Editorial

DIALOGUE, YOKING, AND THE COMMON GOOD

Reflecting once again on the character and mission of this journal as it marks the end of its fortieth year of publication, I recognize that *Zygon* wears a three-cornered hat, so to speak, corresponding to a threefold mandate forged by our founders and elaborated through our forty-year history. First, we are committed to dialogue: exploring the intellectual and theoretical issues that arise when religion and science engage each other. Just as important is interaction, the yoking of science and religion so as to create a coherence between the two; this is the "zygon" function. Finally, our vision considers the overall aim of contributing to the welfare of the human community and the world in which we live. Dialogue, yoking, and the common good—these are the three corners of the hat we wear.

Dialogue, defined as exploring intellectual and theoretical issues, is the research-and-development dimension of our mandate. It may move slowly, and any given exploratory effort may seem esoteric and less productive to those who are exploring some other trajectory. Probing the possibilities of the cosmological anthropic principle, for example, may not hold urgency for those who are preoccupied with the developing cognitive science of religion, for those who are elaborating the sciences of emergence, or for those who focus on the sociobiological bases of altruism. In the long run, however, it is essential not only that the dozens of pathways for exploration be pursued but also that new issues be recognized as they appear. These R&D efforts work cumulatively; individual probes build on previous work and likewise contribute to future probes. Even though, generally speaking, this is the least controversial element of our mandate, there are skeptics who doubt whether dialogue is possible and even some who are opposed to it. Nobel physicist Steven Weinberg is one of the doubters. He fears that constructive dialogue may undermine "one of the great achievements of science": that it has made it possible for intelligent people not to be religious. "We should not retreat from this accomplishment," he writes (1999, 38).

Affirming the possibility of dialogue between science and religion does represent a point of view, even a bias. Within the religion-and-science

[*Zygon*, vol. 40, no. 4 (December 2005).]
 ISSN 0591-2385

field of study, however, it is taken as a basic assumption. Not so with yoking. The term that stands as the journal's title, *Zygon*, denotes this yoking (readers unfamiliar with this perspective are invited to consult the "Statement of Perspective" in the Endmatter of each issue). Most often the partners in this interaction are described as the knowledge provided by science and the tradition of values carried by the religions. The post–World War II generation of scientists who figured in the journal's founding were convinced that advances in scientific knowledge and its technological applications—particularly nuclear physics—had outstripped public understanding as well as the moral reflection that could harness and guide the knowledge and its applications. The result is a dangerous "disconnect" that threatens the well-being of human societies, a sundering of values from knowledge, goodness from truth, religion from science.

Joining or yoking religion and science has been expressed in several ways in the pages of *Zygon*. First, it has been argued, based on evolutionary theorizing, that religion has been selected for by the processes of natural selection, and it thus is a primordial constituent of the history of *Homo sapiens*. In the two articles that are reprinted in this issue, founding editor Ralph Wendell Burhoe suggests that religion plays a role in the developmental processes of the species comparable to that of the fundamental psychic structures that mark individual human development. Religion can and must be reshaped, he insists, but it will not disappear, because it is intrinsic to human life.

A second expression of yoking occurs when scientific knowledge helps to reshape religious narratives that, because of their ties to outmoded understandings of the world, no longer provide the plausible meanings and interpretations that can contextualize our lives. The prominence that the journal has given to the so-called Epic of Evolution is a case in point. There are many versions of this Epic, but for all of them a grand narrative is constructed on the basis of scientific accounts of cosmic unfolding—from Big Bang through the formation of planets, the emergence of life on planet Earth, human evolution, and scenarios of the far future. This narrative functions as a myth of creation, even when classical creation theology is not intended. The Epic of Evolution offers a context for the human species both in evolutionary history and in the planetary ecosystem. For Christians and others rooted in biblical traditions, the scientific narrative can serve as the loom on which traditional beliefs about God, grace, and human destiny are woven, much in the way that the Genesis accounts wove the Hebraic beliefs on the loom of the Near Eastern cultural materials of their day. Over the years, we have given comparable attention to constructing ethical thinking that is informed by the sciences.

