

Dear Friends,

It was a long, hard, and snowy winter here in upstate New York. No one seems to be able to remember anything quite like the sustained period of extreme cold we have endured, especially throughout the entire month of February, when nighttime low temperatures generally ranged between 0 and -13 degrees Fahrenheit (-18 to -25 degrees Celsius). The snow cover only fully disappeared at the beginning of April. Some who never dreamed of moving south have begun asking themselves uncomfortable questions. Unremitting cold has a way of penetrating all the way through to your bones, so that escape from it can begin to feel imperative.

Perhaps it is not reaching too far to say that a kind of coldness has for a very long while been seeping into much of modern science—most chillingly, into biology. Craig wrote in our last issue about the current push for synthetic biology and the creation of artificial, mechanistic forms of life. Certainly the increasing dominance of an engineering mindset in the science of life—a dominance Craig documented—testifies to a lost feeling for the sentience, inner responsiveness, and “warmth” of living organisms, with their aims, passions, needs, and desires, however consciously or unconsciously expressed.

The same chill has taken thorough hold of contemporary evolutionary studies. A view of inheritance as consisting of the passage of atomistic genes from one generation to the next; the idea that random mutations in those genes are what provide the source material for evolutionary change; the radical ignoring of the living creature as a center of intention and activity in its own right; the reduction of the very idea of evolution to a kind of logical algorithm that tells us in advance how evolution works, without regard for observation of actual organisms—none of this would be possible if biological thought were animated more deeply by a passionate, humane, objectively attentive, and warm-hearted interest in organisms themselves.

In this issue Craig turns to one type of organism—the frog—and asks how much we really know about how it arises from the fertilized egg and tadpole. It is the creative and never fully predictable activity of the organism to which he draws our attention. He makes of it a meditation that cannot help but have implications for our study of evolution.

Steve, having been invited to participate in an important new online resource called “The Third Way of Evolution,” tells you a little bit about what motivated the founders of this new website, and shares with you the remarks he was asked to submit for publication on the site.

Bruno discusses his experience working with two California vineyards to help refine their composting processes. Compost—now there’s an approach to biological warmth we didn’t necessarily anticipate in beginning this letter! But Bruno nicely heats up the topic through his call to make compost an essential and vital part of the life of the farm.

Finally, it’s hard to think of anything that releases more soul-warmth into the world than a beautiful flower. Reinout Amons, a Dutch biochemist, friend of The Nature Institute, and participant in one of our Goethean science courses, treats us to an observational discovery he made about the morning glories in his garden.

May you find a warming sustenance of your own in this Spring issue of *In Context*!

Craig Holdrege



Steve Talbott



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### *In Context*

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Copies of *In Context* are free while the supply lasts. Past issues are posted on the Institute website. Our *NetFuture* newsletter is available at: <http://netfuture.org>.

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