

Editorial

FOCUS AND FLEXIBILITY: ZYGON'S PROFILE AND PRACTICE

Zygon's statement of perspective was written by the founding editor Ralph Burhoe and his successor Karl E. Peters in 1979 (Peters 2015, 351). It explains the name and reflects the substantial orientation of the founding editor and his successors. It has been published in almost every issue since then.

The word *zygon* means the yoking of two entities or processes that must work together. It is related to *zygote*—meaning the union of genetic heritage from sperm and egg, a union that is vital in higher species for the continuation of advancement of life. The journal *Zygon* provides a forum for exploring ways to unite what in modern times has been disconnected—values from knowledge, goodness from truth, religion from science. Traditional religions, which have transmitted wisdom about what is of essential value and ultimate meaning as a guide for human living, were expressed in terms of the best understandings of their times about human nature, society, and the world. Religious expression in our time, however, has not drawn similarly on modern science, which has superseded the ancient forms of understanding. As a result religions have lost credibility in the modern mind. Nevertheless some recent scientific studies of human evolution and development have indicated how long-standing religions have evolved well-winnowed wisdom, still essential for the best life. *Zygon's* hypothesis is that, when long-evolved religious wisdom is yoked with significant, recent scientific discoveries about the world and human nature, there results credible expression of basic meaning, values, and moral convictions that provides valid and effective guidance for enhancing human life.

For some history, see contributions by previous editors Karl Peters (2014; 2015) and Philip Hefner (2014). As I am approaching the end of my ten years as editor, let me articulate my own emphasis for the journal. I am less convinced of “yoking,” or of any other substantial position. Thus, while I served as editor, we added to the Statement of Perspective the following sentence:

Zygon also publishes manuscripts that are critical of this perspective, as long as such papers contribute to a constructive reflection on scientific knowledge, human values, and existential meaning.

Or at least, I thought we had added this. In preparing this editorial, I discovered that we had not added this sentence to the statement as published in our journal or on our website. Anyhow, the emphasis in my

editorial practice, qua object of study has been on the *sciences*, broadly understood, and on a diversity of *religious and non-religious orientations*, while understanding ourselves primarily as *a global, scholarly journal in the humanities and social sciences*.

SCIENCES

The journal appreciates the *sciences* as a major source of knowledge of reality and science-based technologies as a major power in society. As editor, I consider the relevant community of scientists as the forum to evaluate whether certain ideas are worthy of our consideration. If a submission was arguing primarily for a “different science,” I might refer it to a journal of that specific scholarly community; I would not primarily consider it material for us as a journal on “religion and science.” We are not a journal for a religious variety of science. This does not exclude, of course publishing contributions on new developments and on interpretations not necessarily shared by the whole community. A recent example is a section on “The New Biology,” with seven articles on current discussions (Watts and Reiss 2017; Ruse 2017; Depew and Weber 2017; and others).

Disciplinarily, *Zygon* has given priority to the natural sciences, but has also included substantial work in the social and behavioral sciences, especially if these relate to evolutionary theories and cognitive neurosciences. In this issue a clear example of the scientific ambition to understand ourselves and our world better is a set of three articles by anthropologist Margaret Boone Rappaport and astronomer Christopher Corbally on the evolution of hominids and humans, focusing on conditions that might explain our religious capacities. But we also welcome critical discussion on interpretations of science, such as the article by Mikael Leidenhag on Owen Flanagan’s proposals for relating philosophy of mind and modern, Westernized Buddhism in this issue.

Furthermore, even ideas that are clearly not accepted by the relevant scientific community may be worth consideration because of the human and cultural dimension, even if the ideas themselves would be dismissed as “pseudo-science” by scientists. How do people in particular subcultures argue? What is the social role of the claim that something is “science”? In a previous issue, we had articles on eugenetics (Prince 2017), on claims that modern science can be found in the Qur’an (Bigliardi 2017), on images of science in film (Jones, 2017), and on the “science” in “Eastern religions” (Barua 2017). The last topic, science in the context of “Eastern” religions, returns in three contributions in this issue: by Jeff Wilson on research on meditation, by Oliver Zambon and Thomas Aechtner on ambiguities about evolution and creationism in the ISKCON (Hare Krishna) movement, and by Renny Thomas and Robert M. Geraci on religious rituals in the Indian Institute of Science.

Finally, we engage science-based technologies, the impact of science on our lives. We had an interesting article on diphtheria, as an example from the history of medicine where new insights and powers led to some reinterpretation of age-old discussions on suffering and divine justice (Johnson 2017). There is the debate about the future of artificial intelligence and of humans, which resulted in various articles on “transhumanism” (e.g., Dumsday 2017).

RELIGIONS AND NATURALISM

With respect to religions, the journal has always been broad in outlook, although its original supporters were mainly representatives of the liberal wing of American Protestantism and Unitarianism, together with morally and socially concerned scientists.

