Editorial

In an age when thermonuclear bombs threaten to blast man off the face of the earth, overpopulation threatens to constrain him to standing room in starvation, and pollution endangers his health, and when an impersonal technology, a rapidly changing condition of society, and a slipping relativity of values disfigure and distort man's self-image and his sanity, the radical estrangement of the traditional "two cultures" of the humanist and the scientist must be overcome.

Scientists are increasingly accepting the responsibility for the practical consequences of their discoveries and realize that technology not only can work wonders for human betterment but may also, if unchecked, destroy us all. Humanists have come to realize that science is a major force in human life and not merely a theoretical exercise or a source of curious phenomena in the laboratory.

But the unusual force of contemporary science first expressed itself in the ending of the Second World War with the atomic destruction of Hiroshima. And since then it has expressed itself in the production of devices which propel man into space to land him on the moon. The humanist still needs to be convinced that science can be a constructive force in human life; that it can be a source of human satisfaction above the level of technological services. In the face of the grave dangers which threaten to become more acute with each generation—most of which dangers would not exist but for some discovery in the field of the natural sciences that through a short-sighted application has led to an upsetting of the balance of nature with respect to the human socio- and bio-cultural ecology—the positive potential of science to enhance human values must be demonstrated.

We know that science is relevant to human values, and what we must now find out is how science can help us reach or extend our values rather than frustrate them. We cannot return to a state of innocent human nature. A thing known cannot be unlearned. But we may be able to turn the vast accomplishments of contemporary science to human advantage. Our recent International Conference on Human Values and Natural Science held at New York State University College

of Arts and Science at Geneseo was called in the belief that this is a necessary and a feasible task.

The conference, which took place April 25 and 26, 1969, benefited from the thought of a couple of dozen American and overseas scientists, philosophers, and educators—and their critics. These men were united in their concern over the present situation and in their belief that the concepts, methods, and technological applications of natural science can lead to a better understanding and, through understanding, to a purposive betterment of the human condition. Their presentations, as well as the responses of those attending the conference, evidenced a sense of urgency as well as a trust in the power of the rational intellect.

The conference raised and discussed issues of widespread concern for human understanding and behavior; and the issues require wider presentation, response, and resolution if humanity is to profit. In publishing six of the papers read at the conference and a related paper on "Values via Science," *Zygon* makes an important contribution to a task set by the conference: to bring to an especially concerned and critical public some significant rationale for understanding human values in the light of the natural sciences.*

It is my hope that this issue of *Zygon* will provoke further discussion and bring forth new contributions in an ongoing dialogue between scientists, philosophers, theologians, educators, and clergymen in a much needed but as yet much neglected field.

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* These six papers, along with others read at the conference, will appear in a forthcoming book, *Human Values and Natural Science,* edited by Ervin Laszlo and James B. Wilbur (New York: Gordon & Breach Science Publishers, 1970).