IAN DOWBIGGIN

"A Rational Coalition": Euthanasia, Eugenics, and Birth Control in America, 1940–1970

In 1940, at the second annual meeting of the Euthanasia Society of America (ESA), its first president, Charles Francis Potter (1885–1962), rose to give a speech. "Euthanasia, or merciful release from suffering," Potter declared, "is rapidly emerging from the stage when it was considered merely the obsession of a few left-wing social reformers to the period when it is being recognized as an important social measure *in the same class with birth control and eugenics*." Almost thirty years later, at another ESA gathering, clergyman Henry Pitney Van Dusen said much the same thing. "Popular attention centers on the Planned Parenthood movement at the other end of life," Van Dusen declared, and "[e]uthanasia is concerned with the responsible termination of life. The more we can relate these two movements practically the better, because they are both concerned with the responsible care of human life, one at its beginning and the other at its end."[1]

These two speeches, highlighting an important yet neglected continuity within twentieth-century U.S. social reform, were fairly typical expressions of an attitude shared by numerous prominent Americans. In the era between the Great Depression and *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court ruling striking down state laws

The author would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the University of Prince Edward Island Senate Committee on Research for their generous support of the research behind this article, as well as Donald Cregier, Thomas Spira, and Richard Weikart for their close reading of earlier versions. I am also grateful to David Klassen of the Social Welfare History Archives at the University of Minnesota, Karen Kaplan of Partnership for Caring, and Dinah O'Berry of Lewis Advertising for their unflagging helpfulness in using the records of the Association for Voluntary Sterilization and Choice in Dying. All responsibility for errors is mine.

THE JOURNAL OF POLICY HISTORY, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2002.
Copyright © 2002 The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA.

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

criminalizing abortion, Americans such as Potter, Margaret Sanger, Robert Latou Dickinson, Joseph Fletcher, Alan Guttmacher, and Paul Blanshard, viewed euthanasia, eugenic sterilization, and birth control as kindred causes.[2] With the arrival of the distinctive cultural climate of the 1960s and its emphasis on privacy, civil rights, and a woman's reproductive right to choose, as well as a declining faith among social scientists in hereditarian explanations of disease, support for eugenic sterilization plummeted. Defenders of euthanasia also tended to redefine the right to die as the freedom to forgo treatment rather than the right to request active assistance in a speedy death.

However, in hindsight what stands out is the way mid-twentieth-century American social activists believed that "birth control" and "death control" formed "a rational coalition," two aspects of the same crusade to liberate human beings from afflictions that had plagued human history for centuries.[3] These reformers were united in their commitment to fight for "the right not to suffer," whether because of excessive fertility, deferred sexual gratification, or a lingering, painful death.[4]

This article argues two central points: first, scholars should begin viewing the histories of euthanasia, eugenic sterilization, and birth control in the United States less as separate narratives and more as a single, broad chronicle of events inextricably linked to the history of one current within twentieth-century American liberalism. For the most part, historians have overlooked how intimately and regularly the American euthanasia, eugenics, and birth control movements intersected during the middle third of the twentieth century.[5] In recent years a handful of scholars have cited the ties among the American eugenics movement, the campaign to decriminalize birth control, and the growing toleration of euthanasia for "defective" babies and geriatric patients.[6] But these scholars have tended to focus on the pre–World War II period, and even then they have not fully recognized the close interrelationship among all three currents.[7]

This article also argues that the belief that eugenics, euthanasia, and birth control had a great deal in common was nurtured by the volatile cultural and political climate of the United States in the 1940s and 1950s, an environment punctuated by a tense debate over the power of the Roman Catholic Church. As John McGreevy has argued, many liberals during this period shared a deep concern that because of a robust Catholicism, democracy, national unity, and

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

personal freedom in America were in jeopardy as never before. This article confirms McGreevy's thesis that Catholicism occupied a highly important place in "the American intellectual imagination," and demonstrates that support for euthanasia and birth control was an important principle for many of those mid-twentieth-century American liberals who also believed that "religion, as an entirely private matter, must be separated from the state, that religious loyalties must not threaten national unity, and that only an emphasis on individual autonomy, thinking on one's own, would sustain American democracy." Liberal backing for eugenic sterilization was more controversial, but it too enjoyed a surprising level of support as late as the 1950s.[8]

Evidence for this thesis can be found in the records of two small yet influential American social reform organizations: the Euthanasia Society of America[9] and the Association for Voluntary Sterilization (AVS).[10] To date, the history of these two organizations has been largely neglected by scholars.[11] This article, based on research in their separate and extensive archives, indicates that these two groups, at first glance so unalike, attracted members with a common outlook on matters of public health and social welfare.