Readers of *Zygon* know from our offerings that many religious thinkers, both theistic and nontheistic, are engaged in reshaping traditional narratives. Religious naturalists, for example, propose credible interpretations

of death, evil, and moral behavior that are informed by scientific understandings of nature. Christian theologians develop ideas of God that take into account quantum physics, information theory, and evolutionary theory. Burhoe spoke of this integrating as "translation" of traditional religious ideas into scientifically plausible concepts. He himself developed ideas of natural selection that corresponded to the traditional ideas of God and of cultural evolution that corresponded to ideas of soul and immortality.

Behind these proposals is the assumption that systems of belief are critical for constructing personal worldviews and undertaking beneficial moral action. If scientific knowledge is integrated in a plausible manner with traditional religious narratives it is more likely that wholesome attitudes and behaviors will result—among both those who hold to traditional religious faith and those for whom this faith has lost its persuasiveness.

This concern for attitudes and behaviors leads directly to the third corner of our hat: the common good. The common good has preoccupied philosophy and religion for millennia. The common good is a societal value: the social systems, institutions, and environments on which we all depend must work so as to benefit all people. *Zygon* has from its inception insisted that the yoking of science and religion is not complete unless it informs society and contributes to its welfare. Integrating religion with scientific knowledge aims at constructing worldviews that can provide the context for human living, that can give us a sense of our place in the scheme of things, a sense of our niche. The expectation is that when we know our niche we will gain a sense of what that niche requires if it is to be a place where the common good flourishes. Religions focus on flourishing; science clarifies the conditions under which flourishing is possible. Religion tells us that self-giving love for others is a paramount value. Science has enabled us to bend nature to serve human flourishing through technology. The common good requires us to make use of both our science and our religion to find ways that technology can promote social systems, institutions, and environments that will benefit all.

Don Browning made just this point in his guest editorial in the September issue. He wrote that "*Zygon* should go in two directions at once": it should "continue to pursue fundamental theoretical issues," but it should also apply the fruits of these inquiries to the emerging worldwide challenges confronting societies on the boundary between biotechnology and tradition, modernity and contemporary expressions of religion (Browning 2005, 530). In effect, Browning is calling us to focus even more intensely on one of our ongoing fundamental aims. His call resonates with our efforts in the past to reflect on religion, war, and peace (December 1986), the urgency of a global ethic (June 1999 and March 2003) and our symposia on HIV/AIDS (March 2003 and June 2004) and organ transplants (September 2003), but it also mandates that we give even more attention to what makes for the common good.

Attention to the common good involves another element, less obvious perhaps but no less urgent and demanding, namely, the institutional expressions of science and religion. Ideas and beliefs are not just intellectual proposals; they are also embodied in actual communities and institutions. The ongoing centuries-long impact of science and religion on individuals and cultures would not have happened without their institutionalization.

The behavior of science and religion as institutions becomes an especially critical issue when we attend to the common good. The common good is influenced by ideas and individuals, but the impact of institutions is much greater, and many historians have paid homage to the immense power of these two forces within human culture. When we focus on ideas and dialogue, we can be cheerleaders for both religion and science, but when we take the institutional impact on the common good into account, we must become critics as well. The impressive ideas of religion and science can be embodied in behaviors that do not work for the benefit of all.

History is full of examples of how both religion and science have allowed themselves to be coopted by social, political, and economic forces—to the detriment of society as a whole. Both religion and science can be turned into dangerous ideologies; religion can become fundamentalism, whereas science can become scientism. This is the dark side of religion and science, and it compromises their contribution to the common good. *Zygon* has given much less attention to critique, because the journal's aim is to encourage science and religion to make wholesome impacts on individuals and cultures. However, critique cannot be absent if we are to be responsible in carrying out our historic mandate. In this issue, we note two pieces that aim at encouragement but recognize that critique cannot be excluded. Rustum Roy, materials scientist, offers an incisive critique of scientism as well as technologism, while religious thinker Ingrid Shafer, in her study of the Faust legend, elaborates an equally incisive critique of religious practices and beliefs that close themselves off from science.

