

Editorial

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The back cover of this issue features the American biologist Sewall Wright. Along with Fisher and Haldane in England, he is regarded as a founder of population genetics. Nowadays, there is a lot of popular writing going around which creates any desired effect with the magic wand of the gene. It is therefore refreshing and illuminating to learn of how much careful and extensive fieldwork provided tests and motivation for Wright's theoretical ideas. It is staggering to learn that his last paper was written just a few months before his death at the age of ninety nine!



One of the major ideas which emerged from this endeavour is also discussed in this issue. A large, well mixed, uniform population would be like nature putting all its eggs into one basket. In contrast, a reasonably large number of fairly isolated and diverse sub-populations could collectively explore a richer variety of genetic possibilities. It is of course essential that the new variations which result should feed back into the general pool through migration. Perhaps Sewall Wright himself might have found it more difficult to diverge from Fisher and Haldane if he had been in England!

Lapsing into the same pop genetics criticized earlier, it is an irresistible temptation to draw lessons for *Resonance's* twin concerns of education and scientific research. Perhaps mega-projects and institutions are likely to progress faster if there is reasonable internal autonomy and diversity. And should we not always have room for a few smaller groups who are free to drift into new waters or even swim against the tide? We could aim at one per cent of the norm laid down by the Chinese leader Mao Zedong. Let at least ten flowers bloom! In this spirit, a given issue of *Resonance* sometimes highlights a topic or person, but always finds room for other things. For example, the reader of this issue is free to move from algebraic geometry to robotics, with ceramics, the ocean and atmosphere, optical illusions, and more available on the way.

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