



Istituto Veneto  
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## **Stephen J. Gould's Legacy: Nature, History, Society**

**Venice, May 10–12, 2012**

Organized by Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti  
in collaboration with Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia

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*Beyond (and without) the invisible hand.  
Transfer of concepts between economics and evolutionary theory*

### **Abstract**

In many of his works, Stephen J. Gould studied the importance for Darwin of Adam Smith, whose idea of an "invisible hand" represented a model of "order from randomness" processes which would be able to subvert pre-established harmony theorized by William Paley's natural theology. In reality, Smith's "invisible hand" model is itself an harmonicistic, theologically founded, postulate, never proved by Smith to be operative in any actual economic theorem, and whose ontological optimism seemingly had a profound effect on the post-darwinian notion of Survival of the Fittest. Inversely, Gould's defence of non-reducible historical contingency in evolutionary processes should be compared to recent criticism addressed to the General Equilibrium Theory in economic theory, that is another "harmonicistic" model.