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## A King's Advice

*"If the Lord Almighty had consulted me before embarking on creation thus, I should have recommended something simpler," Alfonso X, the wise medieval ruler of Castile, once aptly said. Similar thoughts must surely cross the minds of contemporary researchers in many diverse fields – such as the study of our planet (p. 4) and its wonderfully complicated natural system, **the Living Earth**. The complexity of the terrestrial system never ceases to dazzle us, as even the smallest microorganisms can create intricate structures. Despite what many may think, microorganisms rarely occur in nature as individual cells living on their own. **The Social Life of Bacteria** (p. 8) actually involves highly organized "systems" of interconnected individuals functioning together.*

*It turns out that humans could learn a thing or two from bacteria – we often lack good organization and find it hard to get along. Complex ethnic relations, the interplay of concepts, memory, and mentality, the durability of stereotypes – in short, **What Lies Beneath the Surface** in the sociocultural context – is the subject of our interviews with Dr. Anna Engelking and Prof. Barbara Engelking-Boni (p. 40), as well as with Dr. Elżbieta Janicka (p. 16). Changing Polish attitudes towards ethnic minorities and immigrants are also explored in **Tolerance in Poland** (p. 28) – and the Poles turn out to compare quite favorably to other European societies.*

*Mathematicians and computer scientists struggle to maintain a grasp of the incredible complexity of the reality around us. One relatively new field – known as **computational complexity** theory (pp. 32 and 36) – seeks to simplify the solution of many problems. Quite a few practical matters depend on progress made here, such as the security of our bank accounts. And that is something that concerns us all.*

ACADEMIA staff



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**Improvisation on the Creation of the World - linocut, 1958**

Józef Giełniak (1932-1972) created such intricate works using the simple linocut technique that one loses all track of his chisel. Even during his lifetime Giełniak's art was recognized as a world phenomenon, suggesting mental associations with the work of Bosch and Gaudi, Kafka and Schulz, and also Thomas Mann's Magic Mountain. Artists fascinated with his work made pilgrimages to the sanatorium where the artist spent nearly all of his adult life. His linocuts have been exhibited around the world