

Editorial

PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL OR DISCIPLINARY JOURNAL?

A funny thing happened on *Zygon's* way from its origins in 1966 to the present day, forty-four years later. The funny thing is that what began as a slim fledgling journal embodying a vision for dealing with a deep crisis of society has become a flagship journal of an academic discipline—with worldwide Internet availability through three thousand libraries. This unexpected transformation is the theme for this, my final piece as editor of this journal.

In 1966, there was no “religion-and-science” field, no enterprise designated as “religion-and-science.” There were a handful of leading thinkers—among them Ian Barbour and Ralph Wendell Burhoe—and a body of interested readers and listeners. The first issue of *Zygon* lists twenty-one distinguished scientists on the editorial advisory board; Barbour, a physicist trained under Enrico Fermi and teaching both physics and religion at Carleton College, is the only board member who was professionally involved in religious studies. The scientists included those who were involved in programs of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences that aimed to address the crisis of “morale and morals” that was apparent in a growing chasm between the traditions of knowledge, represented by the sciences, and those of values and meaning that are embodied in religion. These scientists took to a deeper level what C. P. Snow termed “the two cultures.” Our first editorial, in March 1966, puts it clearly:

Religious beliefs governing our morale and morals in the West have not kept pace with the radical transformation of our world view and of our conditions of living. The beliefs currently propagated by the Judeo-Christian, as well as other religious traditions, remain largely those which fitted the world views and conditions of life of a prescientific culture.

This same editorial asks, “Why another journal?” There are social science journals that deal with religion and also those that focus on the history of science and religion. Add to these publications “devoted to showing why scientific advances have little relevance for religion and theology.”

But we are committed to the task of reformulating religion for an age of science, not simply analyzing scientifically or historically what has gone on thus far . . . we represent a new field, or a novel approach to a former field.

These scientists were galvanized by the urgency they perceived to resuscitate the lost unity between truth and goodness, expressed as the “yoking” (zygon) of science and religion.

Today, in contrast to 1966, there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of academics who concern themselves with “religion and science.” This entails courses and syllabi to be designed as well as reappointment, promotion, and tenure to be achieved; there may indeed be a societal crisis, but the “publish or perish” rule exists in institutional contexts that are not galvanized by the same motivations as the initial group of scientists who put their endorsements on each issue of *Zygon*. *Zygon* is now embedded in a grand worldwide educational effort that has enriched thousands of minds—students, teachers, and researchers. It’s a wonderful world in many respects, but nevertheless an institutionalization of religion-and-science quite different from what the founders of our journal knew or intended.

I characterize these twists and turns of *Zygon*’s journey as a movement between the roles of *public intellectual* and *journal of an academic discipline*. This distinction describes the poles of a world that *Zygon* traverses. We must either choose between them or attempt to embrace both poles in a single trajectory.

Public intellectuals do not confine their thinking to an area of specialization; they rather bring knowledge and ideas to bear in the larger public sphere, frequently participating in public debates. Public intellectuals may speak about their specialized discipline, and they may also relate that discipline to the larger social, cultural, and political world, but their audience is the larger public square, not their peers in the specialized guild.

While science and religion are both highly developed fields of study, requiring specialized knowledge, they are inherently public because they impinge intensely on the common life. Scientific knowledge makes a difference for how men and women in general understand themselves and the world they live in—this is a matter of worldview. Even more, when it functions in tandem with sophisticated technology, scientific knowledge shapes our bodies and the way we live. Nuclear physics, genetic medicine, and transplant surgery are examples of how intensely scientific knowledge intersects our lives and therefore becomes subject to equally intense public discussion and debate. Religion, likewise, concerns itself directly with both worldview and the way individuals and groups conduct their lives. When they occupy themselves with the conduct of life, both science and religion carry an “ought.” In the public realm, because science inevitably becomes a means for the betterment of life and even for individual and social survival, it carries within itself an imperative. If stem cell research can save lives from disease and deformity, we argue that it ought to be supported.

Likewise, if scientific knowledge can show how to reverse environmental deterioration, it ought to be applied in practice. For its part, religion brings “ought” and “ought not” even more forthrightly to bear, at points intersecting the imperatives of science, as in the issue of stem cell research, and also in ways that have less to do with science, as in the issues of marriage and family, truth and goodness. Since both religion and science are regularly coopted for society’s purposes, they become enmeshed in ambiguities and at times even serve such interests as economic profit, war, and racism. These issues of public concern elicit passionate debate and criticism.

The inherent contrast in the ways religion and science approach life in the world, quite apart from the substance of practical moral issues, is also a matter of public significance. Are we, for example, to shape our policy and behavior on the basis of religious tradition and story or on reason and demonstration as practiced by science?

In its academic disciplinary life, religion-and-science presents quite a different face. As a specialized academic field, it must conform itself to curricular standards—courses, seminars, syllabi and bibliographies, and examinations—and those of research—library acquisitions, scholarly papers, dissertations, and the criteria for academic prestige and advancement. As a discipline, religion-and-science constructs a canon of basic readings, a language or jargon for use in the peer group, a set of issues to be elucidated; the field also assumes its own history, which in turn requires interpretation.

