ANZATS 2021 *Theological Ethics*
## Elective Session Proposals – Theological Anthropology

	Presenter 1	**Presenter 2**	**Presenter 3**
Session 1	Maja Whitaker	Louise Gosbell	Simon Wayte
Session 2	Sarah Bacaller	Daniel Patterson	Jordan Jones
Session 3	Sandra Godde	Glen O'Brien	Doru Costache

1. **Presenter**   Maja Whitaker
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Shaping Our Bodies to Our Shape Our Selves: Contemporary Body Theology in Practice

The modern person has a complicated relationship with the body: the influence of gnosticism is ongoing despite a contemporary "return to the body" in sociological and theological realms. Our approach to the body is more likely to be characterised by manipulation and striving than the divine affirmation that "it is good" (Gen 1). In thrall to the prevailing cultural ideologies that idolise projection, progress and proficiency, the modern person is burdened with the responsibility to make up her own life. The body is a project to be shaped in order to both express and shape a person's sense of self-identity—a project destined to failure at some point. This dynamic underlies the modern epidemic of ill health, eating disorders, orthorexia, obesity and body-shaming.
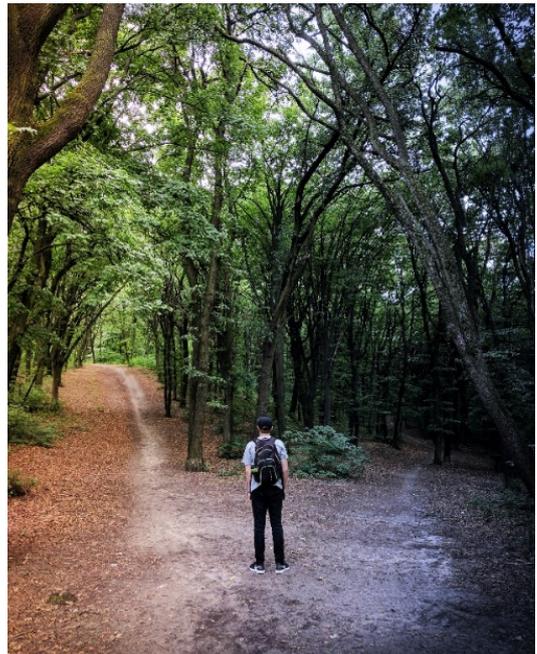
Contemporary Christians are poorly insulated from these perils. A barely perceptible gnosticism undergirds much of the popular theology of the body in practice, and the church has done little to address these ills, instead becoming mired in other body-issues centred around sexuality and reproduction. This paper offers a diagnosis of the problem in modern Christian thought, and asks, what can a biblical theology of the body and the historical tradition of Christian thought and practice offer as a remedy? Ultimately, the human person need not strive to establish his or her identity, instead it is held secure in Christ. Both beauty and health, theologically defined, emerge from the integration of self and body, and the participation of the whole person in the divine life.

2. **Presenter**   Louise Gosbell
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'We await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body' (Phil 3:20-21): Locating 'Disabled' Bodies in the Resurrection

Since the inception of the field of disability theology, questions have been raised about the place of human disability in the resurrection. Some scholars contend that disability is a direct

consequence of the fall of humanity and thus consider disability as incongruous with life in a perfect and redeemed creation. In contrast, other scholars consider disability an indelible marker of an individual's identity and therefore as irremovable as one's gender or ethnicity. For these scholars, disability is part of the natural diversity of humanity in God's creation which means we must allow for the retention of at least some forms of disability in the future kingdom. To what extent does scripture inform our views on the abilities and functions of the human body in the resurrection? Can the presence of Jesus' resurrection scars inform our understanding of resurrected bodies? This paper will give a brief overview of both the elimination and retention theories of disability in the resurrection and outline the ways in which these theories both reflect and inform our understanding of the value of 'disabled' bodies in the world and the church today. Finally, it will propose some anthropological and theological concepts which may help us navigate this complex, dichotomous discussion.