Many mid-century American liberals were united by their readiness to promote the emancipation of human beings from what birth control activist Margaret Sanger, herself an ESA and AVS member, called "biological slavery."[12] Living amid the shock waves from the Scopes "Monkey Trial" of 1925, they tended to believe that science, especially Darwinist biology, trumped all orthodox religious creeds, promising to reveal progressively new truths about the natural world that rendered all established theological doctrines questionable.[13] They shared a faith in science as the "model for all kinds of knowing" and the foundation on which to base a new, secular approach to ethics and morality.[14]

This strain of liberalism drew the support of secular humanists such as Charles Potter and Harry Elmer Barnes, Protestant ministers such as Harry Emerson Fosdick, Guy Shipler, and Henry Sloane Coffin, Unitarians such as John H. Lathrop, Eleanor Dwight Jones, and Inez Philbrick, and various followers of Felix Adler's Ethical Culture Society. Their collective inspiration derived from a new doctrine of individualism that, in attacking the "rugged individualism" of classical nineteenth-century liberalism, highlighted the intimate relationship between personal development and participation in the field of social reform. Euthanasia, birth control, and eugenic

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

sterilization were causes that seemed to offer this form of self-fulfillment and ensure genuine social progress in an age that many American liberals thought was wracked with crisis.[15]

In short, this version of liberalism was inclined to depict humanity in the twentieth century as standing on the verge of a new era that would witness major, unprecedented reductions in human suffering, an expansion of individual choice, and improvements in public health. The chief obstacles to this type of progress, such liberals agreed, were organized religion in general and the Roman Catholic Church in particular, which they accused of using their political power to restrict the rights of individual Americans to privacy and self-actualization. Only an "inner-directed," autonomous individual impervious to authoritarianism, they believed, could sustain American democracy in the face of such threats.[16]

By contextualizing these public-spirited men and women within their organizational, cultural, social, and political environments, then, we can see that what united them in their advocacy of eugenics, euthanasia, and birth control was greater than what divided them.[17] Such a conclusion, besides helping to reconstruct the history of a decisive, transitional era in twentieth-century American liberalism, also points to the curious combination of humane and illiberal motives that inspired these people. But if they sometimes favored what in retrospect are authoritarian policies, it was precisely because they were motivated strongly by "well-intentioned concerns about how to make America a better society and the world a better place."[18]

I

The vision that united American men and women involved in the euthanasia, eugenic sterilization, and birth control movements is reflected in the histories of the Association for Voluntary Sterilization and the Euthanasia Society of America. The AVS was formed originally in 1937 as the Sterilization League of New Jersey (SLNJ) and later became a national organization, named successively Birthright, Inc. (1943), the Human Betterment Association of America (1950), the Human Betterment Association for Voluntary Sterilization (1962), and the Association for Voluntary Sterilization (1965). It remained a tiny organization with limited resources and policy influence until the 1960s, when tycoon and population-control ad-

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

vocate Hugh Moore became president and threw his wealth and considerable energy behind it.[19] Yet, even when the AVS was small and uninfluential, it still enjoyed the support of some important social scientists and activists.

Initially, the AVS was dominated by its outspoken and abrasive founder, the eugenic-minded social worker Marian Olden.[20] Like so many others drawn to the eugenics movement, Olden had been appalled by the deplorable conditions of state mental hospitals and the homes of poverty-stricken families. From these observations, she concluded that factors such as intelligence and mental and emotional health were unevenly distributed throughout America's social classes, with the highest rates of crime, poverty, dependence, and ignorance clustered at the bottom levels of society. Since these classes were apparently the most fertile, Olden reasoned, there was a desperate need to enact compulsory sterilization laws to curb the proliferation of hereditary defects as well as shield the unborn from the allegedly faulty parenting of the mentally retarded. Encouraged by legislation introduced in Georgia, which in 1937 became the thirty-second (and last) state to enact a eugenic sterilization law, Olden and the SLNJ lobbied furiously, although unsuccessfully, between 1939 and 1942, for the passage of a state sterilization law in New Jersey.[21]

Eventually, in the late 1940s Olden's uncompromising, prickly personality convinced her followers in what was by then Birthright, Inc., that she was a public relations liability and they expelled her from her leadership post. Yet, when it came to the issue of the Catholic Church, she and her colleagues in Birthright were generally of one mind. It was clear to them that by the 1940s, as one scholar has written, "the Catholic Church had embarked on a sustained drive against eugenic sterilization laws." In 1945, for example, the Church in Philadelphia was instrumental in defeating a eugenic sterilization bill.[22] Olden attacked the Church not only because its opposition to birth control and eugenics made it difficult to have non-Catholics sterilized but also because she suspected that it was plotting to use the high fertility rates among Catholics to make them a majority in American society, and thus dictate government policy. That Catholics also seemed to contribute a disproportionate number of defectives because of their rejection of birth control made the whole issue seem even more significant to Olden. As she declared in 1947, the time had come to "expose the methods of that church which acts as an obstacle to progress in every form."[23] Olden was unique in other re-

