Is it possible to speak of the relations between nature and culture, life and society calmly? One can only hope that this day will come, although we are clearly not there yet. Discussion was already feverish at the time of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer, hardly quieted down during that of Emile Durkheim and Friedrich Ratzel, and remains a singularly neuralgic topic today. Is this reason enough to turn away from it and wait for the debate to reach that level of maturity that manifests itself with appeasement before tackling its questions?

The temptation is strong and the only reason not to succumb to it has to do with the simple fact that debates laden with high stakes cannot become serene until they have completed a certain trajectory: the one that makes it possible to answer the question that produced them. To renounce pursuit of the path is to preserve the neuralgia and agitation, with the consequence of a sickness for which no one can predict a happy ending, precisely because it has not been identified.

Within UNESCO, this topic evokes great memories that bring with them a certain amount of pride, even if, at the time, they were not always pleasant: Claude Lévi-Strauss's famous statements, "Race and History" in the early 1950s, and "Race and Culture" twenty years later. Enthusiasm accompanied the former, while the latter provoked a "little scandal" as the author of *Le Regard Éloigné* explained some time ago (Paris 1983, pp. 13-14): at the time, he had made the effort to refrain from all objectivity and to force himself to be frank "in order to be useful to UNESCO and see the job entrusted to him with through with honesty." It is probably safe to say that no one is still complaining today.

It is curious that, while the news bombards us with diverse information and disparate narratives on the connections between the biological and the social – whether about human origins or the ambitions of applied genetics, or humanity's threats to nature – the larger debate has been interrupted. Not that the fever has

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dropped, or that the stakes have disappeared; but each of us seems to prefer to present our positions without discussing those that contradict them. The apathy that followed the big polemic provoked by the appearance of sociobiology (1975) perhaps explains this in part, but sciences that can no longer talk among themselves about their differences do not bode well for further dialogue between men. And the history of this century has made it all too clear that the relations between human beings are not independent of the conceptions that we hold of nature and of our nature for us to not take note of these visions.

Admittedly, the role of *Diogenes* is not to host a polemic and the range of our issues is incompatible with the organization of such a vast debate. On the other hand, it appears that popularization through the press or publications has let itself be seduced by promises of spectacular discoveries rather than the more austere reservations of a non-negligible part of the university community. This is why we have accepted to welcome the expression of these reservations in this issue, with the sole condition that they contain a call for taking up the discussion once again and that they give careful thought to how it may be brought to a successful conclusion, and with the understanding that it would not protect itself behind a mask of neutrality.

The Editors

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