



The notion of nature is one of the most recurring, and perhaps questioned, notions in Western thinking, from «hard» sciences, to philosophy, human and social sciences. Although its definition was never obvious, nature currently seems in need of a more radical rethinking, also due to the increasing relevance of research fields that compel to its revision. This is just the goal of the present issue of «Teoria», which also aims to let a number of hints emerge to correct, modify or even replace current definitions and understandings of nature with more adequate ones to constitute an effective reference for the problems of our time. The essays in this collection are the result of an international Call for Papers, which had a very important response in terms of number and quality of the submitted abstracts, as further proof of the fact that rethinking nature is in and for itself one of the burning issues of our time. And just by virtue of the number, quality, and interest of the submitted papers, it was decided to devote to «Rethinking 'Nature'» both issues of «Teoria 2014». Hence, to this first issue on «Burning issues» a second one will follow on «Authors and problems».

Il concetto di natura è uno dei più presenti, e forse anche più dibattuti, in tutti gli ambiti del

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pensiero occidentale, dalle scienze «dure», alla filosofia e alle scienze umane e sociali. Sebbene la sua definizione non sia stata mai pacifica, attualmente esso sembra aver bisogno di un ripensamento più radicale, dovuto anche alla sempre maggiore rilevanza di ambiti di ricerca che impongono una sua revisione. Proprio tale revisione è lo scopo che questo fascicolo di «Teoria» si prefigge, insieme a quello di far emergere una serie di spunti di riflessione per correggere, modificare ovvero anche sostituire le definizioni e le concezioni correnti di natura con altre più adeguate a costituire un riferimento efficace per i problemi del presente.

I saggi contenuti in questo fascicolo sono il risultato di un Call for Papers internazionale, che ha avuto un'importante risposta in termini di numero e di qualità degli abstract proposti, a riprova del fatto che ripensare la natura è di per sé una delle questioni aperte del nostro tempo. E proprio in virtù del numero, della qualità e dell'interesse dei contributi proposti, si è deciso di dedicare a «Ripensare la 'natura'» entrambi i fascicoli di «Teoria 2014». Di conseguenza, a questo primo fascicolo sulle «Questioni aperte» ne seguirà un secondo incentrato su «Figure e problemi».

Flavia Monceri

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Ted Benton

Get Real! Nature without Scare-Quotes

pp. 7-31

The chapter begins by noting and exploring some of the great complexity of the uses of the term “nature”. Uses of the concept of nature to characterise “internal” human nature are briefly discussed before the focus turns to social scientific approaches to “external” nature, and to the relationships between human social life and its non-human conditions. The emergence to centre-stage of concern about environmental degradation has challenged tradition sociological dualisms of “nature” versus “culture”. The materialist tradition stemming from the work of Marx and Engels is taken as one important resource for this effort. Some strengths and limitations of the work of Marx and Engels themselves are reviewed, and later work that develops the capacity of the tradition to analyse the relationship between capitalist development and the rest of nature is discussed. Concepts such as “second contradiction of capitalism”, “intentional structure” and “naturally mediated unintended consequences” are outlined.

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Alexander Riegler

Towards the Consistent Construction of Nature

pp. 33-44

For a realist, nature embodies the ultimate arbiter, while for social constructivists nature is the projection of social interests. In this paper, the highly ambiguous term “nature” is discussed from yet another position, i.e., radical constructivism. It is argued that this position is incompatible with realism and, for reasons of consistency, also with social constructivism. Furthermore, from an ethical perspective, the radical constructivist conception of nature shifts responsibility further away from God, nature, and society to the individual.

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Andrea Aguti

Perché e come ripensare oggi la natura

pp. 45-56

The essay aims to highlight the main reasons for which the theme of nature, usually left in the modern age to scientific investigation, today shows a renewed interest in philosophical reflection. Starting from some considerations in the dialectical relationship between nature and culture and taking into account the difficulty in establishing a clear meaning of the term “nature”, the paper shows that the concept of nature continues to play a significant role especially in the context of ethics, philosophical anthropology and philosophy of the mind when is understood in a normative meaning, and not merely descriptive. To the normative meaning of nature is connected a finalistic interpretation of the latter that in modern times has been widely criticized, but that still seems significant in many areas of human experience.

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Riccardo Manzotti

Galileo Debunked: A Neutral Foundation for Nature

pp. 57-74

Since Galileo's time, according to a widespread ontological framework, nature is conceptually split into absolute and point-like unities of time, space, and matter. In this paper, the empirical adequacy of this view is criticized. By and large, three fundamental features of nature do not seem to fit in it – namely change, unity, and quality. To overcome these shortcomings, an alternative framework based on causal processes, which are intrinsically spread in time and space, is fleshed out. Conscious experience is exploited as a probe into the deep structure of nature rather than as an additional phenomenon to be explained by neuroscience. In the spirit of Whitehead and the late James, a process-ontology – dubbed the spread mind – is outlined to carve nature at its joints in a way compatible both with empirical objective data and with phenomenological adequacy.

