

# NATURE

Authored by  
**mohammad looti**

October 18, 2025

## RECOMMENDED CITATION

mohammad looti (2025). *NATURE*. PSYCHOLOGICAL SCALES. Retrieved from <https://scales.arabpsychology.com/?p=49114>

## Nature

**Primary Disciplinary Field(s):** Philosophy, Ecology, Science, Psychology, Metaphysics

### 1. Core Definition and Scope

The term **Nature** functions primarily as an expansive, umbrella concept utilized across disparate academic disciplines to delineate a wide spectrum of theories, ideals, and observable phenomena. In its broadest metaphysical application, Nature encapsulates the entirety of the physical realm, often equated with the totality of reality itself, extending from the subatomic structure of matter to the vastness of the cosmos and the fundamental laws governing their interaction. This definition positions Nature as everything that exists independently of human modification or artifice, representing the fundamental structure and processes of the universe. Consequently, discussions pertaining to the ultimate reality or the inherent order of existence frequently default to an exploration of Nature, establishing it as a foundational term in ontological and cosmological inquiry.

A more precise and empirical definition--particularly prevalent in the biological and geographical sciences--restricts **Nature** to the observable phenomena of the natural world. This interpretation specifically references entities such as **plants**, **animals**, geological formations, weather systems, and other physical features that constitute Earth's biotic and abiotic components. This view emphasizes the dynamic, self-regulating systems of the biosphere, highlighting the complex interdependencies within ecosystems and the processes of evolution, growth, and decay. When employed in this context, Nature serves as a label for the wilderness, the untamed environment, or any place where human intervention is minimal or absent, thereby providing a clear distinction between the organic, spontaneous world and the constructed human environment.

The complexity of the concept arises from the necessity to distinguish between Nature as a governing force--the underlying principles of reality--and Nature as a collection of entities--the specific manifestations observed. Furthermore, the inclusion of humanity within or exclusion from Nature forms a central philosophical dilemma. If humans are physical beings subject to biological laws, then human actions and creations could be argued to be natural phenomena. Conversely, the capacity for abstract thought, technology, and intentional manipulation of the environment often leads to a practical separation, where Nature is defined precisely by what it is not: the domain of culture, civilization, and the built environment. Navigating these overlapping definitions requires recognizing that Nature operates as both a descriptive term for observable objects and a normative term for inherent qualities or systems.

### 2. Etymology and Historical Development

The etymological root of the term **Nature** traces back to the Latin word *natura*, meaning "essential

qualities, innate disposition," and originally related to birth or production (from *natus*, past participle of *nasci*, "to be born"). This Latin concept was itself a translation of the ancient Greek term *physis* (φύσις), which referred to the inherent, dynamic principle or source of growth and change within an object. Early Greek philosophers, often referred to as the Presocratics or natural philosophers, were primarily concerned with understanding the *physis*--seeking the ultimate, unchanging substance or fundamental law that governed the diverse changes observed in the material world. This established the concept of Nature, from its very inception, as intrinsically linked to both origin and inherent essence.

During the Classical and Medieval periods, the concept evolved through the writings of thinkers like Aristotle, who emphasized that the nature of a thing was its purpose or final cause (teleology), defining its movement, character, and necessary destiny. Medieval philosophy integrated this classical understanding with theology, often viewing Nature as God's creation--an ordered, rational, and knowable system reflecting divine intention. This perspective allowed for the development of the concept of **Natural Law**, the belief that moral and ethical systems are inherent in the structure of the universe, discernible through reason, and accessible to all human beings. This historical development solidified Nature not just as a physical entity, but as a moral and ontological blueprint.

The Scientific Revolution of the 17th century profoundly transformed the understanding of Nature, shifting from a teleological framework to a **mechanistic worldview**. Figures such as Isaac Newton described Nature as operating according to universal, fixed mathematical laws, comparable to a giant machine. This enabled unprecedented scientific advancement but stripped Nature of its inherent vitality or consciousness. Following this mechanistic phase, the Romantic movement of the late 18th and 19th centuries reacted against the cold, deterministic view, re-emphasizing Nature as a source of aesthetic beauty, spiritual inspiration, and moral purity. This dichotomy between Nature as a predictable mechanism (Science) and Nature as a vital, sublime entity (Romanticism) continues to inform modern Western thought and environmental philosophy.

### 3. Key Characteristics and Conceptual Frameworks

**Autonomy and Independence:** A defining characteristic of Nature is its perceived ability to exist and operate independently of human volition. Natural processes--such as geological erosion, biological evolution, and astronomical events--occur without requiring human permission or design, underscoring the vast timescale and complexity that characterize the physical realm.