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

spects, but she merely expressed what many liberal Americans had concluded by the late 1940s, namely, that Catholicism represented a stark threat to a healthy, democratic society.[24]

Liberal fears of Catholic supremacy stemmed from the fact that between the Depression and the mid-1950s the U.S. Catholic Church was "the dominant cultural institution in the country."[25] Over the course of these years the Church enjoyed a unity, rigor, and power that propelled it to the very center of American life. To the dismay of many secular liberals, it seemed as if the public was willing to follow the Church's lead in setting the social policy agenda for the country. Politicians, intimidated by the ballot-box might of Catholic voters, courted powerful Catholic prelates such as Francis Cardinal Spellman and Dennis Cardinal Dougherty. Catholic clout extended all the way to Hollywood, where the Legion of Decency, with Catholic backing, pressured the movie studios to eliminate scenes of sex and violence from their films.[26]

American liberals framed their anti-Catholicism in terms of defending the constitutional separation of church and state, but they also objected to specific policies that the Church historically championed. Liberals in the 1940s remembered well the Church's support for Francisco Franco's nationalists in the Spanish Civil War, an event many saw as a dress rehearsal for World War II. They also remembered the sometimes anti-Semitic speeches of the "radio priest" Charles Coughlin during the Depression. They were just as upset over the Church's teachings on sexuality and reproduction. In 1930, Pope Pius XI issued the Vatican's first modern statement on sex and birth control, describing those who used contraception as grave sinners and condemning eugenic sterilization as an unlawful interference of the state in the sacred life of the family. When the Church used its legislative influence to postpone the decriminalization of birth control, eugenic or otherwise, most liberals were furious. Impressed by Freudian theories and the findings of sexologist Alfred C. Kinsey, they were increasingly convinced of the need to separate sex from reproduction and plan the number of children people wished to have.[27]

Within such a hostile cultural climate, the AVS found it extremely difficult after World War II to popularize sterilization as a contraceptive technique, especially eugenic sterilization. The very term "eugenics" was tainted because of its Hitlerian connotations. In 1933, the Nazi government had passed a eugenics-motivated, coercive sterilization law, resulting in the asexualization of close to

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

four hundred thousand "Aryan" Germans by 1939. When these facts became well known after the war, the AVS tried to dodge the perception that it was a eugenic organization by endorsing voluntary sterilization—tubal ligation for consenting women and vasectomy for consenting men—as a birth control method.[28] Sterilization of the feeble-minded was advisable less because of hereditary factors and more because it was inhumane for the handicapped and their potential offspring to permit them to reproduce.[29] Officially, the AVS advocated sterilization for its liberating rather than punitive features—a safe, simple, reliable technique for preventing pregnancy without diminishing sexual desire. To the AVS, sterilization helped society meet the goals of making each child a wanted child, separating sex from procreation, halting population growth, averting world famine, and reducing crime and poverty.[30]

Shaking its eugenic reputation was one thing. Getting rid of all eugenic sentiments was another. For example, in 1959 the AVS executive director wrote that it "takes up where Planned Parenthood leaves off. . . . [C]ontraception does not and never will solve the problem for those who need fertility control the most—the morons, the ignorant, the irresponsible."[31] The AVS gradually adopted the policy of persuading obstetricians "to be more sterilization minded," and specifically perform more postpartum tubal ligations. In the words of H. Curtis Wood, gynecologist and AVS president from 1945 to 1961:

> If the half wits and morons could be talked into sterilization after the birth of a few children, instead of making no attempt to limit their numbers at all, we could at least be getting somewhere. I and several of my friends are doing them quite often on these women on a strictly voluntary basis and it is not hard to talk most of them into it during their pregnancies. They do not want to be bothered with a lot of children and when it is explained to them are only too happy to have it done. We need to educate the doctors to educate their patients.[32]

Although the potential for abuse is obvious in Wood's remarks, the AVS condemned all compulsion when it came to sterilization. It opposed any social welfare legislation that sought to use sterilization as a method for penalizing the poor for having children. The AVS hoped that it could still achieve standard eugenic aims such as fer-

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

tility reduction among the poor and mentally handicapped without having to rely on cumbersome eugenic sterilization laws that primarily affected only institutionalized patients.

