

Editorial

The Institute on Religion in an Age of Science (IRAS) has been dedicated to the goal of building bridges between religion and science: Its members seek ways of retaining the valuable functions of religion but in terms that build on, rather than conflict with, the growing body of scientific knowledge about the nature of the world. Among recent developments in science Edward O. Wilson's *Sociobiology* is especially pertinent to this goal. In the last chapter of this book Wilson extrapolates from the range of patterns of social behavior across the animal kingdom to human social behavior, and he predicts that the growth of this biological approach will revolutionize the social sciences and the humanities. He then expands this theme in a smaller, more speculative book, *On Human Nature*.

These books have had a large impact, at least in the United States, on the literary world and on social critics, as well as on scientists. Wilson has forced a large audience to think about the importance of genetic factors in human behavior, and he has deliberately stimulated controversy by boldly stating many propositions that challenge the traditional wisdom. Early on much of the criticism was tendentious and emotional, arising from ideologists who saw a threat to their dogmas and from social scientists who saw a threat to their territories. But that has largely passed: One can now criticize Wilson's provocative conclusions and predictions legitimately, without fear that one is abetting those "neo-Lysenkoists" who oppose any application of genetics to problems involving human behavior. Responsible criticism has now emerged in a large number of symposia and publications.

Since a substantial portion of *On Human Nature* deals with problems of ethics and of religion—matters of central interest to IRAS—it seemed natural for IRAS to sponsor a symposium that would bring Wilson and some sympathetic critics from biology together with a group of liberal theologians and philosophers. The occasion was the 1979 summer meeting of IRAS on Star Island, New Hampshire, cosponsored for this topic by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. The steering committee was cochaired by Solomon H. Katz (then IRAS president) and by me.

Most of the major addresses of the symposium are presented in this and the next issue of *Zygon*. Ralph Wendell Burhoe's and George Edgin Pugh's presentations appeared in final form respectively in the June 1979 and the June 1980 *Zygon*. Additional interesting talks not included here were given by Eugene G. d'Aquili, Irven DeVore, Katz, Patricia McBroom, Karl E. Peters, and Eugene Wratchford.

A scheduled major participant was Charles Frankel. All involved were looking forward very much to exchanging views with this great liberal social critic and philosopher, long devoted to illuminating the current threat of social disintegration and to defending the permanent values of civilization. In an ironic illustration of the trends that concerned him, he and his wife were senselessly murdered by burglars two months before the meeting. Frankel had published, in *Commentary*, an extensive critique of Wilson's position; no doubt this would have been very similar to the presentation that he would

have made at Star Island. We are grateful to the publishers of *Commentary* for permission to reprint his essay here. It is with profound admiration and sympathy that we dedicate the September and December issues of *Zygon* to Frankel.

In the papers following Frankel's, mine, like Frankel's, considers Wilson's large expectations for the social contributions of sociobiology utopian and emphasizes the importance of studying the diversity as well as the universals of human behavior. Alexander J. Morin's defends scientific materialism most vigorously. (We should note an excellent companion piece by Morin, "Revelation and Heresy in Sociobiology," in the journal *Science, Technology, and Human Values* [Spring 1979].) Finally, in the tradition of the British romantic poets struggling with materialism, J. W. Bowker's emphasizes the aesthetic rather than the moral aspect of religion.

In the December 1980 issue the discussion of Wilson's views will continue with papers by the biopsychologist Jerre Levy, the theologians Philip Hefner and J. Robert Nelson, and the philosopher Daniel R. DeNicola. It will conclude with a new essay by Wilson himself on scientific materialism and its possibilities for effectively interacting with religious thought.

B. D. D.

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