Editorial

Sally Woollett

Last month marked the 199th anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth on 12 February. An annual event planned around this date is Evolution Weekend, a time when congregations of all religions are encouraged to have meaningful discussions about the idea that science and religion are not mutually exclusive.

Contributors to the Mixed Opinion piece (p.3), comprising members of the scientific and religious communities, indicate that polarisation of scientific and religious views is unhelpful and unnecessary. As Father Paul McCabe states: "Science and religion are as body and soul. Neglect one at the peril of the other." The authors acknowledge differences and difficulties between the two communities, but they also recognise a fertile common ground and opportunities for respectful negotiation and cooperation about mutual interests.

Nine countries participated in this year's Evolution Weekend, but it is predominantly a US event. Michael Ruse(p.11) thinks that the evolution–creation debate is still hotly contested in the US because organised religion is still a fundamental way for people to connect on resounding social and moral matters, and many denominations "make biblical literalism nigh mandatory".

Tanya Scharaschkin says that few people in Pakistan understand Arabic, the language of the *Qur'an*, so they must rely on Islamic clerics and mosque leaders for interpretation (p.16). She believes that "extreme reverence for unquestionable authority and the heavy emphasis on rote memorisation are inimical to a scientific understanding of evolution".

This edition of *Issues* goes further than the evolution–creation debate. Hiram Caton chooses diverse examples such as post-war counterculture and science fiction to illustrate relationships between science and spirituality (p.19).

Max Whitten sees the importance of worldviews in our questions and interpretations (p.7). He writes: "Blending science and spirituality is … more about providing a satisfying view of life, and the way we like to think the world ticks."

Helen Verran provides a perfect example of differing worldviews when she describes a difference of opinion between a Yolngu Aboriginal person and a scientist about the relationship between two types of plant (p.23). She says philosophy has a role to play if we are to "seriously consider the question of whether knowing and managing Australia's landscapes can be informed by both science and the Dreaming".

Robert Thurman takes a novel approach in his open letter to God (p.27). His questions to God include ideas about the formation of matter in the Big Bang and about our universe as a bubble in a "multiverse". However,according to Mike Pope (p.31): "Arguments about eternally existing multiverses and such are simply substitutes for God".

Edward Fackerell also looks at multiverses, Big Bang theory and steady state theory (p.35), and quotes Fred Hoyle, one of the postulating physicists who later reconsidered his atheism: "A common sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super intellect has monkeyed with physics, as well as with chemistry and biology".

As for science education, Beverley Jane (p.38) hopes that the damage done by stereotypical portrayals of scientists can be overcome by encouraging a more contemplative approach to science in science education. Michael Buchanan (p.41) suggests that this type of science education can be prompted by making room in science curricula for teachers to explore spirituality.

George Ellis (p. 45) concludes that "consonance between science and religion is possible; indeed, they fit together to give an overall view of reality, with basic agreement in the areas where there are overlaps."