

Editorial

HUMANS IN THE CENTER?

As humans we tend to place humans in the center. However, by now, we understand our place to be fairly modest: we live on one of the planets with a midsize star, somewhere in one of the spiral arms of a galaxy that is also just one among billions. Many more planets have been discovered in recent years. Science offers fascinating discoveries. The fact that we humans can make such discoveries is equally fascinating. With the development of science, we have opened new windows on reality, seeing farther and seeing differently.

Is science just opening windows? Can we treat science as knowledge without a knower, a human with values, interests, and biases that shape the particular perspective and results? To some extent we can: successful science seems to be accepted by people with quite different social, cultural, and religious orientations. In a presidential address to the Philosophy of Science Association, the late Ernan McMullin has analyzed the role of values in science. He argued that over time, epistemic values drive nonepistemic values out. This address has inspired Michael Ruse in his research in the history and philosophy of biology, where the notion “progress” has carried much nonepistemic baggage, including the evolutionary trend toward the “higher” primates and, finally, “us.” The coexistence of a scientific discourse that seeks to exclude such evaluations and a cultural and religious discourse that reflects on the meaning of human existence in the light of science is in tension with McMullin’s thesis, though on the scientific side, his expectation that epistemic values push others out seems by and large confirmed. In this issue we republish Ernan McMullin’s presidential address with the reflection by Michael Ruse on the way this issue has shaped his career. In coming issues, we will republish more articles by Ernan McMullin with reflections by others in the field. For a brief introduction to McMullin (Drees 2011), see some of his contributions in *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* (McMullin 1980, 1993, 2011).

This issue also offers reflections on humans and on what we might become. Hava Tirosh-Samuels on surveys the current discourse on “transhumanism,” the idea that with modern technology and medicine, we might expand the human life span and abilities to a level far transcending the human condition of today. As one of the advocates of transhumanism, Aubrey de Grey claims the first person who will live to be over a thousand years old has already been born! Through technology, we will slow down aging. Others speculate that our descendants may be machines that achieve

immortality. Such claims have been criticized as unrealistic by many others. “Transhumanism” is a fascinating domain of dreams and speculations that sits at the intersection of science and our values and dreams of ultimacy. Tirosh-Samuelson analyzes transhumanism as a hybrid of religious and secular motives. Robert M. Geraci focuses in particular on the techno-dreams in videogames, while James J. Hughes writes more on social realities and imagination. Ronald Cole-Turner considers the interplay of transhumanist ideas and Christian themes, and in particular the presence of such imagery in charismatic, evangelical Christianity. *Zygon* previously published other reflections on biotechnology, dreams of the future, and interpretations of the past (e.g., Geraci 2010; Marangudakis 2012; and Caiazza 2012).

Whereas “transhumanism” seems to reach for the stars, the section “Doing Good, Doing Bad, Doing Nothing” is more sobering. “Doing nothing” may be the most troubling option; not only are we inclined to do bad things, but we also let bad things happen as if we are indifferent, or at least don’t dare to engage ourselves for the good. Karl E. Peters and Barbara Whittaker-Johns recapitulate the 2011 conference of the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science on this topic. William J. Shoemaker draws on modern studies of the brain, while Ervin Staub discusses mass violence and genocide. Not our best side. Karl Peters offers a Christian-naturalistic proposal for understanding “human salvation” in the context of an evolutionary world.

A further section focuses on the understanding of humans, perhaps as beings “in the image of God,” drawing especially on the Christian heritage. Given that a major domain in “religion and science” has become anthropology, it is worthwhile to consider some substantial theological reflections on human being and becoming.

The long arch of time returns in the final section on eschatology, between cosmology and ethics. Klaus Nürnberger argues that the scientific perspective for the long run does not allow for a cosmic, futurist understanding of eschatology. He pleads for a more limited, hermeneutical understanding of the symbols and texts. In contrast, Robert J. Russell—who just published a major book *Time in Eternity* (Russell 2012)—argues that the scientific understanding need not imply the metaphysical perspective presented by Nürnberger. An earlier collection of essays by Russell was discussed in *Zygon* by Nancey Murphy, John F. Haight, Michael Ruse, and Willem B. Drees with a response by Russell (2010).

The issue starts with a reply by Andrés Ruiz and Jeffrey Koperski to an article published in June (Pynes 2012), which itself was a response to an earlier article by Koperski (2008). The key issue is when concern about hidden agendas and implicit motives may be a valid reason to dismiss someone’s arguments, and when that would be an inappropriate *ad hominem* argument. The domain at stake, in this exchange, is one

where this is most likely to occur—the controversy over evolution and “Intelligent Design.” The issue ends with some reviews. There is plenty to read besides *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*, but this issue also offers some substantial and challenging food for thought.

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