

## *Editorial*

This issue of our journal could be construed as an ensemble of “departments.” There are six of them: a theme section on Ernest Becker’s psychological theories concerning the denial of death, a regular article on humanoid robots, the Teachers’ File, a symposium on a major new book by James Gilbert, a section of book reviews, and an Endmatter section with two brief pieces on Ralph Wendell Burhoe.

The very organization of our table of contents calls attention to the many-facetedness of our enterprise. The six sections speak to distinct interests and audiences, it is true, and some readers will surely leave certain sections unread because their interests are not piqued. Since, however, each of the departments is equally rooted in dynamic, cutting-edge thinking on the religion-and-science interface, every reader will find in each section ideas that are enriching for our effort to yoke scientific knowledge with the values-concerns of religion and the humanities for the purpose of better understanding human existence in our time.

The theme section on Ernest Becker is explained in detail by its guest editor, Neil Elgee, in his introductory comments that follow. Our hope is that this coverage in *Zygon* will contribute to the long overdue attention that Becker deserves. Becker probed deeply into what makes human beings tick; Anne Foerst, a theologian and computer scientist, introduces us to the same kinds of concerns that emerge in the work of a team of scientists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who are attempting to construct a humanoid robot on the principles of “embodied AI (artificial intelligence).” Understanding human nature and personhood is fundamental to her project, as she outlines it. In our next issue, we will feature two responses to her piece, one by Helmut Reich and one by Mary Gerhart and Allan Russell.

The Teachers’ File articles, by Helmut Reich, Philip Clayton, and Mark Railey, also focus on human nature: Reich on the psychology of religion, and Clayton/Railey on pedagogy.

James Gilbert’s new book *Redeeming Culture: American Religion in an Age of Science, 1925–1962* is the first book by a professional historian to deal specifically not only with the time frame in which *Zygon* has emerged as a voice in American intellectual life, but also with the persons who founded the journal and their vision. Gilbert discusses a number of other figures who were at work at the same time as the *Zygon* founders, thus placing the first phases of our work in helpful cultural

perspective. Richard Busse and James Miller offer full-length commentaries on Gilbert's work.

Ralph Wendell Burhoe, founding editor of *Zygon* and its intellectual leader for twenty-five years, died on May 8, 1997, as he approached his eighty-sixth birthday. A full commemorative issue of the journal is planned for 1999. In the meantime, we will publish brief statements that focus on the theme, "Why we should remember Ralph Burhoe." The first two of these pieces appear in our Endmatter section, by Hubert Meisinger and Philip Hefner.

—Philip Hefner