Hello and welcome to the first episode of Entanglements. This podcast is all about exploring the connections between humankind and nature, and crucially, how different disciplines have understood this connection. Over the coming episodes, I speak to a number of really interesting people all about how we as humankind connect to, understand and interact with nature and the natural world. In this first episode, however, it's just me, as I try to wrestle with what exactly nature means. So, here I am, sitting here, excited about launching this new podcast. However, I'm at a bit of a loss.

everyday language. However the roots of our modern word go even deeper than this. The Latin word natura was only used by philosophers such as Cicero in the 1st century BCE to (and apologies for my pronunciation). This

and producing, is derived from the Indobe . to

However, which is integral to our self-understanding, confuse me. How can these be mutually exclusive terms? Indeed, what's confused me further is that while the word physis was used as early as the 6th century BCE by figures such as Heraclitus, 200 years later it started to acquire what we might recognise as its modern meaning and indeed, its ambiguity. For instance, in , the word physics deriving itself from physis , Aristotle defines physis as the essence of things. However, in , he goes on to admit that the word is actually used in many different ways, each with different meanings.

Thus, even 2,400 years ago, a defining feature of hysis, the word which would become nature, was its ambiguity. This ambiguity remains today. Indeed, it seems, how we understand nature as an operating concept is far more thematic than anything else. Indeed, as the ecologist and philosopher Professor Timothy Morton describes it, nature is a transcendental term in a material mask, which stands at the end of a potentially infinite series of other terms that all collapse into it.

Nature effectively works, in our language, as an empty placeholder for a host of other concepts. Sometimes it's animals, streams, forests. Sometimes it's leaves, roots, twigs. Sometimes it's trees and birds. Sometimes it's the trees on the mountain, but not the trees in the streets. Sometimes it's entire ecosystems, and it's the weeds which emerge from concrete pavements.

This episode is about charting the fluctuations and ambiguity of the word nature, and explore what this reflects about how we, and particularly Western societies, have understood our very selves.

So back to a deeper dive into etymology. Often when we think of nature, as we'll see, we tend towards thinking that which is primordial, non-human, or in some way base. However, it's interesting to note that the Greek and Latin predecessors for our word nature only seems to have properly emerged once these languages had reached linguistic and philosophical maturity. Might this suggest that words like physis, or the very idea of nature, ambiguous as it is, is not necessarily a basic human concept? Indeed, physis was a more technical and abstract philosophical word that seems to have been mainly used by urban scholars rather than people working in the fields, living in the countryside, or appearing in contexts in which we might expect it to, in the rural world or what we now call nature poetry.

Indeed, in Aristotle, the word itself rarely appears within his own work on animals, plants and ecosystems, even if the name of the physics derives from the word physis . Further, the interesting thing is that unlike the dictionary in front of me, which explicitly separates humankind and nature, most Greek definitions of physis don't exclude humankind. Rather it seems to be a dynamic term, a more spontaneous ordering of the world in which humans are a part. The antithesis of nature was understood to be chaos, and thus for figures like Aristotle, civilization itself could be thought as natural insofar as it entailed order. After time, later movements, such as the Epicureans and th

opposing concepts are those of the supernatural or the unreal. The third definition of nature: the specific force at the core of life and change. This is the way nature was seen by figures such as Heraclitus, Nietzsche, and Darwin, and the opposing concepts are those of inertia, fixedness, entropy. As we can see, there are three changing variables across these definitions. The first being whether it includes or excludes humankind, the second whether it is a dynamic or a static state, and the third whether it includes the whole of reality or just only some of its constituents.

So, as we journey through exploring what nature is throughout this series, one thing I want to keep in mind is the ambiguity of the term nature itself. It would be too cumbersome to