**Order and Lawfulness:** Despite its apparent chaos, Nature is fundamentally characterized by underlying order, manifesting in the predictability of physical laws (e.g., gravity, thermodynamics) and biological mechanisms (e.g., genetics, homeostasis). This lawfulness allows for systematic scientific inquiry and prediction across all scales of reality.

**Dynamism and Change:** Nature is never static; it is defined by perpetual change, flux, and

cyclical processes. These changes encompass phenomena ranging from instantaneous chemical reactions to gradual climate shifts and the continuous creation and destruction of matter and energy, making adaptation and resilience central features of natural systems.

One crucial philosophical framework used to analyze Nature is the distinction articulated by Baruch Spinoza between *Natura Naturans* and *Natura Naturata*. **Natura Naturans** (Nature Nurturing or Nature Nattering) refers to Nature as an active, generative, and creative process--the underlying power or cause. Conversely, **Natura Naturata** (Nature Nurtured or Nature Nattered) refers to the totality of specific effects, products, and concrete entities resulting from the creative power, encompassing all observable phenomena such as **plants, animals**, and physical features. This framework helps to intellectually separate the fundamental generative force (the principle of change) from its transient manifestations (the observed world).

Perhaps the most enduring conceptual framework involving the term is the pervasive dichotomy of **Nature versus Culture**. This intellectual separation defines Nature as the realm of the inherited, the essential, the uncontrolled, and the purely biological, while Culture represents the domain of the acquired, the conventional, the consciously manipulated, and the social. Historically, this distinction has been used to justify human exceptionalism and the subjugation of the natural world, positioning civilization as an escape from the brutality or necessity inherent in the natural state. However, contemporary critical theory often challenges this rigid binary, recognizing that human culture is necessarily embedded within and dependent upon natural systems.

A related characteristic is the concept of the **Wild**, or the unmodified state. In this context, Nature represents that which is untouched by human technology or intensive management. The preservation of wilderness areas is based on the aesthetic and ecological value assigned to these pristine or relatively undisturbed environments. However, the degree to which any part of the Earth remains truly "wild" is increasingly debated, given the global impact of human activities such as climate change and pollution, which permeate even the most remote ecosystems. The concept of the wild thus serves less as a strict geographical locator and more as an idealized standard against which the degree of anthropogenic change can be measured.

#### 4. Nature in Scientific Disciplines (Ecology and Physics)

In the field of **Ecology**, Nature is analyzed as a system of interconnected living organisms and their environment. The focus here is intensely practical and observational, aligning closely with the source definition: "the phenomena which are observed in the natural world." Ecological studies investigate how energy flows through food webs, how species interact (e.g., competition, symbiosis), and how abiotic factors (climate, soil) structure biotic communities. Key ecological concepts such as **biodiversity**, carrying capacity, and nutrient cycling are essential components of understanding Nature's self-regulatory mechanisms. Furthermore, modern conservation biology

frames the preservation of Nature as vital not only for intrinsic value but also for maintaining the essential ecosystem services that sustain human civilization.

The physical sciences, including **Physics** and Cosmology, interpret Nature on a fundamentally different, often non-biological, scale. Here, Nature is synonymous with the physical universe and the overarching laws that govern it. This includes the four fundamental forces, the properties of matter and energy, and the evolution of the cosmos since the Big Bang. While ecology deals with specific life phenomena, physics seeks universal constants and deterministic relationships that apply everywhere. The pursuit of a Theory of Everything is, in essence, an attempt to fully articulate the intrinsic Nature of reality and physical law, providing a comprehensive framework for all natural occurrences.

The observational link is critical across both scales. Whether examining biological diversity or quantum mechanics, science relies on the methodical observation of phenomena--a direct echo of the definition that Nature is "simply the phenomena which are observed in the natural world." This emphasis on observation distinguishes scientific inquiry into Nature from purely speculative metaphysical exploration. The scientific definition of Nature thus demands empirical evidence, reproducibility, and adherence to testable hypotheses, making the study of Nature a cumulative, evidence-based endeavor that constantly refines our understanding of the physical world.

## 5. Significance in Philosophy and Metaphysics

Philosophically, Nature holds immense significance, particularly in the realm of ethics and politics through the concept of **Natural Law**. Philosophers from the Stoics to Enlightenment thinkers like John Locke argued that inherent moral principles are discernible through rational reflection upon the structure of Nature. In this view, Nature is not merely descriptive but prescriptive, providing a standard against which human laws and institutions can be judged. Violations of Natural Law--such as the infringement of fundamental human rights--are considered fundamentally unjust because they contradict the necessary order built into the fabric of the universe, providing a powerful basis for moral and political critiques.

