Leaving aside its subject matter, which we survey in the introductory paper, this issue of Philosophical Transactions is unusual in two ways we wish to highlight here. First, the issue is based on one of the relatively small but growing number of Discussion Meetings organized and supported jointly by the Royal Society and the British Academy. This partly explains the large size of the issue, which includes papers authored by all 24 of those who presented talks over the 3-day meeting.

Second, as part of its celebrations of its 350th anniversary, the Royal Society opted to locate this Discussion Meeting in the Queen Elizabeth Hall of the Southbank complex, as part of its 10-day-long ‘Festival of Science and Arts’. This allowed an unusually large audience to participate and we are grateful to the Society for facilitating this unique event.

In addition, we thank the Society for supporting a complementary 2-day satellite meeting, ‘Social Learning in Humans and Non-human Animals: Theoretical and Empirical Dissections’ at the Kavli Royal Society International Centre for the Advancement of Science.

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