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Marta Bertolaso

Why It Proves so Difficult to Pin Down a Definition of Nature

pp. 75-92

In Philosophy of Biology a definition of what should be considered *nature* – as opposed to *nurture* – has remained an elusive issue. In order to clarify some reasons of this, I adopt in this paper the following strategy. Instead of performing a conceptual analysis of the term of nature in biological sciences, I explore two related epistemological issues that pose the question about the explanatory import of the notions of nature and nurture: a) when a circular causality seems to characterize the regulatory features of a biological behaviour and b) how the context dependency argument comes into the explanatory picture of a biological process. My thesis is that the notion of nature (and its interdependence with the notion of nurture) has a peculiar epistemological status because it implies relational causal categories.

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Joseph A. Raho

Rethinking Nature Through Synthetic Biology

pp. 93-111

The world's first self-replicating synthetic cell was created in 2010. Beyond promises of advancing fundamental scientific knowledge, synthetic biology poses various ethical problems – from risk and safety concerns to worries about tampering with nature. Whereas traditional genetic engineering aims to modify existing organisms, synthetic biology looks to design and assemble organisms de novo – i.e., from scratch. Two principal groups of moral objections to synthetic biology will be explored and assessed. I argue that the second set of ethical quandaries, raised by intrinsic objections, provides the clearest example of how synthetic biology causes us to “rethink nature”, the topic under discussion in this thematic issue of *Teoria*. Although with any technology there is increased risk of misuse, we ought to embrace synthetic biology – and with it, the complexities surrounding this new relationship.

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Koen B. Tanghe

Robots on Spaceship Earth: A Theoretical Plea for Machine Metaphors

pp. 113-130

Metaphors are inevitable core elements of the conceptual schemes that shape our thinking and behavior. Traditionally, nature is interpreted in terms of agential metaphors such as ghosts, gods, witches and angels. Science, in contrast, is characterized by contra-intuitive, mechanistic thinking and machine metaphors. Modern societies nevertheless remain, to a certain extent, in the grip of powerful agential tropes. It will be argued that they are one of the obstacles that stand in the way of both reaping the full benefits of modern science and of meeting two of the biggest challenges we have ever faced: overpopulation and climate change. Or, put differently, they are one of the reasons why there is a problematic mismatch between our modern “*Umwelt*” and “niche”.

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Robert Zwijnenberg

Biotechnology, Human Dignity and the Importance of Art

pp. 131-148

Biotechnology allows us to re-design and design anew both nature, living creatures, and also the human mind and body. This forces us to reconsider our traditional views of humans and nature. What limits do we wish to impose on biotechnological intervention in nature and the human body? What view of nature and of what it means to be human informs these limits? All debates on biotechnology seem to rely on the concept of human dignity. Any search for a different ethical and aesthetic approach to humans and nature has to begin with this concept. The meaning of human dignity is almost indefinable, however. I argue that art, too, should have a role in our reflections on the applications and implications of biotechnology.

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Theodore Grudin

The Artinatural and the Importance of Nature Studies

pp. 149-163

The conceptual separation between the natural and the artificial in environmental discourse limits the potential for progress in the spheres of social justice and sustainability. Overcoming the conceptual binaries that are implied in the term “environment” may enable progress in these areas. Several key moments in cultural history – in philosophy, science, literature and film – provide perspective on how these binaries function. If terminology has been a constraint, terminology may also allow new ways of seeing and understanding. Integrative terminology allows thinking that moves beyond bifurcating cosmologies that perceive objects as natural or artificial and, instead, the two realms can be seen as interwoven, as “artinatural”. The field of Nature Studies can help students explore these more accurate languages and approaches to understanding nature’s complexities.

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Lars Tønder

Public Reason Renaturalized

pp. 165-182

This article takes up recent discussions of nature and the sensorium in order to rethink public reason in deeply divided societies. The aim is not to reject the role of reason-giving but rather to infuse it with new meaning, bringing the reasonable back to its sensorially inflected circumstances. The article develops this argument via a sensorial orientation to politics that not only reframes existing critiques of neo-Kantianism but also includes an alternative, renaturalized conception of public reason, one that allows us to overcome the disconnect between the account we give of reason and the way it is mobilized in a world of deep pluralism. The article concludes with a discussion of how a renaturalized conception of public reason might change the positioning of contemporary democratic theory vis-à-vis the struggle for empowerment and pluralization in an age of neo-liberalism and state-surveillance.

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Flavia Monceri

The Nature of the “Ruling Body”: Embodiment, Ableism and Normalcy

pp. 183-200

In this article I try to show that the assumptions we rely upon when constructing notions of human nature strongly affect the concrete human individuals by building up the correct, adequate, human body as the norm to which anyone of us must conform in order to be declared fully human. In short, the construction of the “ruling body” moving from a particular definition of human nature is the topic of this article, as well as its implications for those human bodies that are not able, or willing, to conform. I have chosen to show the basically totalitarian character of the present (and still mainstream) notion of the “human nature” by means of referring to the case of the so-called “disabled bodies”. My aim is to advocate a different notion of nature, according to which there is no possibility to build stable categories of the human body and the human being (in the singular), due just to the fact that every possible notion of nature is unavoidably constructed by (some) human beings for the sake of themselves, therefore always implying the exercise of power.

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