

IARPT 2025 CFP

The Institute for American Religious and Philosophical Thought (IARPT) is pleased to provide the Call for Paper for its 2025 meeting, to be held in Harrisonburg, VA, June 16-19, 2025. The meeting theme is *Dark Naturalism: Suffering, Death, and Grief in a Wholly Natural World*. As the title indicates, central to this theme are questions about the meanings and experiences of suffering, death, and grief in a world without a supernatural God. Such a view of the world need not exclude the transcendent, sacred, holy, divine, or the good, beautiful, and true. With that expansiveness in mind, this conference calls for submissions that engage suffering, illness, death, grief, and adjacent concepts and experiences from theological and philosophical perspectives that presume a wholly natural world (however narrowly or widely, thinly or deeply the "natural" is defined).

Questions papers could address include (but, of course, are not limited to):

- What is life's meaning and death's significance in a wholly natural world? To what extent are the value of life and the inevitability of death interrelated in a wholly natural world, and what existential values or meanings can be drawn from such interrelatedness? How can pragmatic naturalist, process naturalist, or adjacent traditions address the psychological and cultural dynamics of the "denial of death" (see, for example, Ernst Becker)?
- What practices or rituals, existing or imagined, are appropriate to naturalistic views of death? What might wholly naturalistic mourning rituals look like?
- What can naturalistic philosophies and theologies contribute to the ethics and politics of aging?
- What resources can pragmatic naturalist, process naturalist, or related perspectives offer to an ethics of suffering and death? How can such perspectives contribute to our understanding of and interventions within the social determinants of illness, suffering, and death?
- How can pragmatic naturalist, process naturalist, or related perspectives enable new ways of understanding and responding to mental illness therapies, addiction disorders, and addiction recovery?
- How might naturalistic perspectives inform our understandings and experiences of grief and grievability? How should we understand the work of grief and mourning in pragmatic, naturalistic, and / or process perspective?
- How do or should the finitude of the world and the precarity of life inform our moral values, principles, and ways of life? How does moral worth or standing depend, or not, on the finitude of the subject of worth or standing? What role does the relative grievability of various forms of life play in how we account for the value of those lives?
- What is the place of tragedy in pragmatism, naturalism, or process thought? Do these traditions make sufficient room for the tragic? What distinctive resources might these traditions provide for conceptualizing tragedy in meaningfully new ways?
- Does the concept of evil make sense in a wholly natural world? Is there a need for a theodicy in such a world?
- Can the concept of an "afterlife" have meaning in a naturalistic view of the world?

- What does it mean for a wholly natural world to be overly humanized (e.g., the Anthropocene), and are distinctions between moral and natural evil still meaningful in such a world?
- What resources do naturalist, pragmatist, process, and adjacent traditions offer to our understanding of death, loss, grief, and mourning?
- Additional topics might include treatments of social death, system death, structural injustice, war, melancholy, illness, bad moods, soul sickness, nihilism, or work on moral emotions such as guilt, shame, disgust, or terror.

These questions and potential paper topics are suggestive, not exhaustive. Proposals on related questions are also welcome. Moreover, as always, we will consider proposals related to the intellectual traditions of particular interest to IARPT (e.g., empiricism, naturalism, pragmatism, process philosophy, and liberal theology).

While IARPT meetings are traditionally structured around paper readings of approximately twenty minutes and a few longer invited keynote lectures, we invite **creative approaches** to conference sessions. Proposals for panels, debates, discussions, fishbowls, etc., are highly encouraged.

Proposals should contain a descriptive title and a brief (no more than 500 words) but informative and readable description of the paper to be presented, with some indication of why the proposer considers the paper an important contribution to the theme of the conference. Proposals should also include a brief (150-word) author bio.

Applicants should also note that the conference is in-person, and we are committed to maintaining the collegiality IARPT meetings are known for. For this reason, we are not accepting proposals for papers to be delivered remotely or virtually.

All proposals should be sent in Word format to the program chairs: Michael Hogue (mhogue@meadville.edu) and Dan Ott (daniel.ott@emu.edu). The deadline for submissions is **February 1**.

Potential funding for travel and lodging is available in the form of the W. Creighton Peden Scholarship; please click [here](#) for more information, and please indicate your interest in this option upon the submission of your proposal.