Can the origins of morality be explained entirely in evolutionary terms? If so, what are the implications for Christian moral theology and ethics? Is the latter redundant, as sociobiologists often assert? Stephen Pope argues that theologians need to engage with evolutionary theory rather than ignore it. He shows that our growing knowledge of human evolution is compatible with Christian faith and morality, provided that the former is not interpreted reductionistically and the latter is not understood in fundamentalist ways. Christian ethics ought to incorporate evolutionary approaches to human nature to the extent that they provide helpful knowledge of the conditions of human flourishing, both collective and individual. From this perspective, a strong affirmation of human dignity and appreciation for the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity is consistent with a revised account of natural law and the cardinal virtues.

Stephen J. Pope is Professor of Theological Ethics at Boston College. He is editor of Common Calling: The Laity and the Governance of the Church (2004).
Christian ethics has increasingly assumed a central place within academic theology. At the same time the growing power and ambiguity of modern science and the rising dissatisfaction within the social sciences about claims to value-neutrality have prompted renewed interest in ethics within the secular academic world. There is, therefore, a need for studies in Christian ethics which, as well as being concerned with the relevance of Christian ethics to the present-day secular debate, are well informed about parallel discussions in recent philosophy, science or social science. *New Studies in Christian Ethics* aims to provide books that do this at the highest intellectual level and demonstrate that Christian ethics can make a distinctive contribution to this debate – either in moral substance or in terms of underlying moral justifications.

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HUMAN EVOLUTION
AND CHRISTIAN ETHICS

STEPHEN J. POPE
Boston College
James M. Gustafson
teacher, mentor, and friend
**Contents**

*General editor's preface*  
*Acknowledgments*

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This book is the twenty-eighth in the series New Studies in Christian Ethics. It contains an important dialogue with some of the earlier books in the series, notably Stephen Clark’s Biology and Christian Ethics, Colin Grant’s Altruism and Christian Ethics and Jean Porter’s Moral Action and Christian Ethics. There are also points of mutual concern shared with Celia Deane-Drummond’s recent Genetics and Christian Ethics. All of these books closely reflect the two key aims of the series – namely to promote monographs in Christian ethics that engage centrally with the present secular moral debate at the highest possible intellectual level and, secondly, to encourage contributors to demonstrate that Christian ethics can make a distinctive contribution to this debate.

Stephen Pope has already established a firm reputation as a creative Catholic theologian with his book The Evolution of Altruism and the Ordering of Love (1994). His particular contribution in Human Evolution and Christian Ethics is to engage critically and creatively as a natural-law theologian with sociobiologists. Quite a number of the latter have been highly critical of religion in general and of Christian theology in particular. He argues at length that they have often misunderstood (and oversimplified) what theologians today are attempting to do. But he is also aware that theologians themselves have all too often ignored evolutionary science. In contrast, he has read the science carefully and in the process developed a critical but sympathetic Christian ethical approach to sociobiological explanations of purpose and altruism that most other Christians simply ignore.

This is a careful and helpful book that offers an important bridge for those who wish to take both evolutionary theory and theology seriously.

Some of the chapters of this book were written while I attended the John Templeton Oxford Summer Workshops at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, in the summers of 1999–2002. Special thanks are due to fellow participants who made those three summers so intellectually stimulating and informative, and especially to Professor Alistair McGrath, the head of Wycliffe Hall, and Professor John Roche of Linacre College, Oxford, for their stewardship of this valuable program. Finally, I would like to thank Dean Joseph F. Quinn and Dean John J. Neuhauser of Boston College for granting me a sabbatical so that I could complete this book.
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A final mention must be made of my teacher, James M. Gustafson. Among his many accomplishments has been his ability to communicate to his students a sense of his deep devotion to learning, unwavering fidelity, and profound intellectual honesty. I dedicate this book, with admiration, gratitude, and loyalty, to Jim.