3. **Presenter** Simon Wayte
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Restoring the Human Face of Christ in a Dehumanising World

In today's world, the forces of dehumanisation reduce the human person to a cog in the machine – to a substance without mystery or ultimate purpose. One tendril of these dehumanising forces can be traced back to the classical period and the definition of person developed by Boethius. In his definition of the person as an individual substance of a rational nature Boethius asserts that person properly pertains to substance not accident. As useful as this definition may be in an argument against Monophysitism it tends to close off the possibility of personhood being properly applied to relation.

The development of a relational definition of person has the potential to restore a sense of mystery and ultimate purpose to the human reality. This paper fashions a relational definition of personhood through the retrieval of elements already present in the tradition. Taking an initial lead from Thomas Aquinas, together with Henry of Ghent and Richard of St Victor a general definition of person based on relation is developed.

A relational definition of personhood opens up the beauty of the divinization of the human person as Christification. In this process an alignment with the personal kenotic attitude of Christ brings about a union which has the power to transfigure the whole human reality restoring the human face of Christ in a dehumanising world.

4. **Presenter** Sarah Bacaller
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Interpreting Theological Anthropologies by Reference to Attachment Theory: Heuristic Possibilities

Concepts of divine truth and authority shape Christian self-understanding and theological anthropologies — grounding self amidst others in the world before God. Such concepts are diversely manifested in social markers, taking shape in the language, practices and structures of ecclesial communities. But how are healthy theological anthropologies that resource human flourishing to be differentiated from life-diminishing theological anthropologies that ultimately cramp and distort senses of the self? By what criteria are Christian understandings of selfhood, truth and authority to be approached, beyond either absolute assertions of authority, or flattened relativity of individualised personal experience? Attachment theory, drawn from the field of

psychology (after Bowlby and Ainsworth), offers an intriguing hermeneutic for understanding core human needs and relational formation. Its assertion that human beings in their infancy require a secure, safe and reliable base (caregiver) to found a cohesive sense of self has changed approaches to child development and nurture worldwide. Attachment theory affirms that views of self, others and world are shaped relationally, through exploration and return; ultimately, through trust. This paper explores how attachment theory yields helpful possibilities for filtering theological anthropologies, including concepts of truth and authority, in Christian life. It seeks to get beyond objective versus subjective notions of truth, by reference to attachment theory in dialogue with Hegelian notions of interpersonal recognition. Implications are extrapolated to theological anthropologies expressed in Christian communities by asking: What is it that we, as human beings, need in order to thrive within theological articulations of life?

5. **Presenter**   Daniel Patterson
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Returning with Butler to Eden:
A Critical Engagement with Sarah Coakley's Reading of Judith Butler's Theory of the Body

In her influential article, "The Eschatological Body: Gender, Transformation, and God," Sarah Coakley offers a reading of Judith Butler's theory of the body. Coakley suggests Butler's work exemplifies the modern ironic obsession with the body by theorising a way to overcome the body. By drawing on the thought of one patristic theologian, Gregory of Nyssa, Coakley sets out to show that Butler's desire to overcome the body is grounded in a hidden desire for God in the eschaton. In this paper, I challenge this reading of Butler's thought by arguing that Butler does not harbour a tacit desire to overcome her own body by looking to the future. I suggest instead that Butler gives voice to her desire to overcome another body by looking to the beginning. I conclude by contending that theology properly engages with Butler's gender theory only when the theologian grasps Butler's principal concern of how the body in the beginning relates to our bodies now. This protological (re)orientation not only provides a corrective to Coakley's suggested theological reading of Butler, but also opens new avenues for theological engagement with Butler.

6. **Presenter**   Jordan Jones
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Vulnerability: Precarious Life as a Call for and from Humanity

What is vulnerability? What does vulnerability have to do with our humanity? And how can our vulnerability as creatures inform ethics? These questions and more besides were first piqued when I read Judith Butler's Precarious Life (2004) in which Butler explored questions of grieving, violence, and vulnerability in the context of a post-9/11 world. In Part 1 of this presentation I will look at what Butler has written about the precarious state of human existence individually and socially. Part 2 will then look at how vulnerability is both inherently political and ethical. While Part 3 will then ask how Butler's theory of vulnerability might bring together anthropology and ethics in theological dialogue.

