

FSA Gaetano Massa 2026

Session abstracts

Session Mathematica

Modeling Intelligibility?

This is the fifth and final installment of our five-year research project on the history and philosophy of mathematics. Our topic this year culminates our multidisciplinary research of the definition, properties, and nature of number by examining ancient and modern theoretical models for mapping intelligibility in Plato, Plotinus, Proclus, Augustine, Francesco Patrizi, modal logic, and mathematics.

Session Mapping Low and Thinking High

The epistemological value of visions and visualisations in theurgy

Visions occupy a central epistemological role as structured encounters with the divine. In the Chaldean Oracles, they grant the soul mediated access to truths beyond discursive reasoning. Iamblichus presents visions as both gnosis and transformative engagement with the divine hierarchy, while Proclus frames them as illumination within the Neoplatonic system, complementary to philosophical reasoning.

Neoplatonic theurgy employed visualization as a central method for facilitating the soul's ascent and alignment with the cosmic and divine order. In Iamblichus and Proclus, visualization practices functioned as ritually efficacious operations capable of actualizing the presence of higher intelligible entities, thus emphasizing the role of phantasia in theurgy. Through carefully structured mental images (often of divine synthemata, cosmic hierarchies, or luminous emanations) the practitioner sought to attune the soul's faculties to the ontological structures they represented. These techniques complemented ritual actions and invocations, forming a holistic ritual technology combining sensory experience with noetic reality.

Within this framework, visualization served as both cognitive training and metaphysical participation, enabling the practitioner to transcend discursive reasoning and engage directly with divine causes.

Thus, visions and visualization techniques in theurgy did function at the intersection of ritual, metaphysics, and epistemology, demonstrating the legitimacy of non-discursive modes of knowing in Neoplatonic theurgy.

But if knowledge is traditionally validated through reason and demonstration, how can visionary theurgical experience claim epistemic authority without collapsing into mere subjective illusion? Can truths apprehended through divine vision be communicated or justified within the frameworks of discursive reasoning, or are they inherently

incommunicable, raising a paradox between knowledge and expression? Besides, if theurgy allows the soul to access realities beyond intellect, does this imply that rational cognition is incomplete, or that divine revelation can surpass the very criteria by which knowledge is judged? Last, how may the theurgist distinguish between authentic theurgical insight and revelation on the one hand and illusions on the other hand, if both operate outside the usual boundaries of rational verification?

Session Porphyriana

Dörrie calls Porphyry the ‘last half-Platonist’, and his work is indeed an important source for the reconstruction and study of pre-Plotinian Platonism. Faithful to the Platonic tradition, his task focuses on synthesising and reconciling all the wisdom of the Greeks in his interpretation. The variety of titles offers us a panoramic view of the scope, literary genre and content of his enormous work, in which the exegetical approach predominates.

Porphyry's exegetical pluralism is the result of a conscious methodological choice, which does not exclude an organic and unified approach to his interpretation. In his commentaries, Porphyry's exegesis seeks to find complementarity and harmony between the doctrines of Plato, Plotinus and Aristotle, representatives of what he considers to be ancient universal wisdom.

Session Aristotle and Aristotelians

The purpose of this panel is to explore aspects of Music in the peripatetic tradition. We begin with Aristotle and Music, which creates the conditions for Aristoxenus' interpretation of Aristotle An. Post. The final presentation on Al-Fārābī will carry the theme of Music in an Islamic Peripatetic tradition.

Session Vivarium novum: Συμφωνία Πλατωνική

Organised by the Accademia Vivarium novum, Συμφωνία Πλατωνική examines the transmission of key Platonic concepts and texts from antiquity to the Renaissance, with a focus on their metaphysical, ethical, historical, and textual dimensions. It brings together scholars of different fields to study how Platonic doctrines were received and reshaped across various traditions. Its goal is to foster scholarly engagement with the enduring cultural significance of the Platonic thought.

Session Later Platonism and Gnosticism

This panel includes papers on the polemic between Plotinus and the Gnostics, on post-Plotinian engagements with Gnostic and Christian texts, and on the philosophical features of Gnostic writings. The presenters will discuss metaphysical, hermeneutical, and historical aspects of Neoplatonic-Gnostic interactions.

