

## Editorial

On 24-26 March 1983 the Science and Religion Forum in Britain returned to Durham where it had been officially and publicly initiated in 1975. Its theme on that previous occasion, whose proceedings were also reported in *Zygon* (Vol. 11, No. 4) was "The Problem of Consciousness" and involved much discussion of the biological dimension to that problem. Eight years later the rapidly developing biological sciences, with their increasing impact on received religious and ethical ideas, again provided the Forum's theme, "The Ethical Challenge of Contemporary Biology." There was a deliberate ambiguity in this title, comprising, as it did, a reference both to biology's interpretation of human ethical behavior and its origins and also to the ethical problems generated by the application to human beings of new biological knowledge and techniques. The former was the principle emphasis of the meeting, which did come to earth again at the end with a stimulating paper by John Walker of the Department of Community Medicine at the University of Newcastle. His paper was concerned with the painful decisions that have to be made in administering finite medical resources at a time when possible medical treatments and techniques are expanding so rapidly in number and cost. We hope very much that that paper will find publication elsewhere.

Thus it was that the major focus of this Forum, the best attended and one of the liveliest to date, was on the implications for our understanding of the nature and origin of ethical decisions of that sturdy, not to say vociferous, new member of the biological sciences, sociobiology. The excellent panel of speakers had been energetically assembled by the Forum's chairman, John Robertson of the University of Leeds. The honorary president, John Habgood, at that time Bishop of Durham (and now, to all our pleasure, Archbishop of York) was present throughout the proceedings and gave a perceptive summing up at the end.

In this issue of *Zygon*, the contributions at Durham are reproduced, thanks to a timely and much welcomed current arrangement between the Forum and *Zygon*. The first speaker was Michael Reiss, whose informative and shrewd account of the current scientific standing of sociobiology, especially with respect to application of its principles to *Homo sapiens*, proved to be an essential "curtain raiser" for those of us who are not professional biologists. Appropriately, his paper is first in this issue.

We were fortunate to have present Peter Singer of Monash University, Australia, who had given the British Broadcasting Corporation's Horizon Lecture in the previous week. Neither a student of religion nor a biologist, he provided a valuable philosophical assessment of the limitations of sociobiology's account of human altruism and ethical values. The second essay in this issue reproduces substantially what he said at the meeting in the form of the major part of an article he contributed elsewhere. Although we have not been able to reproduce the response to his paper at Durham, we have been fortunate in being able to include in this issue a critique by William Rottschaefer and David Martinsen of Singer's philosophical arguments as he has expounded them in his widely discussed *The Expanding Circle: Ethics and Sociobiology* (1981).

Their article is followed by a contribution (not presented at Durham) by myself that moves the necessary and continuous assessment of the kinds of argument that prevail in sociobiology to its frontier with theology, which also has a perennial concern with the nature of human beings and their purported ethical motivations. My discussion inevitably included a consideration of the contributions of Philip Hefner, one of the few systematic theologians who has grappled directly during recent years in a number of publications with the implications of sociobiology for a theological anthropology and with the *is/ought* relation. In his paper he develops this theme of sociobiology and ethics within the wider perspective of theology on the history of nature and of human beings and on the concept of the creative will of God.

Present at this meeting was Peter Baelz, Dean of Durham Cathedral, which for more than 800 years has stood sentinel over the River Wear at Durham. Until relatively recently he himself had been Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology at Oxford University and was prevailed upon to give some impromptu reflections on the proceedings from an explicitly Christian theological point of view. He pointed out discontinuities in the history of humankind to which theologians were bound to draw attention. His reflections, now presented in print, took the Durham discussion very aptly, in relation to the intentions of the Forum, from its starting point in genetics and the sociobiology of insects to a consideration *sub specie aeternitatis* of the whole process of the evolution of living organisms, including human beings, as a creative activity of God, thereby raising the ultimate question of what sort of God must be involved in such a process.

As a coda to the exposition and development of these central themes, we are glad to be able to include the slightly edited transcript of a 1982 BBC broadcast on "Genes, Mind and Culture"—a discussion, chaired by John Maddox, the editor of *Nature*, on the book of that title by Charles J. Lumsden and Edward O. Wilson. The latter was a participant in this discussion with the theologian John Bowker, the philosopher Anthony Quinton, and the geneticist John Turner. This transcript nicely complements the rest of this issue in raising more fully than elsewhere the broader issue of cultural change in relation to biological evolution.

I would like to thank the Editor of *Zygon* for inviting me to be the guest editor of this issue, which establishes more explicitly than before a link across the Atlantic between the Science and Religion Forum and what is in fact *the* journal of science and religion.

Arthur Peacocke