government or manner of education or way of life. From the sixteenth to the twentieth century we find this pervasive concept in many guises: in the honnête homme of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in the "natural" man of Rousseau, in the rationalism of the Enlightenment, in the "natural" beauty invoked by neoclassicism.”

- *The End of the Modern World*

# John Keats

“There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:  
We know her woof, her texture; she is given  
In the dull catalogue of common things.  
Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,  
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,  
Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine —  
Unweave a rainbow.”

- *Lamia*

# Gerard Manley Hopkins

My aspens dear, whose airy cages quelled,  
Quelled or quenched in leaves the leaping sun,  
All felled, felled, are all felled;  
Of a fresh and following folded rank  
Not spared, not one  
That dandled a sandalled  
Shadow that swam or sank  
On meadow & river & wind-wandering weed-winding bank.

O if we but knew what we do  
When we delve or hew —  
Hack and rack the growing green!

Since country is so tender  
To touch, her being só slender,  
That, like this sleek and seeing ball,  
But a prick will make no eye at all,  
**Where we, even where we mean  
To mend her we end her,  
When we hew or delve:**

After-comers cannot guess the beauty been.

Ten or twelve, only ten or twelve  
Strokes of havoc unselfe  
The sweet especial scene,  
Rural scene, a rural scene,  
Sweet especial rural scene.

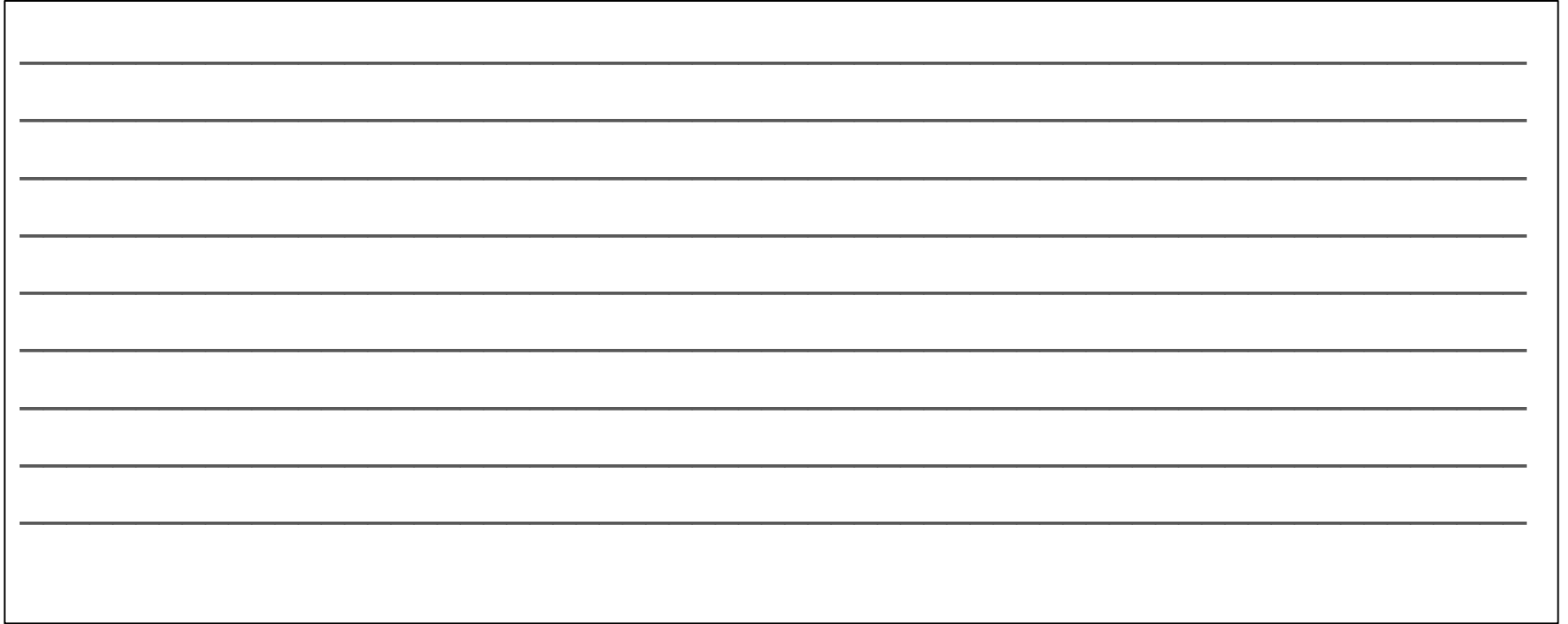
- 'Binsey Poplars.'

# Pope Francis

“We must be grateful for the praiseworthy efforts being made by scientists and engineers dedicated to finding solutions to man-made problems. But a sober look at our world shows that the degree of human intervention, often in the service of business interests and consumerism, is actually making our earth less rich and beautiful, ever more limited and grey, even as technological advances and consumer goods continue to abound limitlessly. We seem to think that we can substitute an irreplaceable and irretrievable beauty with something which we have created ourselves.”

- *Laudato Si'*

What problems arise from this view of nature?



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# The Natural Logic of the Marketplace

“In this, as well as in the other operations by which society is formed or sustained, there is a natural process which cannot with impunity be departed from. If the depôts were opened while the country was still full of the produce of the late harvest, that produce would be exported and the population would become entirely dependent upon the depôts, which must, in that case, soon come to a discreditable and disastrous stop. Private dealers necessarily lay in their stock at the current market price, whatever that may be. Retired from the competition with public bodies selling food at prices artificially reduced by charitable subscriptions and grants out of national funds, the deep and inveterate root of social evil remained, and this has been laid bare by a direct stroke of an all-wise and all-merciful Providence, as if this part of the case were beyond the unassisted power of man... Posterity will trace up to that famine the commencement of a salutary revolution in the habits of a nation long singularly unfortunate, and will acknowledge that on this, as on many other occasions, Supreme Wisdom has educed permanent good out of transient evil.”

- Charles Trevelyan, *The Irish Crisis*.

# Kohei Saito

"The crude materialism of the economists who regard as the natural properties of things what are social relations of production among people... is at the same time just as crude an idealism, even fetishism, since it imputes social relations to things as inherent characteristics, and thus mystifies them... Marx's critique of classical political economy is a critique of the fetishistic (that is, ahistorical) understanding of economic categories, which identifies the appearance of capitalist society with the universal and transhistorical economic laws of nature."

- *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism.*

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# Henri de Lubac

“Christian theology has long presented two orders - the order of grace and the order of nature - as separate. If we begin by dissociating the two orders completely, however, in order to establish the existence of a natural order that could be fully and finally self-sufficient, we are all too likely to end up by seeing not so much a distinction as a complete divorce... Indeed 'it is extremely hard-as experience has shown-to pursue this idea of "pure nature" and make it anything other than a great "X" for which we have no precise intellectual meaning, and which cannot therefore help our thinking along very much, without our ending up by gradually attributing to it more and more of the qualities and privileges which attach to our present human nature in relation to God. Thus the supernatural order loses its unique splendor; and, as we shall see, by a logic whose headlong course we cannot halt, often ends by becoming no more than a kind of shadow of that supposed natural order.”

- *The Mystery of the Supernatural.*