7. **Presenter**   Sandra Godde
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What Does It Mean to Be Human? Examining the Importance of Embodiment for Personal Identity through a Transhumanist and Christian Worldview

Is the corporeal nature of being human essential to our future human flourishing? In our reach for human progress and immortality, what part does the human body play? The Transhumanism movement, based on a belief that we are transitional humans on our way to becoming posthuman, offers a vision of the future in which we have the freedom to escape our humanity as we know it. This is proposed by either transforming the human body into a cyborg by making it part of cyber networks, or by ultimately abolishing it altogether as an imperfect carrier of the mind/soul with its frailties, vulnerabilities and limitations. This idea is proposed by uploading our intelligence into either a mechanical substrate or a superior prosthetic body in order to cheat death. Much of modern technology points towards a transhuman future: genetic augmentation, cell regeneration, implantable devices that interact directly with the brain, artificial intelligence, robotics, cybernetics, nanotechnology, cloning, uploading the mind and other technologies that could all change what it means to be human in the future. The eschatology of the transhumanist, that posits a post-human entity dislodged from its biological body in the future, is vastly different to the biblical eschatology of immortality of the entire human person, as demonstrated by the resurrected Christ. What does the bible reveal about the nature of humanity, the importance of the body, and the end goal of future flourishing? Does the biblical hope of resurrection of the dead, where the redeemed retain the unity of body-soul-spirit in a glorified and transformed body, without corruption, offer humanity an infinitely superior hope than the Transhumanist's vision for the future?

8.   **Presenter**   Glen O'Brien
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'A Curious Machine': John Wesley's Theological Anthropology and the Posthuman Future

In his fascination with science and technology as instruments of human flourishing and in the teleological direction of his new creation anthropology, John Wesley's thought can inform both Posthuman and Transhuman discourse. Wesley was something of a polymath – interested, though not always adept, in a wide variety of scientific and mechanical experiments and remedies. It would be a stretch to say he was a 'futurist' but when we couple his interest in emerging technologies with his later eschatological sermons on the nature of the new creation, we discern a teleological direction in the broad shape of his theology. For Wesley, the future of humanity, of non-human animals, and of the very constituent elements of the organic world were caught up together in God's preparing, birthing, and perfecting grace. The human telos was thus part of a larger divine purpose for the entire cosmos. This paper will consider a number of Wesley's sermons on theological anthropology as well as three later sermons on eschatological themes and argue that he anticipated a cosmic renewal in which human technology played a part in the divine action that moved the universe toward its final purpose.

9.   **Presenter**   Doru Costache
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Beasts, People, and Gods in Clement of Alexandria

Perhaps one of the most influential early Christian authors, Clement of Alexandria (d. ca 215) made the challenging claim that humanity shelters three categories of human beings, that is, beasts, people, and gods (Stromateis 7.6). His stance is far from unique, though he must have been

the first Christian author to articulate it in this manner. A generation after him, Plotinus mentioned three categories of human beings, of which the highest was the "divine man" (Enneads 5.9). Clement's gods and Plotinus' divine people are ethically and spiritually accomplished, the hallmark of their experience being the contemplative aptitude. But perfection is not by design; it is the outcome of a lifelong process of transformation. For Clement, on whose thinking I focus, this process follows three stages, ethics, physics, and divine vision (sometimes this Platonic schema makes room for its Aristotelian variant, where the first two stages appear in the reverse order). I begin by examining the opposite process, which transforms human beings into beasts. Then I consider the process of divine transformation through the three stages. I shall be working within the framework of Bogdan G. Bucur's study, 'Hierarchy, Eldership, Isangelia' (2015). It is against this backdrop that I intend to elucidate Clement's views of what makes a human being.