

Editorial

AFTER FIFTY FULL YEARS, IT'S NICE NOT TO KNOW

In *Fiddler on the Roof*, a 1971 movie on Jewish life in Russia in the early twentieth century, the three oldest daughters of dairyman Tevye (played by Chaim Topol) and his wife Golde (Norma Crane) intend to marry men with different ways of life. Triggered by the new ways in which their daughters speak of love, Tevye asks Golde, in a duet, “Do you love me?” Her first response is dismissive; “You are upset, you are worn out. Go inside, Go lay down, maybe it’s indigestion.” He persists, and after some back and forth, including recollections of the first time they met, on their wedding day, the duet takes a pragmatic but romantic turn. “For twenty-five years I have lived with him, fought with him, starved with him. Twenty-five years my bed is his. If that’s not love, what is?” “Then you love me?” “I suppose I do.” “And I suppose I love you too.” Which leads to the conclusion, “It doesn’t change a thing, but even so. After twenty-five years, it’s nice to know.”

After fifty full years, we also might wonder about the condition of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*. The journal might have been based on a confusion that would pass, but it persisted well beyond its founding editor. It is a pragmatic labor of love, from authors and reviewers, the editor and all others who work together to make this a healthy journal. The world has kept changing; in recent issues, we offered reflections on our own history (Hefner 2014; Peters 2014), and on the way the world has changed, and those changes affect the future of religion and science (Bagir 2015; Bauman 2015; Fredericks and Schweitz 2015; Peters 2015). We also are well aware how diverse the world is, and thus have published a variety of essays from various parts of the world—Asia (Kim 2015; Li and Fu 2015), South Africa (Conradie and du Toit 2015), Europe (Evers 2015; Oviedo and Garre 2015), and Latin America (Silva 2015), and this issue develops the series with contributions on religion and science in Islamic countries with an article by Nidhal Guessoum and another from the Indian cultural context by Anindita Niyogi Balslev. The journal is doing well; *Zygon* is accessible online in over 10,000 libraries and in 2014 an article was downloaded over 100,000 times (Drees 2015b).

But after fifty years, we still cannot claim to know how religion and science relate, or even how to understand religion in relation to science. We do not get closer to “the answer.” Opinions remain varied, from a staunch defense of independence with the belief that religion addresses questions not handled within the framework of science (Ruse 2015) to a

quest to understand God in scientific terms as an emergent phenomenon in the world (Abrams 2015). It is not just that adherence to religions may have changed; it seems that for many what it means to be religious has changed—from authority to authenticity, as I summarized it in the title of a contribution (Drees 2015a). What is meant by “religion” differs from one person to the next; some think of their own fairly well-defined tradition or denomination, others look for a metaphysics that is theist or religious naturalist (Ruper 2014); some treat religion anthropologically, as the symbols and rituals of particular groups, others think more individually and define religion as meaning and self-realization or self-loss (Rousseau 2014; Simpson 2014). Beliefs, moral orientations, communal practices: we cover it all. It is nice not to know what “religion” is, nor to have answers to our ultimate questions or be absolutely certain about the deepest values, so that we can continue our journey, our exploration of surprising ways of living and acting in the world, our conversation on convictions that are dear to some, and may be surprising or even distasteful to others. The doors remain open for scholarly contributions that relate human knowledge as realized in the sciences and technologies to human orientations, religious and naturalist, intellectual, moral, and existential, in many different ways.

IN THIS ISSUE OF *ZYGON*

Islam and India: Continuing our reviews. Reflecting on the way human knowledge and human existential concerns interact will not result in timeless truths. It is situated, in particular historical, social, political and religious contexts. One review article in this issue informs us of some of the major issues in Islam and science. Geographically this topic is not too strictly situated, as the engagement with science is not merely an issue in Muslim majority countries; think of Muslims living in Europe. As Nidhal Guessoum surveys the field, he shows fundamental variation among Muslims, in how they relate to science and to their own tradition and its sources. Some of that has surfaced before in the pages of *Zygon* (e.g., Bigliardi 2014).

The Indian cultural heritage is the focus of Anindita Niyogi Balslev’s contribution, a context which also allows for a great diversity, from its earliest period to the present (see, for instance, also Gosling 2013; Lopez 2008, 2010). An article published last year, on self-psychology and the natural world at an American Buddhist Center (Capper 2014) and a discussion on Owen Flanagan’s book *The Bodhisattva’s Brain* (Flanagan 2011; see Coseru 2014; Flanagan 2014; Goodman 2014) show how this heritage has spread far beyond the Indian subcontinent, and been transformed in the process.

Framing climate change. What is the best way to talk about climate change? Some treat it as a technological issue that might be solved by geo-engineering (Clingerman 2014). Others prefer apocalyptic language, to impress on us the grave threats ahead. Again others promote a new vision of our place on Earth, as articulated in evolutionary epics and in the Earth Charter (e.g., Eaton 2014; Riley 2014a, 2014b; Tucker 2014). *Why We Disagree about Climate Change* is the title of a book by Mike Hulme (2009), in which he considered various dimensions of this conflict. In his contribution to the continued conversation in this issue, he points out that we continue to disagree. This is not due to a lack of knowledge, as if some participants are not properly informed. The continuing controversy rather reflects the variety of frames people use in approaching such major issues.

