

Editorial

Readers may find a useful entrée to the articles that appear in this issue by reflecting that the major questions of human existence arise within our experience of nature. The British philosopher R. G. Collingwood argued in his 1945 book, *The Idea of Nature*, that we elaborate all of our intellectual formulations under the constraints imposed by our understanding of nature. One could argue that concepts of the human “spirit,” for example, are fundamentally conditioned by how we conceive nature’s place in human being. Or, that concepts of God’s “transcendence” are determined as much by what we understand about nature as they are by what we know about God. All three of the major Western religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—possess within their traditions the awareness that what we learn from God’s revelation is inextricably intertwined with what we learn from the study of nature. Isaac Newton’s generation worked within the ambience of a concept of the Two Books: the Book of Nature, interpreted by science, and the Bible, interpreted by the church.

But just what do we learn from nature? That question continues to engage serious thinkers, and this journal has never ceased to ponder it. In his paper, Karl Schmitz-Moormann insists that in our day evolution is the “standard way” of understanding nature. Consequently, he argues that no theological statements can claim credibility unless they are expressed in an evolutionary mode. The force of his argument lies in his suggestion that this requires, at least for the Christian theologian, a thoroughgoing reformulation of conceptualities, and that it will result in a “fundamental reconstructing” of every theological theme. The payoff, he believes, will be a renewed understanding of religious truths. In other words, taking nature seriously will allow us to reform and deepen our appreciation of religion.

Lodovico Galleni’s contribution to these pages focuses on Pierre Teilhard de Chardin—not upon his better-known philosophical and theological writings, but rather upon his scientific work. Galleni guides us expertly through Teilhard’s tireless search to understand evolution, particularly whether or not it could be said to have a direction. Longtime readers will remember that this very question was the subject of articles by geneticist Theodosius Dobzhansky and theologian George Riggan in the September 1968 issue of *Zygon*. Both of those writers were ambivalent about the scientific value of Teilhard’s thinking about directionality in evolution, although Dobzhansky was willing to give him benefit of the doubt. When Galleni’s argument is placed alongside their pieces, we note his more detailed reading of Teilhard as a *scientist*, and we also are left with the sense that a great thinker like Teilhard never loses the ability to provoke us to new ideas when he grapples seriously with the fundamental properties of nature, even when there is disagreement concerning the correctness of his final conclusions.

Disagreement about the nature of nature has been the ground for the centuries-long debate over whether the existence of God can be inferred from our knowledge of nature. Philosopher Jack Carloye is one of many

thinkers who believe that the *argument from design* was prematurely declared dead by the likes of Immanuel Kant in the eighteenth century. This philosophical notion, also called the *cosmological argument*, moves from the orderliness of nature to the conclusion that there is an ordering source, or God. Like Kant, Carloye works through his philosophical arguments in the context of the physical sciences.

In June 1991, the Nobel Laureate Roger W. Sperry presented us with an extensive proposal for understanding how knowledge gained from the neurosciences demands a rethinking of how religion and values are related to science. In this issue, James W. Jones supports the general thrust of Sperry's argument but also insists that Sperry claims too much for his theories. This article is part of *Zygon's* current effort to understand what resources the burgeoning field of the neurosciences offers for understanding religion, values, and human behavior. In one of the next issues, Professor Sperry will respond to Jones and carry his own thinking further.

Two physicists, William Klink and Thomas Gilbert, begin a conversation that deals directly with knowledge of nature and the knowledge that grounds religious belief and human behavior. Within a discussion of ecology and the environment, Klink speaks of the inadequacy of the ecological sciences and proposes that we would be better served to think of our technology and ecological sciences as instruments in a *dialogue* with nature. Whether religion then enters into the dialogue depends entirely on whether one's perspective on nature requires a religious worldview. Gilbert takes issue with what he believes is Klink's unnecessarily pessimistic view of the ecological sciences, but he agrees with Klink's proposals, while offering his own imaginative revision of them.

The reader who takes these six articles seriously will be reminded once again that nature is an inexhaustible realm, a realm which, if we seriously aim to understand it, will require our fullest intellectual energies and moral sensitivity. Over the years, this journal has insisted that religion emerges within this natural realm and that its functions are to be understood as dimensions of nature. If that is the theme, the articles in this issue contribute a kind of counterpoint suggesting the magnitude of the discussion to which we are committed.

Special note should be given to the book reviews. Within the past three years, four younger philosophers (Michael Banner, Philip Clayton, Wentzel van Huyssteen, and Nancey Murphy) have published substantial works dealing with the structures of scientific thinking and how they relate to the structures of religious thinking. Two of them, Clayton and van Huyssteen, joined by another young philosopher, J. Wesley Robbins, serve as reviewers. The result is a conversation in itself, and readers who wish to join in should consider themselves welcome.

This issue also marks the end of the second year of work by the new editorial team. We solicit constructive reactions to the quality and direction of the journal.

—Philip Hefner