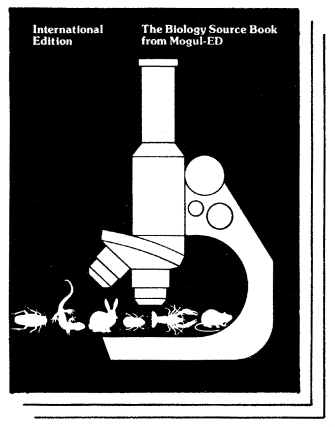


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tance in helping plan the types of technology that we should export and the detailed manner in which they could be applied in order to minimize the frequently chaotic changes they produce in the cultures of the recipient nations.

Neither the potential benefits nor the political dangers of sociobiology rest solely with the issue of genetic determinism of human social behavior. The best formula for increasing our understanding of sociobiology, while at the same time safeguarding against political misuse of information, lies in promoting basic research in this new field, and in disseminating the findings to as broad an audience as possible.

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Plutonium and Christian Ethics

Regarding the article "Plutonium: Its morality questioned by National Council of Churches" by Philip M. Boffey (News and Comment, 23 Apr., p. 356), I wish to inform your readers that I did *not* participate in the colorful debate at the Riverside Church in New York City on 28 January "appointed by the Atomic Industrial Forum" as the article says, but rather representing myself, at my own expense.

Since last fall, I have been actively assessing the views of both the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches on these matters and communicating the substance of them to the U.S. Congress, the Energy Research and Development Administration, the National Academy of Sciences, and the National Academy of Engineering.

The World Council's work is by far the best; they did not (contrary to the implication in Boffey's article) make a colorless "neutral" report; they said that they're not finished yet. Their working papers and report will be published as a book, but meanwhile can be found in issues 20 (May 1975) and 21 (October 1975) of their occasional journal *Anticipation*. They are excellent reading for all who seriously ponder these matters. Their interim report in issue 21 answers some of the questions and raises others (for example, What are the world's options?) and tries earnestly to structure each part of the debate so that it can be constructively continued.

The National Council's work is too narrowly constructed and very hubristic, as was also pointed out by the ethicists Maxey, Shinn, and Williams at the 28 January debate. It fails to introduce in any organized way any principles of ethics, Christian or otherwise, but builds its persuasions on the base of its own conclusions—a proclivity discussed in ancient times and found wanting (1).

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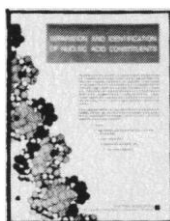
1. Jer. 23 : 21, "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran; I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied."

Boffey's report on the National Council of Churches' position on the "plutonium economy" was a sympathetic and balanced document. It started with a provocative quote from material I presented to the National Council's General Board complaining about their illegitimate ecclesiology, but regrettably omit-

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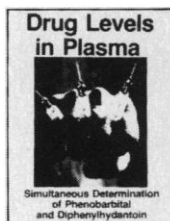
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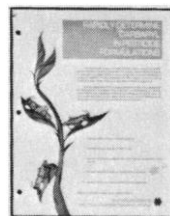
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ted a technologically relevant point. From the quote, your readers could draw the erroneous conclusion that I am an advocate of the breeder. My position has been that by far the most cost-effective R & D to balance energy supply and demand in a free enterprise economy is a set of nationwide programs to actively encourage nonuse, even beyond conservation. By coincidence, this position is also the only essential element of energy policy which can be unambiguously connected to Christian ethics via the imperative to share.

Church bureaucracies, like others, prefer to pronounce on (scientific) subtleties well beyond their ken (and involving only the sixth derivatives of moral imperatives), which requires no action on their part. They avoid the obvious behavioral corollaries of their main hypotheses, which call for sacrifice, however minor, on the part of their constituencies. Scientists should easily recognize such proffered "cheap grace" as the modern day analogue of the "perpetual motion machine."

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Contrary to the implication in Rose's letter, the National Council of Churches did in fact allow the Atomic Industrial Forum (AIF) to choose the three pronuclear experts to participate in the debate, and the AIF did in fact name him as one of the three, after first getting his permission to do so. A "chronology" of events published by the church council on 22 March states that Rose was "chosen by the Atomic Industrial Forum," and a report on the debate published by the AIF on 5 February states that the three pronuclear speakers were "coordinated by AIF." As for the World Council of Churches' report, the judgment that it was "neutral" on the nuclear issue was made by National Council of Churches staffers.

—PHILIP M. BOFFEY

Nuclear Power Decisions

If the United States were a more nearly ideal representative democracy, I would agree with Brewster C. Denny's opinion (Letters, 16 Apr., p. 202) that use of the direct ballot referendum or initiative is an inappropriate way of dealing with an issue as complex as the regulation of nuclear power plants, and that the appropriate way would be through elected representatives who reach their conclusions by means of reasoned de-

bate. The problem is many people fear that our elected representatives may not be basing their conclusions primarily on the issues, but rather on promises and threats from special interest groups. As long as there is any reasonable suspicion that our elected officials are responding to these political pressures (and there are certainly grounds for such suspicions today), I cannot blame the supporters of the California initiative for taking an issue like nuclear power, which (because of the potential profits involved) is so susceptible to political pressures, directly to the people.

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While Denny is factually accurate regarding the way our political process works, he nevertheless misses the point.

He does not believe that informed debate on the technically complicated issue of nuclear power is possible and that, considering the risks and the economic alternatives, such a debate would not be likely to "produce an appropriate result." This indeed is the heart of the issue; but (i) Can we assume that informed debate will occur in Congress? and (ii) If so, will that debate be any more likely to produce "an appropriate result" with necessary consideration for risks as well as economic alternatives?

At a time when confidence in representative government is so low, it is no wonder that people are trying to bypass that body of decision-makers, especially on such an important issue. Just a quick look at recent "representative" decisions on environmental issues alone, from food quality and air and water pollution to atomic energy, indicates that these decisions have been made with much more concern for economic alternatives than for risks. Our understanding of the risks is so limited that extreme caution is the only prudent course. The emotion stirred by the nuclear power question is rooted in a perception of deliberate disregard by planners for the possible risks.

We must not rush to dependence now on an inadequate and potentially dangerous technology and build up a debt we might have to pay for a million years, when, in 50 years, the development of this technology may be either unnecessary or certainly much more safe. The problem is not the development of nuclear power per se but the push to proliferate it at a time when the safety of the technology is at best doubtful.

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SCIENCE, VOL. 192