The stuff of the specialized discipline may seem tedious and abstruse to the larger audience, whereas the burning issues of public concern may be distractions within the routines of academia. The public delights in lampooning the meticulous professor, just as academia is notorious for penalizing the public intellectual who has not won the stripes that are bestowed only to those who have jumped the approved hurdles.

The dissonance between public square and specialized academic discipline is serious and important. The public sphere requires clarity, simplicity, and relevance; policy and action are present immediacies—they cannot be delayed interminably until research projects are completed. On the other hand, the complexities of specialization and research do make an irreplaceable contribution. Although the public may believe, for example, that religious thinkers across the board reject Charles Darwin, the historical fact (well documented in scholarly tomes) that Darwin has been well received by many religionists needs to be recognized. A comparable point can be made about Galileo’s relations with the church. To take another example, the cognitive sciences certainly defy easy popular explanation, but they are nevertheless enormously significant for understanding religion, mental health, and moral behavior. Such understanding is not fostered by the demands of the public square; it is found in the ivory towers of academic specialization, where there are time and resources for study and reflection.

There is, of course, a third audience to be considered in this connection: the religious communities. In that first editorial, *Zygon's* founders underscored and cited as justification for the journal's existence a commitment "to the task of reformulating religion for an age of science." To be sure, the public square and the academic discipline must give attention to reformulated religion, but it is the life of religious communities that is most existentially affected by such reformulation. And these communities will insist on directing that reformulation; they may indeed reject it out of hand, just as in the public realm the revisionist history of how religion has related to Darwin or Galileo has been mostly ignored.

How is *Zygon* to conduct itself amid these three worlds—public square, academic discipline, and religious community? At no point in its forty-four years has the journal wanted to ignore any of these three. At the mundane level of editorial process, each of these worlds brings its own criteria of excellence and relevance. An article that satisfies the criteria of one of these worlds will not necessarily find favor in the other two. *Zygon* has had to be more, even, than interdisciplinary—it is multidisciplinary.

This is *Zygon's* challenge as it faces the future. It is an exciting if ambiguous place to be, and it offers more possibilities than pitfalls, if it is properly negotiated. As I reflect on my own journey in the world of religion-and-science, which began in 1962, and on my twenty years as editor of *Zygon*, I recognize that it has taken a course almost identical to that of the journal. It has been a journey in and between these three worlds, and each of them has consumed my interest and energies. The fact that I am retiring as editor does not mean that I relinquish my visas, so to speak, to travel freely in these worlds. Each of them carries its own form of excitement and offers its own distinctive gestures of hospitality. My thanks go out to all of you readers and authors who have made a wonderful journey possible. My good wishes go out also to the new editor, Willem B. Drees.

I conclude with words from Dag Hammarskjöld: "For all that has been, thanks. For all that will be, yes."

—Philip Hefner

OVERVIEW OF ARTICLES

The first section opens with a proposal for an "empirical aesthetic," set forth by Alejandro Garcia-Rivera (theology, physics), Mark Graves (philosophy), and Carl Neumann (molecular biology), as a contrast to the notion that beauty is incidental, in the mind of the beholder. Lothar Schäfer (physical chemistry) and his collaborators, Diogo Valadas Ponte (psychology) and Sisir Roy (physics) reflect on how quantum reality may serve as a foundation for ethics. Their expansive interpretation from physics may be seen as a companion to the two articles with which this issue closes, by Patrick Heelan and Karl Pribram. Hector Qirko (anthropology) presents a

fundamental study of altruism in suicide terror organizations, and Inna Semetsky (education) analyzes the Tarot card phenomenon in terms of science, mathematics, and philosophy.

A symposium on cultural evolution follows in the second section in a discussion of the recent book *Not by Genes Alone: How Culture Transformed Human Evolution*, by Robert Boyd and Peter Richerson. The symposiasts are Donald Braxton (religious studies), William Irons (anthropology), and Robert Glassman (psychology).

Two studies of the thought of William James are offered—by religious studies scholar Ann Taves, who deals with the classic work *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, and philosopher John Kaag, who interprets James on the basis of his psychological works.

The concluding section, “Physics and Mind,” presents companion pieces by two senior scholars who have been in conversation with each other for several years, Heelan (philosophy, physics) and Pribram (neuropsychology, psychiatry). From their different perspectives, they underscore the fundamental significance of the observer and the observer’s mind in our perceptions and interpretations of reality.

In this issue, the reader will encounter the profound and mind-stretching range of *multidisciplinarity* as it has found a home in the pages of *Zygon*. We would call this issue a kind of calisthenics of intellect and spirit, adding that there is also great pleasure to be found here, not often associated with the strenuous nature of calisthenics. Enjoy!

THE JOINT PUBLICATION BOARD

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to support *Zygon Journal*

With gratitude for Philip Hefner's sustained and creative leadership of *Zygon* from June 1989 to June 2009, the Joint Publication Board of the journal has established The Philip Hefner Fund. This endowment fund will be used for the purpose of sustaining the journal and honoring the vision and service of Philip Hefner.

As a challenge to the *Zygon* community, \$70,000 has been pledged over five years to match dollar for dollar contributions to this fund. All who are interested in expressing their gratitude and in honoring Hefner's outstanding editorial leadership are invited to contribute to this fund. Donations may be in the form of one-time gifts or pledges of up to five years.

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