

Editorial

Six years ago, in the twenty-first volume of this journal, *Zygon* devoted two consecutive issues to the theme “Recent Discoveries in Neurobiology—Do They Matter for Religion, the Social Sciences, and the Humanities?” The twelve papers devoted to that theme were delivered at the 1984 annual summer conference of the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science (IRAS). This conference was put together by the renowned cultural anthropologist Victor Turner as the direct outcome of a 1982 conference which IRAS had devoted to his own thinking on the theme “Ritual and Human Adaptation.” At that conference, he made public a dramatic turn in his thinking, in which he recognized the correlations between human neurobiological structures and process on the one hand and cultural forms and behavior on the other. He produced his landmark paper, “Body, Brain, and Culture,” which appeared in the September 1983 issue of the journal.

We rehearse these items, not only because they represent a high point in *Zygon*'s attention to the neurosciences, but also because they were harbingers of the future for the journal. During the 1984 conference, one of the speakers spoke of the 1990s as the “Decade of the Brain.” These prescient comments describe accurately the increased attention to the neurosciences that marks the manuscripts submitted in the past two years to *Zygon*. Roger Sperry's paper “Search for Beliefs to Live by Consistent with Science” (June 1991) is a major contribution from this period. December 1991 saw the publication of James Jones's gloss on Sperry's paper—a piece that we hope will attract further comments on Sperry's proposals.

The range of our current submissions in this area is broad—ranging from the sober and pedantic to “new age” fantasies and speculations. The deluge is such that we are seeking contributions that can evaluate seriously the significance of the neurosciences for *Zygon*'s yoking project and help our readers chart their course through the welter of possibilities. Our project has from the beginning recognized that the emergence of the human central nervous system was pivotal, since it enabled new types of programs to develop and inform *Homo sapiens*, programs that we call psychosocial or cultural. Since religion appears within the substance of these programs, our increased knowledge of the central nervous system is significant for understanding the origins and function of religion. Although in the 1960s and 1970s, this point of view was not widely appreciated, in the 1990s it has become popular to the point of faddism. Hence the need for serious evaluation of the directions in which current insights may lead us.

In this issue, James Ashbrook continues his years-long pilgrimage into the neurosciences, applying to them his own constructive theological brilliance. (See also Robert Potter's review of his book *Brain and Belief*.) He once again demonstrates the courage to walk on the frontier, which means that his argument constitutes more a wager than a set of unimpeachable facts. Its value lies in its fruitfulness for guiding further thought, in this case, on the relation between neurobiology and traditional concepts of soul

and sabbath. Potter corroborates this in his review, when he judges that Ashbrook, "acting as a holistic generalist, has outlined the agenda for the future work of teams of specialists." Within the next year, we will present several articles that focus upon the 1990 work of Charles Laughlin, John McManus, and Eugene d'Aquili, *Brain, Symbol and Experience: Toward a Neurophenomenology of Human Consciousness*.

The concepts that stand at the center of Ashbrook's discussion are phenomena of time. Roy Rappaport also focuses upon such phenomena, as they occur in human ritual experience as viewed from an anthropologist's perspective. His is a striking elaboration of how human cultural interpretations of time intersect with physical concepts in an explicit attempt to insert transphysical considerations into the human purview. It is just such an insertion that Ashbrook discusses in the context of neurobiology.

Mary Maxwell's paper also attends to culture's impact on human perceptions of the world, in the context of moral understanding and with an awareness of how faulty cultural images can distort our view of the world.

Despite our earlier comments, the physical sciences still occupy more space upon the religion-science stage than the other sciences. Ian Barbour has devoted many years to what occurs on this interface between religious thought and physics. In doing so, he has attained the well-deserved unofficial title of *doyen* to us all. Holmes Rolston reflects upon Barbour's *Religion in an Age of Science*, the first volume of the 1989-91 series of the Gifford Lectures.

The social sciences have over the years received relatively less attention in our pages. The September 1990 issue did devote itself in large part to this branch of science, and it has attracted considerable response. Daniel Pals provides a lengthy response, which in turn elicited a rejoinder by one of the 1990 essayists, Robert Segal. The issue at dispute is a fundamental one: How are we to understand the possibilities of the social scientific approach to the study of religion, both for the sciences and for religion?

Zygon opened its first volume with a survey of theological resources from the physical, biological, and social sciences. Although we did not plan it this way, the journal opens its twenty-seventh volume with discussions pertaining to these same three domains of science. In 1966, the prominent questions were: Can the sciences contribute to theology? and What is the common ground between theology and the sciences? The terrain of exploration in 1992 is different in many respects from that of 1966, but the basic questions remain.

—Philip Hefner