

Editorial

The sound of rain
has come to overlay all
a house among voices of insects

Matsumoto Takashi

In September I participated in the World Academic Conference of the Seoul Olympiad. One of the five three-day sessions was on "Humanity's Encounter with Nature: Destruction and Reconstruction." In this session sixty Eastern and Western philosophers, theologians, and scientists discussed how in the twentieth century we could live in harmony with nature. No one questioned the idea that we should live in harmony with nature; on this point Eastern Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist traditions united with Western environmental and evolutionary science. All believed that the future of human life and civilization depended on reconstructing more harmonious relations with the natural world.

However, when I raised the question, What is the nature with which we should be in harmony? the discussion faltered. Remembering the papers in this December 1988 issue of *Zygon*, I pointed out that nature could be brutal as well as beautiful. Following George Williams I argued that there is evidence in the animal kingdom of deception, cuckoldry, rape, infanticide, and so on. I further argued that not only was the Buddhist monk living in harmony with nature in his mountain retreat; so was the scientist who with his elaborate technology was coming to know the hidden mysteries of the universe. Yet the natures with which each was in harmony were quite different. In our discussion in Seoul we did not resolve the issue of the nature of nature; nonetheless we continued to agree that human beings should live in harmony with nature.

The question, What is the nature with which we should live in harmony? is one way of expressing the central problem of this issue of *Zygon*. Papers herein grapple with the problem in three ways: the question of the foundation of ethics; the epistemological question of the relation of human knowing to the "know-how" of other species; and the question in natural theology of the benevolence of a Western personal deity or the "morality" of the Eastern Way of the Tao or of Heaven and Earth.

The context of all these problems is set by George Williams's essay, which opens the section called "Controversy." Using some of the work of sociobiology, Williams grounds some human capacities for morality in evolution but argues that humanity cannot model its own morality after the behavior of other species. This is because the evidence shows that both the process and products of evolution are morally unacceptable to human beings. As Thomas H. Huxley, a primary defender of Darwinian evolution argued, the ethical progress of humanity depends not on imitating nature but on combating it. Responses by Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, Michael Ruse, Ralph Wendell Burhoe, and John Cobb, Jr. accept much of Williams's well-supported analysis. However, they question his moral interpretation of some of the cases he cites, argue that human cultural and moral evolution cannot be successful in complete opposition to biological evolution, and affirm not the moral value of nature but the non-moral, intrinsic value of life itself in its various forms. Following the Controversy section, the

article by David Oates shows how the problem of evil, posed by Darwinian natural selection and pressed in detail by Williams, was dealt with historically. The article by Franz M. Wuketits analyzes some of the current Darwinian challenges to moral philosophy and epistemology. Finally, the closing Credo statement by Eric Chaisson affirms a naturalistic religion of cosmic evolution.

The conclusion of all this might be that, while we humans cannot accept morally all the specific mechanisms by which species live in accord with the requirements of nature, nonetheless we must live in our own way within nature's constraints or laws. Our ethics must take into account the requirements of nature that set the boundary conditions for human survival and well-being; our epistemology must recognize the biological basis of our cognitive capacities, capacities even for cunning and deception that, while not always moral in terms of our human standards, are part of our evolutionary history; our theologies must recognize the "freedom" allowed by the ultimate determiner of all destinies in the plurality of strategies for biological and social survival—a freedom that at times may reflect the dark side of the ultimate mystery at the foundation of all existence. In short, we must live in harmony with nature, but at the same time not with all that nature represents. We cannot but be intimately related with the rest of nature out of which our own human nature has evolved. At the same time we must recognize our distance from nature, which is the consequence of our evolved ability to reflect rationally on the good and evil in nature.

Perhaps this distance can be symbolized by the idea that humans live not only in the *oikos* (the habitat) of nature but of houses. In a paper presented at the Seoul Conference on "House as a Mediator between Man and Nature," Toru Haga (professor of comparative literature and culture at the University of Tokyo) argued that Japanese haiku poetry recognized the value of the human house as a way of enhancing the beauty of nature as well as a way of shielding humans from the threats of nature. The beauty of moonlight is enhanced as it shines through a window:

Moonlight pierces
this one room house,
such as where I live.

Murakami Kijo

So is the sound of rain falling on a roof enhanced:

The sound of rain
has come to overlay all
a house among voices of insects.

Matsumoto Takashi

However, the house is also a shield from nature's threats:

Under this low roof,
What a pleasure to hide myself
for wintering.

Matsuo Basho

After hearing Haga's exposition and analysis of the "house as mediator," I am impressed by the realization that we humans have only rarely lived with nature in the raw. In trying to live in harmony with nature we have usually created our "houses"—our distinctly human tools, art, religion, science, and technology—both to enhance nature (at least in our eyes) and to protect

ourselves. The question, of course, is, What kinds of houses do we have to erect? Can they be like some traditional houses of the East that reflect the Taoist and Zen Buddhist traditions—open to surrounding nature? Here the task of living is to be in accord with the natural flows of existence. Or, as we discover the mechanisms that govern those flows, as George Williams has done, mechanisms that often seem brutal and selfish, must we build our ethical and religious houses more humanistically? In trying to live in harmony with nature, just how solid—how open or closed to nature—should our moral and religious houses be?

Karl E. Peters