

Editorial

A striking feature of the contents of scientific journals like 'Nature' and 'Science' is the frequency with which ethical issues are aired in their comment and letter pages. Such issues vary from questions of scientific fraud and the priorities of scientific funding to human embryo research and the applications of genetic engineering. There is widespread acceptance within the scientific community that such issues cannot be addressed solely by the application of scientific methods. Whereas scientists may often be in the best position to assess the possible risks and ethical implications of their technologies, in the final analysis the value-judgments which are inevitable in all applications of scientific knowledge are neither derived from science itself nor are they the prerogative of any special grouping within society. That the scientific community is very aware of this fact is illustrated by the recent grant for \$400,000 awarded by the National Institutes of Health to the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences (USA) to carry out research and consultation on the theological and ethical issues raised by the Human Genome initiative.

Christians, of all people, should be most positive about those scientific advances which elucidate the detailed workings of living organisms, for they realise that they are in God's world, and that no corner of God's world is barred from scientific investigation. As John Brooke reminds us in this issue, the 'law' metaphor has long been used by Christians within the scientific community, with various nuances, to express their conviction that the natural world is under God's aegis, and so coherent and potentially understandable. It has been argued that the fear of upsetting the gods by *hubris* ('impiety') that prevented the Greeks from investigating the natural world was demythologised by the Christian doctrine of creation, so contributing to the rise of modern science. But today a new type of secularised *hubris* is competing for the public's attention, a superstitious fear of 'upsetting mother nature', that equally needs to be demythologised by the Christian emphasis that the stewardship and investigation of God's world is a holy enterprise.

At the same time Christians are realists about human nature and about the potential that humans have to misuse scientific knowledge. John Bryant's article on the Human Genome project is therefore useful in focussing our attention on the key ethical issues raised by this initiative. It is hoped to pursue some of the questions raised in Prof. Bryant's article in greater detail in future issues of the journal. Further contributions to this discussion are invited.