Session Cusanus : Sources and Projections

The panel focuses on the philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa, his medieval sources, and his projections into the Renaissance and modernity. On this occasion, several topics will be examined in order to trace their origins in preceding Christian Platonism (Augustine, Eriugena, the *Liber XIV philosophorum*). The expression of his thought as reflected in his sermons will be assessed, and its projection will be examined in the Florentine Platonists and in Giordano Bruno

Session Aporiai polietias

This panel presents the outcomes of the three-year research project of the Philosophy of Artificial Intelligence group, whose members are the speakers. It explores AI's impact on politics, epistemology, collective imaginaries, embodiment, and ethics, focusing on information technologies, philosophy of mind, and the political transformations of modernity.

Session Patres

The inaugural session of the research group *What Is Hidden and What Is Manifest in Early Christian Thought?* explores the dialectic between concealment and revelation in early Christian theology, with particular attention to how transcendence and immanence are negotiated in dialogue with Neoplatonic metaphysics and, in some cases, the Jewish tradition. Benedetto Neola examines this tension through the lens of Gregory of Nyssa's theory of names, focusing on his refutation of Eunomius and the theological implications of naming the divine. Ilaria Ramelli offers a cross-traditional analysis of the hidden and the manifest, tracing these categories across Christian, Jewish, and pagan theological frameworks. Ilinca **Tanaseanu-Döbler** addresses the well-known metaphysical axiom "everything is in everything," exploring how both Neoplatonic and Christian thinkers deploy it to account for the non-spatial presence of the divine. Finally, Michele Abbate turns to the most influential, and perhaps most enigmatic, synthesis of Neoplatonic and Christian thought in Late Antiquity: the theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.

Session Soul, Eros and Music in Ficino

Soul, Music, and Melancholy in Ficino's Letters and Treatises.

The panel will deal with a range of interconnected issues in Marsilio Ficino's philosophy. Against the metaphysical background of his reading of Plotinian psychology, we will consider especially the relation between music and melancholy. Given Ficino's use of both letters and treatises as media of expression, the implications of his contrasting methodology will also be examined.

Session Interiority: Imagination, Creativity, and Consciousness

The panels explore conceptual maps for understanding interiority from the 'first-person' perspective of the agent who knows, thinks, and acts. This year, we focus on ancient and later thinkers' imaginative visions captured in philosophy, literature, and art with the aim to elucidate human consciousness and its relation to the world and the divine.

Session Neoplatonic Religion and Theurgy

This research session on visions, light and imagination in theurgy advances a critical reconsideration of how Neoplatonism theorizes the relationship between religious experience, imagination, ritual, theories of divine manifestation, perception, truth and reality. Rather than considering visionary experience as a marginal, allegoric or merely literary phenomenon, we will study its literalist and systematic integration into Neoplatonic metaphysics, psychology, and ritual theory. In Neoplatonism, phantasia is not discarded as purely misleading and has, on the contrary, a strong epistemological function. The session thus studies the systematization of a doctrine of phantasia in Neoplatonism leading to visions of the divine and divine beings, and of the characteristics of these visions - what is their level of communion between the soul and the gods? How about visions of angels and archangels? What is the role of light, the eye of the soul and that of the Intellect of the soul during theurgical visions? When do these visions occur, and are they necessarily related to a level of reality that verbal language fails to express? To what extent are dreams considered as "visions" in Neoplatonism, and how can we distinguish common dreams from dreams sent to us by the gods? And most importantly on the epistemological level, how may we differentiate mere subjectivism and pathological hallucinations from visions of the divine according to the Neoplatonists? In Neoplatonic theurgy, visions are transformed, from a merely subjective capacity of the individual soul, into a theophanic medium, questioning the very boundaries between perception, differentiation, the separation between subject-object, reality and truth. Visions, as the Neoplatonists understood and interpreted them, are capable of mediating between levels of reality that would otherwise remain discontinuous.

This transformation raises significant epistemological questions. If rational thought (*dianoia*) is, by definition, bound to discursive analysis, then visionary states - whose content is symbolic, immediate, and often resistant to linguistic expression - require an alternative criterion of truth. The session explores the claim that theurgy provides precisely such a criterion through its integration of visionary experience within the metaphysical framework of the soul's descent and ascent.

Session: Antiquity Stepping Up

The session "Antiquity Out of Step" brings into focus dimensions of ancient philosophy that resist linear narratives and canonical boundaries. By shifting attention beyond the standard alignment of Greek philosophy with its classical centers and dominant traditions, the panel explores dissonant trajectories, marginal inheritances, and alternative genealogies. Together, the contributions propose an Antiquity that is not synchronized with later systematizations, but alive in its internal frictions and unresolved questions.