Annick de Witt develops this theme by considering a few major world-views that serve as such frames. Lisa Stenmark considers these differences in terms of the myths we use and the stories we tell. A particular religious frame is presented here by Jonathan Moo, on climate change and apocalyptic imagination. Mary Evelyn Tucker reports on the “religion and ecology” movement, and argues that we should work toward a shared vision and joint action.

Thus, these five papers show an interesting diversity of perspectives, as the irenic aspiration to find a shared vision of the Earth by drawing on the science via the evolutionary epic is quite different from the way I understand the approaches by Hulme and Stenmark, which emphasize more the disputational or agonistic nature of democratic processes (Stenmark 2013; Drees 2014). Even among those of goodwill, there will continue to be disagreement, I expect.

What is specific about humans? A third thematic section deals with the question of what characteristics might be specific to humans, to ourselves, a theme that recurs quite often when speaking about religion and science (e.g., De Cruz and De Maeseneer 2014; Uytterhoeven 2014, and others in that issue). Paolo d’Ambrosio argues that we should accept science-based methodological naturalism, at least as a heuristic strategy. Along these lines, the domain of the natural has been extended when evolutionary thinking developed. It provided a way to regard the specificity of living beings, humans included, within a scientific context. Ontologically, one might consider “emergent monism” as the corresponding ontological framework.

In the second contribution, Lluís Oviedo considers religion from an evolutionary and cognitive perspective. The title raises already the important programmatic possibility: “religion as a language,” or rather, religions as languages. He suggests that understanding religion as a language might open a path in cognitive study of religion that would be closer to the way religion is lived by believers than more dominant approaches in the

cognitive study of religion, that tend to focus on beliefs, especially on beliefs about supernatural agency.

In the third contribution of this section, Ivan Colagè focuses on one further step, written language, and its impact on the brain and on culture. With writing, new forms of self-determination and self-transcendence arise. Colagè interprets this in a theological anthropology that aspires to do justice to science, especially neuroscience and evolution, and theological insights, drawing on Karl Rahner and others from the Catholic tradition.

Galileo Galilei among the Russian Orthodox. In this issue, we also have some individual contributions from various backgrounds. Teresa Obolevitch offers an original and very informative study of the reception of Galileo and the Copernican view of the solar system in Russian Orthodox circles, including a controversy in 2015! As Galileo was an Italian Roman Catholic who had offended the pope, the controversy is primarily one that has taken place within the Roman Catholic Church, and haunted the leadership at least until the recent study commissioned by Pope John Paul II (Coyne 2013; McMullin 2013). However, as science, his arguments in favor of the Copernican view of the universe were also important outside the boundaries of that church. Was Galileo a martyr for science, or rather an example of a sensible scientist who distinguished well between the spheres of scientific and religious authority? Different periods and persons favored different interpretations. It was, of course, for some a welcome apologetic opportunity to point out that the Eastern Orthodox Church was more tolerant and reasonable than its Roman Catholic counterpart.

Islamic legal debate in response to ambiguous gender. A quite different topic is analyzed in detail by Sayed Haneef and Mahmood Abd Majid. They consider Islamic moral and legal discourse on the management of intersex, that is, of children born with an ambiguous genital identity. For some time, immediate surgical intervention, creating an apparently genetically well-defined gender, has been the standard treatment. Haneef and Abd Majid argue that such an approach raises serious legal and moral questions. He thus, against common practice, argues for postponing any such interventions. Not only the issue itself merits publication, but also the insight it provides in the interplay of particular religious (and legal) and more global (or also particular, Western) medical and moral reasoning (see, e.g., also Ghaly 2013a, 2013b).

Human birth and human enhancement. Human birth is also the topic of the final contribution published in our fiftieth year. For women, giving birth is, and always has been, a risky process. Modern medical technology allows for various interventions, and thus has reduced the risks for women and their children, at least for those with access to good health care.

One might go several steps further—why not grow children in artificial environments? Why not skip birth and infancy, and aim at mature new beings? Such visions may be the material of science fiction, but thinking about ways to improve greatly the human condition seems a laudable goal. In his contribution, Eduardo Cruz deals with transhumanism and human enhancement, the aspiration to improve humans in a major way (see also Tirosh-Samuels 2012; Cruz 2013). He argues that skipping birth and infancy may seem a gain, but might be a loss. The engagement of parents with children, as the situation in which we develop stories and other forms of creativity and resilience, has helped to bring about much that we value in humans, and thus is not to be discarded lightly.

As always, this issue offers various informative and challenging contributions on important topics, as did the contributions in the 199 previous issues of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*—I pointed out some of the links to recent contributions. Of all those contributions, which article raised the most important questions? What would be the correct answer to those questions? After fifty full years, it is nice not to know.

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