A particular religion can be the point of departure, its theological resources being drawn upon for the perspective it offers on scientific understandings of the world or on moral issues due to medicine and technology. We have in recent years published various articles on Islamic bioethics (e.g., Ghaly 2013, and further articles in the same issue, as well as Al-Attar 2017). A tradition can be also the object of study, as ideas and practices have been shaped by science and technology as well as by other historical circumstances. And a particular line within a tradition can be criticized (e.g., Bigliardi 2017). In this issue, we have a discussion on the question whether “emergence” can be used in Pentecostal theology, as two students of Amos Yong, David Bradnick and Bradford McCall, challenge earlier articles by Mikael Leidenhag (2013), Johanna Leidenhag (2016), and Mikael Leidenhag and Joanna Leidenhag jointly (2015) with a response by Leidenhag and Leidenhag on their understanding of emergence and the limitations of its theological potential. The review essay by Stefaan Blancke, on the way Islam is changing in our time, triggered by a book by Taner Edis, is another example of engagement with a tradition. And in this issue, two articles on the way science and science criticism function in a Hindu context, such as the Hare Krishna movement (by Oliver Zambon and Thomas Aechtner) and the Indian Institute of Science, by Renny Thomas and Robert M. Geraci, also may serve as examples.

The journal has, from the very beginning, also published contributions that offered a naturalistic alternative or interpretation of religious traditions. Thus, this journal has contributed to the development of “religious naturalism”; in this issue, the review by Kristel Clayville of Jerome Stone’s book *Sacred Nature: The Environmental Potential of Religious Naturalism* is one more example of this interest. The reflections on “naturalism” in this journal have been in a constructive mode mostly, rather than the confrontational debates on religion and naturalism that may be associated with authors such as Richard Dawkins and Alvin Plantinga. That constructive

mode reflects the original ambition of “yoking” religion and science. In popular culture, Buddhism is sometimes seen as the way to do so—see not only the article on Flanagan by Mikael Leidenhag in this issue, but also the turn toward “spirituality” and meditation. In this issue, Jeff Wilson analyzes such a mixed form of science and contemporary religion, “the new science of happiness,” the blend of modern Buddhism and the scientific study of meditation.

The “yoking” need not imply that all authors seek to integrate religion and science intellectually; their coexistence in human culture implies the potential for interactions, even if they are considered categorically distinct. The proper way to understand and relate the main categories (theology, religion, spirituality, faith; science) is the focus of the article by Hermen Kroesbergen in this issue. Other recent examples are an article by Andrew Torrance (2017), against methodological naturalism—which probably is the default position for most authors in this journal—an article on the “poetic naturalism” of Sean Carroll (Whitley Kaufman 2017), and on the compatibility of religion and science if one does not treat religion as “believing without evidence” but as a search for transformative experiences (Recker 2017).

HUMANITIES

Given the focus of *Zygon*, history and philosophy are major humanities disciplines that are relevant. Last year we published historical contributions on ideas in the nineteenth and early twentieth century about diphtheria (Johnson 2017), on Henry Nelson Wieman and Reinhold Niebuhr (Rice 2017), and on Horace M. Kallen’s use of evolutionary arguments to support a particular views of Jews in the context of America’s democracy (Matthew Kaufman 2017). Aside from articles with a moral focus such as articles by Gregory Peterson (2017) and Celia Deane-Drummond (2017) on the question whether empathy might be considered immoral, the journal also receives substantial numbers of papers that are primarily philosophical in kind. If relevant to the scope of the journal, and sufficiently original and developed, these might be published (e.g., one by Walter Schultz and Lianne D’Andrea-Winslow [2017] on causation, dispositions, and physical occasionalism), though many technical philosophy papers that are built on fine scholarship are referred to other journals.


QUALITY OF SCHOLARSHIP

For me, the highest priority has been the standing of *Zygon* as a scholarly journal, with a focus on religion and the sciences (broadly understood). Thus, the sentence I intended to add to the Statement of Perspective; selection did not regard the position advanced by the submitting author—whether “yoking” or a different program. *Zygon* serves as a platform for

different orientations on religion and science. Quality and focus has been central; of unsolicited submissions, more than half have been rejected, either because the topic or orientation was not one that fitted *Zygon*, or because the level of treatment was not up to our standards. Of those published, most have been invited to revise after the initial reviews.

For me as editor, it has been important to engage religion in a wide range of varieties, from “naturalism” to traditional positions, not merely theology or metaphysics, but also lived religion. I have striven to make the range of topics and of contributing authors more genuinely global. One example has been the partnership in a conference on East Asian voices, resulting in a thematic issue in March 2016.

I wish the readers well with this issue with interesting contributions on important topics. And previous issues have much more of interest.

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