Preface

The papers in this volume are based on the Royal Institute of Philosophy's annual London lecture series for 2004-5. The intention of the series was to focus on a rapidly growing area of interest within philosophy and without. Some have claimed that with the decline of Marxism and Freudianism, Darwinism or, more accurately, neo-Darwinism, has become the dominant intellectual paradigm of the day. And certainly there are many bitter disputes between those who see it as their mission to carry the neo-Darwinist torch before the general public and between those who oppose that vision, often on religious grounds. In fact, as always, things are not nearly as simple as they are often portrayed. For one thing the 'neo-Darwinian paradigm' may not be as seamless and as simple as both its attackers and some of those who seek to defend it would have us believe.

We hope that the papers in this volume, which are written from a number of different perspectives and standpoints, will help to demonstrate that biology and its underlying philosophy are in a state of development which defies the standard stereotypes. Matters are far more complex and far more interesting than one might be forgiven for thinking were one to confine one's attention to public pronouncements on the subject. At the same time, as again we hope the papers demonstrate, the issues discussed, while complex, are not so formidably technical as to exclude all but specialists, and they are also issues which bear directly on our conceptions of human nature and hence of ourselves.

It is a great pleasure to thank those who gave the lectures in the series and who have contributed to this volume. I hope that readers of the volume will be as stimulated and provoked as were those who heard the lectures, and that this volume will itself further one of the most significant debates of our time. My thanks are due to Dr Sophie R. Allen for her help with editing and for compiling the index.

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