

Editorial

Two central theme areas command our attention in this issue of *Zygon*: the neurosciences and morality. Since these themes have been continual areas of concern for us over the years, the reader may well ask, What is new in the treatment they receive at our hands now? The answer, clearly, is that as the discussions have developed, there is much more scientific material to be taken into account, and similarly we are more sophisticated in our strategy for relating this material to our understanding of religion.

In the neurosciences section, Ian Barbour offers a truly magisterial overview and interpretation, encompassing artificial intelligence as well in his foundational effort to put the pieces of these complex research fields into theological and philosophical perspective. It is a vintage Barbour piece, which vividly exhibits just how this area has grown quantitatively, becoming in fact a field of its own for religion/science reflection and also how complex and nuanced is the task of interpreting it. The reader would do well to survey this journal's coverage of the neurosciences over the past five years, not only for a wealth of factual information but also for a sense of how difficult and rich the interpretive task has become.

James Ashbrook and Carol Albright, in their essay written in the very last days before Ashbrook's death last January, offer an interpretation of the March 1999 symposium in these pages on their book, *The Humanizing Brain*. In the process they set down certain basic proposals for the religion-and-science conversation in general and for the neuroscience discussion in particular. Their piece certainly marks an advance in fashioning a sophisticated methodology for the dialogue.

Taken together, these two articles establish a kind of benchmark for the future as we try to make sense of the neurosciences in relation to religion, theology, and values. Even five years ago, the sophistication with which these two presentations approach their theme would have been impossible; neither the state of research discoveries nor the level of experience in interpreting these discoveries was available to us. This fact should give us pause as we participate in a very fast-growing area of religion-and-science thinking.

Karl Peters introduces the section on morality and evolution with an interpretive reflection on the 1997 Star Island conference where the following four papers were delivered. He not only puts these papers in perspective but also fills in perspectives from the papers of that conference

that, unfortunately, do not appear here. Each of the four papers advances the development of thinking on this theme by utilizing research that, as in the neurosciences, has altered the terrain of interpretation and reflection. Michael Ruse surveys the history of evolutionary ethics and formulates once again his own position by reference to that history. He proposes a view that can surpass the (to him inadequate) traditional position that flows through Herbert Spencer, Julian Huxley, and E. O. Wilson. Anthropologist Robert Sussman focuses on older and more recent interpretations of Man the Hunter, concluding that, since they cannot be validated on the basis of scientific data, they must be considered to be renditions of a perennial myth that reinforces traditional cultural beliefs.

Biologist-philosopher Paul Thompson, covering some of the same material as Ruse, considers evolutionary ethics to be alive and well but also very much a work-in-progress that waits for its further development on the results of theorizing in neurobiology and cognitive science. The final piece in this set, by Philip Hefner, presents an interpretation of Jesus' moral teachings and practice as (to use Gerd Theissen's phrase) proposals for cultural evolution.

The Teachers' File continues its series on What One Needs to Know with Carl Helrich's article on thermodynamics. Willem Drees presents a substantial discussion and critique of Philip Clayton's recent book, *God and Contemporary Science*. The Credo section concludes this issue, with Kim L. Beckmann's creative effort to move from the science of the laboratory to spiritual reflection in her sermon, DNA Fingerprinting and the Offertory Prayer.

We hope that readers will find in these offerings, as the authors have, the advancement of their own thinking on the interface of religion and science.

—Philip Hefner