Such complex reflections on the mandate and aims of *Zygon* seem appropriate to our fortieth year. The subject matter of our journal—so critical to the life of the human community and to the world in which we live—demands serious reflection on our aims. This seriousness is clearly present in the contents of this issue. In the opening Thinkpiece and in the closing Credo, we reprint two pieces by Burhoe that lay out his convictions concerning the significance of the *Zygon* mandate for the future of humanity. In the final segment of the anniversary symposium that has run in each of this year's issues, technology receives concentrated attention from Bronislaw Szerszynski (cultural and historical studies), V. V. Raman (physics), Roy (materials science), Ted Peters (theology), and Antje Jackelén (theology). Gregory Peterson (philosophy, theology) provides a retrospective assessment and interpretation of the twenty-one contributions to this project of reflecting on science, religion, and secularity in a technological society.

Philosopher and historian Shafer explores the significance of the Faust legend for understanding science, while poet Alan Nordstrom sees Faust as an honest secular humanist.

In a section of articles Thomas Oord (theology, philosophy) analyzes recent research on love. Philosopher and bioethicist Bernard Rollin probes the deep significance of genetic engineering. Robert Geraci (religious studies) explores the dialectic between meaning and "static" in artistic, religious, and scientific truth, and theologian Leonard Hummel considers the attempt by George Murphy (a physicist and clergyman) to interpret the cosmos through the lens of Martin Luther's theology of the cross.

Zygon has never promised an easy journey. Our satisfaction comes from our dedication to a very heavy mandate and the sense that we have done our best to carry out our mission—and that so many authors and readers have joined in the project.

References

Browning, Don. 2005. "*Zygon* at 40: Its Past and Possible Future." *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 40 (September): 529–33.

Weinberg, Steven. 1999. "A Designer Universe?" *The New York Review of Books* 46 (October 21): 30–38.

—Philip Hefner

Big News in January

As of 1 January 2006, two new possibilities will be available to *Zygon* readers:

(1) All of the back issues—forty years—have been digitized, and they will be available for reading and searching. The *Zygon* Web site will have useful cross-referencing and supplementary materials, and from to time we will organize discussions of key articles.

Readers can access the material at either *www.blackwellpublishing.com/zygon* or *www.blackwell-synergy.com* (if you experience difficulties, contact *customerservices@blackwellpublishing.com*).

(2 The *Zygon* Web site will be up and functioning at *www.zygonjournal.org*. We will post features about the journal, excerpts of some articles, calls for papers, and cross references to digitized back issues.

Call for Papers

Zygon welcomes papers on the theme "What place, if any, do the ideas of *meaning*, *purpose*, and *telos* play in scientific research and theory formation?" On the one hand, we often read that "teleology," "design," and "purpose" are alien to science; we also read that "chance" and "randomness" are fundamental to science, especially for the biological sciences. On the other hand, the idea of "function" also seems basic to some scientific thinking, especially biology. "Function" seems closely related to purpose, as philosophers of biology have frequently observed. A recent report, for example, noted that paleontologists are much exercised over the question "What were dinosaur feathers for?" Is it the case that science operates with notions of "purpose" and "telos" with lower-case *p* and *m*, whereas religion raises those letters to upper-case status? What is the nonscientific thinker to understand about the stance of science on these questions? Do the various sciences take different positions on this question?

Length is negotiable. Deadline is 1 February 2006. Authors planning to submit such a paper should inform the editor as soon as possible. Send notifications to both of these addresses:

pnhefner@sbcglobal.net
zygon@lstc.edu