

## *Editorial*

Why so much attention to nature and naturalist modes of thought? This issue adds its heft to what is already a mountain of articles and symposia devoted to examining concepts of nature, the interpretation of nature, and the possibilities of naturalist modes of thought for religion, value-formation, and morality. Why do we continue to add to this immense amount of reflection on nature?

R. G. Collingwood, a British philosopher of the mid-twentieth century, observed in his 1945 book *The Idea of Nature* that all of our ideas and concepts are conditioned by our idea of nature, an idea that is generally formed during our elementary-school years, though we hope not ossified at that early age. Our ideas of beauty, of our own possibilities, of God, and of the environment around us—all of these and more bear the mark of what we think about nature. That Collingwood's insight is far from banal becomes clear when we remember that the enormous impact of the sciences in the last century and the sea change that they have effected in our worldviews make their impact primarily on our ideas of nature. If it is true that our ideas of nature condition all of our thinking and feeling, then it is clear that the very ground on which we stand has been undergoing radical reshaping for as long as any of us can remember.

I believe that Collingwood is correct in his observation, and I am also convinced that scientific explorations into the nature of nature challenge our ideas about most of the basic realities of life. We certainly know by now that what we believe (or do not believe) about God, about what is “natural” for us, about values, and about our survival are so intertwined with our ideas of nature that they cannot escape potential dismantling in the light of science's continually new insights into the nature of nature. Consequently, I can imagine no more important subject for our journal to focus on than nature and its implications for our attempts to come to grips with life, religion, and how we should live in the world today.

Every article in this issue touches on nature and its significance for us. Gregory Peterson opens with a Thinkpiece that examines scientism—that is, the claims and limits of what science can tell us about nature. The first half of the issue then turns to a symposium organized by the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science on the question, “Is Nature Enough? The Search for Transcendence.” Michael Cavanaugh provides an introduction

to the five contributions of the symposiasts: theologians John Haught and Jerome Stone, scientists Ursula Goodenough, Terrence Deacon, and V. V. Raman, concluding with the reflections of theologian and pastor Barbara Whittaker-Johns. This symposium makes clear that nature-based attempts to shape a philosophy of life can take a variety of directions, some leading to traditional religious understandings, others to quite different points of the spiritual compass.

In the section of articles that constitutes the second half of the issue, two pieces probe the interaction of science and our choices of values: psychiatrists Nancy Morrison and Sally Severino explore the ways in which biology and morality interact in each person's moral reflection, while Massimo Pigliucci, a philosopher, adds to the ongoing discussion of science and ethics. Ecologist Matthew Orr suggests that the vitality of religion is correlated to its capability for interpreting the environmental crisis. Marc Bekoff offers another installment in his interpretations of animals, based in his research. This is the third of Bekoff's articles to appear in these pages over the last three years. Richard Grigg, religious studies scholar, calls attention to the resources for understanding evolution to be found in the work of Paul Tillich and at the same time enters into dialogue with John Haught, whose article on Tillich and Teilhard we published in September 2002. Cosmology, "fine-tuning" for life, and models of portraying God's action in the world are the topic for theologian Taede Smedes. His essay won a 2002 prize from the European Society for the Study of Science and Theology.

Our ideas of nature will never be finished products, because we are always, especially today, learning new and surprising things about nature. It follows that our worldviews, whether they are rooted in religion or not, will also always be works-in-progress. Attention to this ongoing work of learning and reflection will always be central to this journal's agenda.

—Philip Hefner