

## Editorial

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The attempt to draw a sharply-defined boundary between 'scientific knowledge' and 'non-scientific knowledge' is not a trivial exercise, as editors of scientific journals have sometimes found to their cost. Everyone would accept that the workings of the genome and the properties of lasers are subjects that belong to 'science'. Nearly everyone would also accept that the composition of love sonnets and art appreciation are not topics appropriate for submission to scientific journals. But what about astrology, putative spoon-bending, papers referring to Mother Earth and the 'strong form' of the anthropic principle? New Age thinking, the subject of two papers in this issue, is particularly difficult to categorise because the term encompasses such a philosophical *pot-pourri*. Yet, as Ernest Lucas points out in some introductory notes to the subject, certain common philosophical threads (of rather ancient vintage) run through New Age thinking, justifying the lumping together of this rather disparate group of ideas under a single title. Should we take it seriously? It is tempting not to, and the wilder aspects of New Age practice probably need not detain us for very long. Yet there is a central core of New Age thinking that represents a conscious alternative to both Christianity on the one hand and to materialistic philosophies on the other. In the first of two articles on the New Age, Ernest Lucas discusses the way in which such thinking constitutes a further attack on the concept of objectivity in science. The second article, by Lawrence Osborn, on the Gaia hypothesis, illustrates the difficulties of over-tidy definitions of scientific knowledge, with the more respectable aspects of Gaia being absorbed into scientific orthodoxy, whilst its terminology is also being used by others in an attempt to validate certain claims of New Age thinking.

One of the objections of New Age thinkers to traditional religious belief is that an unnatural wedge has been driven between the sacred and the secular in the Western world. The life and writings of the late Donald MacKay illustrate how clear Biblical thinking makes such a dichotomy quite unnecessary. In his review of Donald MacKay's recently published Gifford Lectures, Gareth Jones reminds us of the vigorous way in which MacKay held together both his rigorous and tough approach to scientific matters' and his 'profound and well thought-out Christian faith'; 'he was never willing to isolate his work from his faith, by putting them into discrete, non-communicating boxes . . .'. The way in which Christian faith is far from being isolated from 'work', and indeed addresses a topic of considerable practical concern to many scientists, is illustrated by Oliver Barclay's article on 'Animal Rights', in which he argues that the Biblical concept of responsible stewardship for the whole of the created world gives a far greater motivation to care for animals than the rather subjective and piece-meal theorising that characterises much of the present animal rights movement.

New Age thinkers may well be right that a false dichotomy between the sacred and the secular is a common characteristic of the Western world. The challenge to Christians is to demonstrate how quickly that dichotomy dissolves in the context of a Biblical world-view.