A significant metaphysical problem concerning Nature revolves around the existence of suffering and imperfection, often referred to as the problem of "natural evil." If Nature is ordered and potentially divine or rational, how does one account for catastrophic events like earthquakes, diseases, and the inherent brutality of survival (e.g., predation and resource scarcity)? This challenge forces a critical examination of whether Nature is inherently benevolent, indifferent, or characterized by a combination of creative and destructive forces. Responses range from recognizing Nature's amorality--it operates without moral intent--to theological explanations concerning the fallibility of creation or the necessity of systemic cycles of destruction for renewal.

In contemporary thought, the concept of Nature is central to **Environmental Ethics**. This branch of

philosophy scrutinizes human attitudes toward the non-human world, debating whether Nature holds intrinsic value (value independent of its utility to humans) or merely instrumental value. The rise of environmental movements has challenged traditional anthropocentrism--the view that humans are the center of moral consideration--and advocated for biocentrism or ecocentrism, asserting that all life or entire ecosystems possess moral standing. This shift has profound implications for resource management, conservation policy, and global efforts to mitigate the consequences of the Anthropocene era.

## 6. Psychological and Behavioral Dimensions (Nature vs. Nurture)

Within **Psychology** and the behavioral sciences, **Nature** is most famously defined in opposition to Nurture, forming the basis of one of the field's most enduring debates. In this context, Nature refers specifically to the inherent, biological, or genetic predispositions that influence human personality, intelligence, cognitive development, and behavior. These innate factors include inherited traits, temperaments, reflexes, and the fundamental structure of the brain that dictates biological drives. Understanding the contribution of Nature involves analyzing genetic blueprints, hereditary components of mental health conditions, and the universality of certain behaviors across cultures.

The classic **Nature versus Nurture** debate seeks to quantify the relative influence of genetics (Nature) against environmental factors (Nurture, including upbringing, culture, and experience) in shaping an individual. While early research often sought clear, separate percentages attributable to each, modern psychological consensus recognizes that this is a false dichotomy. Instead, virtually all complex human traits are understood to result from a continuous, dynamic interaction between genetic potential and environmental influence. For example, a person may have a genetic predisposition for anxiety (Nature), but the extent to which that anxiety manifests or is managed is determined by their developmental environment and coping strategies (Nurture).

Current research, particularly in fields like **Epigenetics**, explores the integrated mechanisms through which environmental factors can switch genes on or off without altering the underlying DNA sequence. This sophisticated view demonstrates that Nature and Nurture are not two competing forces but two aspects of a unified system, where experience literally modifies the expression of inherited potential. Consequently, the psychological understanding of Nature has moved beyond simple determinism, emphasizing the complex, probabilistic interplay between the biological self and the ecological and social environment throughout the human lifespan.

## 7. Debates and Criticisms

A significant ongoing debate concerns the definitional boundaries of **Nature**, especially in a world profoundly reshaped by human activity. Critics argue that the traditional definition--that which is untouched by humanity--is increasingly archaic, as global processes like pollution, climate change,

and habitat modification mean that few, if any, ecosystems remain pristine. The concept of the **Anthropocene** suggests that humanity is now the dominant geological force shaping the planet, making all environments, to some degree, cultural artifacts. This realization necessitates redefining Nature to include human influence, acknowledging that concepts like urban parks, managed forests, and even genetically modified organisms exist within a novel, hybrid natural-cultural sphere.

Another key criticism targets the Romantic idealization of Nature, often referred to as the myth of the "noble savage" or the portrayal of a benign, harmonious wilderness. This critique points out that Nature is characterized by intense competition, disease, violence, and unpredictable destruction, which are equally "natural" as beauty and order. Relying on a romanticized view risks overlooking the brutal realities faced by many species and impedes realistic conservation efforts that must manage complex, often harsh, ecological dynamics. A balanced perspective requires confronting both the life-giving capacity and the indifference of the natural world.

Finally, technological advancement continually challenges the conceptualization of Nature. Developments in biotechnology, synthetic biology, and genetic engineering blur the lines between what is created versus what is born, raising profound ethical questions about the integrity and autonomy of natural processes. As humans gain the ability to synthesize life forms or fundamentally alter biological systems at will, the very meaning of "natural" is destabilized. These developments force philosophical reflection on whether Nature is merely raw material for human ingenuity or if it possesses intrinsic limits and boundaries that should not be violated, maintaining **Nature** as a critical, contested term in the modern lexicon.

## 8. Further Reading

[Nature \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Natural Law \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Physis \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Nature \(Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy\)](#)