

Editorial

This month *Zygon* has done something never before essayed in our twenty-eight-year history—it has turned over the entire issue, except for the book reviews and the final piece, to professional academic philosophers. The skepticism that the editors of this journal have traditionally harbored toward philosophy has called forth substantial criticism from the academic community over the years. After all, it is dogma in some circles that without philosophy as a gatekeeper, religion and science cannot even carry on a conversation. By this criterion, the editors have walked for a quarter century in pathways of heterodoxy, and they appear likely to continue to do so.

The sources for this skepticism are worth noting. Nobel Prize winner Roger Sperry (who has been a staunch supporter of *Zygon*) wrote concerning the Founding Editor, Ralph Wendell Burhoe, that one of his wisest strategies consisted of “taking care to steer clear of embroilments in the underlying philosophical issues where science and religion pointedly differ and where oftentimes the antagonisms are most intense and the view points most incompatible” (foreword to *Yoking Science and Religion: The Life and Thought of Ralph Wendell Burhoe*, by David Breed. Chicago: Zygon Books, 1992, p. xii). Noting the same tendency in Burhoe’s approach, but from a somewhat different perspective, James Gustafson lamented the strategy but concluded that precisely such an approach provides philosophers a challenge upon which to practice critical skills (“Theology Confronts Technology and the Life Sciences,” *Commonweal*, 16 June 1978, pp. 368–92).

There is little question that our ambivalence toward philosophy has roots in a similar ambivalence on the part of the scientific community, with whom, by tradition, this journal has cultivated close links. As this editorial was being written, there appeared in the Sunday *New York Times Book Review* (7 March 1993, pp. 11–12) some highly relevant commentary by Paul Davies, a physicist of note who is concerned with religion. Reviewing two new books, by Steven Weinberg and Leon Lederman (both Nobel laureates in physics), Davies included remarks particularly relevant to the current *Zygon* dialogue among Wesley Robbins, Nancey Murphy, Philip Clayton, and Wentzel van Huyssteen. Their conversation deals with the question, Are scientific laws (specifically the laws of physics) in touch with a “real world” external to the observer (and if so, what does it mean to be “in touch” with reality?), or are they “merely human inventions, descriptive rather than prescriptive”? (Davies, p. 12). Davies’s comments carry his trademark pungency.

Mr. Weinberg lambastes this sort of sophistry [the philosophical speculation I have just referred to]. He makes no bones about his distaste for philosophy. . . . “The insights of philosophers have occasionally benefited physicists,” he concedes, “but generally in a negative fashion—by protecting them from the preconceptions of other philosophers.” You would certainly have a hard time

persuading Mr. Weinberg, indeed most physicists, of the popular philosophical position that the laws of physics are merely a linguistic or methodological convenience. Mr. Weinberg is in no doubt that physicists are uncovering an already existing lawlike order in nature, that the laws are read *out* of nature, not *into* nature.

He is explicit about this "rough-and-ready-realism." We physicists, he writes, have a "belief in the objective reality of the ingredients of our scientific theories" and "a powerful impression that the laws of physics have an existence of their own." He agrees that physicists might not be able to state in rigorous philosophical terms just what they are doing, but they surely are doing something right. This is a wonderful blast of fresh air. It is now fashionable to assert that science is just another cultural activity, successful merely on its own terms. This is nonsense. Science is the most reliable path to truth that we know. (Davies, p. 12)

Zygon has clearly, over the years, stood closer to Paul Davies and Steven Weinberg than to the philosophers they criticize. It has shared the fear that a preoccupation with second-order reflection may obscure the very urgent "something right" that scientists are doing at first hand. On the other hand, the journal has also attempted to provide a canopy under which the philosophers can probe the possibilities for the yoking of science and religion to which we are committed. In this respect, we have chosen to stand astride the fault line that separates what C. P. Snow termed the "two cultures" rather than to grant the term legitimacy by tabernacling with one culture to the neglect of the other. The editors over the years have attempted to bring the benefits of philosophical analysis more closely into conjunction with the actual intentions and methods of scientists *and* with the practice and theory of religion.

The articles in this issue are, however, clearly products of the 1990s, and the philosophers represented here are not of the ilk that worries Sperry, Weinberg, and Davies. These philosophers are for the most part younger thinkers, and they are not so much challenging the conviction that science refers to something real as trying to understand more fully what that conviction means. In the process, they engage in considerable redefinition of terms and concepts. They probe deeply the postmodern challenge to Weinberg's rough-and-ready realism, to perceive the roots of that challenge. None of them subscribes to a dualism in which science and religion are isolated from one another or fated to eternal warfare. On the contrary, each of them has previously written about the interaction between religion and science that they agree is a presupposition for their philosophizing. Robbins, Murphy, Clayton, and van Huyssteen, though they differ among themselves, are all concerned with the way reason functions, both in science and religion/theology. Furthermore, they focus not only upon science and religion, but upon the science-and-religion conversation itself and the thinking it has spawned. They write not so much about the two separate cultures, religion and science, as about the concrete ways in which those cultures interface. In this sense, their dialogue testifies to the growing maturity of the enterprise to which this journal is committed. The dialogue portion of this issue follows up on a less elaborate conversation among the four principals in the June and September issues of *Zygon* in 1992.

Ernan Mc Mullin's piece on evolution and special creation opens this

issue on a topic that has seldom been discussed in our pages, largely because the editors believed that the evolution-versus-creation debate has generated more heat than light. Mc Mullin is one of those highly competent philosophers who rise above the level of conventional discourse to clarify the most fundamental themes and issues that have arisen from this debate that has wracked American society for over a century. His article owes its origin to a debate with another distinguished philosopher, Alvin Plantinga.

Ursula Goodenough is a biologist who combines the gifts that derive from her intense work in her science with those that flow from her self-aware reflection upon what she does as a biologist. Her concluding essay conveys the excitement of a scientist who is reflecting upon her own creativity as she goes about her work. That is itself a kind of philosophical thinking.

Will the relationship between philosophy and science, and between philosophy and religion-and-science, take a different course from that which has characterized it through the past century? We believe it will, and the very presentation of this issue of our journal testifies to that belief.

—Philip Hefner