

EDITORIAL

There are numerous perspectives about life and its values in relation to various sciences and disciplines. Scientifically speaking life is directly linked to protoplasm, the substance which is the highest known form of organic matter. The protoplasm is basically a system of life-structures and functions in which nucleic acids, carbohydrates, fats, hormones, vitamins and enzymes occur. This foundational living matter appears in a cellular organization. The cellular schema means that life is only present in an individualized form. The vital processes take place in and through the cellular structures of an individual, even that of a microscopic form. The basis of the vital processes is the metabolism of the cell, an interchange of materials which may again be divided into a metabolism of nutrients and energy. The metabolism of the cell means that the living thing is a pulsating unit of life empowered to bring about the contractions of its molecular elements which are the bases of all immanent movements, the signs of the pulsation of life. So in scientific terms life is described as the vital energy in a cellular organic material unit.

Another property of life from a biological perspective is its specific irritability or response to stimuli. This enables the organism to maintain itself as an individual or species against its environment. The living thing is always in a constant flow of activity. This flow is kept in harmony in a self-regulated equilibrium. This equilibrium enables the organism to adapt itself and hence safeguard its continued existence and its individual and specific development.

The task of natural philosophy today in its consideration of life is not so much to take up a more or less well founded attitude towards the various classical explanations of life, as to keep the question open. For this is undoubtedly the only way in which even in biology due attention can be paid to man whose existence represents a life which ranges from what are certainly inorganic natural processes to an ethical or an even religious behaviour which is determined by values of life, preferential options of goals in life with the consciousness of responsibility, and possibly with a glimpse towards some transcendence beyond one's embodiment.

Values of life are differentiated by specific perceptions of the degrees of "good" that makes something desirable, attractive, pleasurable, beautiful, worthy of approval, admiration and love; also that which inspires good feelings, attitudes of esteem, commendation, positive and appreciative judgment; and besides, that which is useful in view of attaining meaningful goals in life. The problem of the hierarchy and classification of the values of life is particularly difficult and many different systems have been proposed. The best and the simplest seems to be based on the relationship of values ultimately to some transcendental goal of life, spiritual or religious as visualized by the individual subject. It is in this connection that "life" as such, no matter whose it is, is respected as the most fundamental value of humanity. World religions interested in promoting the values of life in all forms of individuation have their own specific reasons and perspective on the inviolable nature of life in general and human life in particular. The values of individual options, freedom, and choice of the means of preserving life for the harmonious growth of each species as well as their healthy maintenance, are also considered to be the fundamental rights of each individual or species of life. "Thus life-values" and existential rights of a living being are interconnected. World Religions have defended always this interrelationship of life and its fundamental rights for survival, temporal as well as eternal; they called it by different expressions such as *salvation, liberation, nirvāna* etc.

Journal of Dharma in this issue offers to its readers an opportunity to read some of the great insights of World Religions and the allied disciplines, exposing their perceptions of life and its values of varied strands. The authors of the research papers published in this issue by no means claim exhaustive coverage of all the relevant details of their respective areas of study. However, we hope these are pointers towards broader areas of exploration both in the sacred world of religions and also in the secular world of biological Sciences.

Thomas Manickam
Associate Editor