In other words, well into the 1960s the AVS was simultaneously a eugenic and noneugenic organization, an alliance between those, such as Wood, who believed that eugenic purposes could be fulfilled more efficiently through voluntary sterilization and those who were also convinced that greater access to sterilization services would provide women with wider reproductive choice. These two views could coexist in the same person's mind. To Wood and many others in the AVS, issues of choice, access, availability, and eugenics blended into an overall approach to birth control, which rested on the theory that sterilization is the most practical form of contraception.[33]

This curious combination of motives is not so strange in view of the fact that between the 1930s and 1960s some AVS members were involved in the liberal campaign to empower individuals with greater control over their lives, question the dogmatism and doctrinal certainty of fundamentalist Christians, and contest Roman Catholic power over social policy. The AVS, with fresh memories of how Catholics had opposed the enactment of eugenic laws, were equally upset over Catholic hospitals that routinely denied physicians ward privileges if they belonged to any family planning organizations, such as the Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA) or the AVS itself.[34] For example, in 1952 non-Catholic physicians at St. Francis Hospital in Poughkeepsie, New York, were threatened with the loss of these privileges if they did not sever their ties with the local chapter of Planned Parenthood. Such Catholic action helped to forge alliances between the AVS and the American Civil Liberties Union, which in 1947 criticized Connecticut hospitals for firing non-Catholic doctors who supported the legal use of contraceptive devices.[35] Little wonder that H. Curtis Wood belonged to Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, an anti-Catholic lobbying group committed to outlawing aid to parochial schools. Wood's pleas for the widespread use of voluntary sterilization were also published in *The Humanist,* the journal for the liberal and anti-Catholic American Humanist Association (AHA).[36]

To support his pro-sterilization views, Wood liked to quote the clergyman Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878–1969), an ESA and AVS member and, by the mid-1920s, "the best-known liberal [Protestant] minister in America."[37] Fosdick, a graduate of the free-thinking

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Union Theological Seminary in New York City, was a fervent advocate of the social gospel, the duty to apply the Christian messages of compassion, hope, and self-sacrifice to social and economic issues. Fosdick insisted that Christianity be "intellectually hospitable, open-minded, liberty-loving, fair, [and] tolerant," open to everyone, regardless of creed or formal confession. In terms of social issues, Fosdick attacked racial discrimination, defended birth control, embraced pacifism, and supported Alcoholics Anonymous. Yet, Fosdick also agreed with Marian Olden that "selective sterilization" and "scientific eugenics" were crucial to solving the overpopulation problem. As he wrote, "[i]ndiscriminate human spawning serves no useful purpose."[38]

Algernon Black (1900–1993) was another AVS member with distinctly liberal views. Black, born in Manhattan to Russian Jewish immigrants, at an early age won a scholarship to the Ethical Cultural School, maintained by the Society for Ethical Culture of New York City. Founded in 1876, Ethical Culture offered a religion based on ethics rather than a creed or theology. It sought to foster "a living sense of being moved by superb ideals which have no limit, human ideals for endless individual and social action." Instead of a God, Society for Ethical Culture members believed in the infinite worth of the individual and the centrality of ethical principles, defined chiefly in terms of democratic values. Adherents regarded Ethical Culture as an alternative to Judaism and Christianity. Black, first elected as a leader of the Society for Ethical Culture in 1934, was also a steady AVS and ESA member in the 1950s and 1960s. His willingness to be identified with the AVS spoke to his belief that the organization's agenda coincided with the other certifiably liberal causes he supported, such as racial desegregation, civil rights, and nuclear disarmament.[39]

The predominantly secularist and liberal ideas of Fosdick and Black were echoed by other AVS members, including Brock Chisholm and Paul Blanshard. Chisholm (1896–1971), a Canadian psychiatrist, was elected as the World Health Organization's first director-general in 1948. Like Black, he was a member of the ESA and the AVS, and in the early 1960s served as AVS honorary president. In 1945, Chisholm created controversy in Canada when he accused parents who let their children believe in Santa Claus of permanently damaging their youngsters' emotional and cognitive development. He was also fond of attacking religious taboos about sex and reproduction and defending masturbation and contraception. In addition,

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

he was an outspoken critic of world population growth and proponent of the need for a United Nations–led world government. In 1959, Chisholm was named Humanist of the Year by the American Humanist Association.[40]

With members such as Fosdick, Black, and Chisholm, the AVS proved to be receptive to the views of Paul Blanshard (1892–1980), author of the controversial 1949 best-seller *American Freedom and Catholic Power,* and arguably the liberal intellectual most identified with anti-Catholicism. In this book and his 1951 *Communism, Democracy, and Catholic Power,* Blanshard equated Catholicism and Soviet communism as threats to American democracy. Blanshard was a trustee of the Ethical Culture Society and one-time Congregationalist minister who did graduate work at the Union Theological Seminary. He left the ministry in 1918 and joined the trade union movement, served as an urban reformer in the La Guardia administration in New York City in the 1930s, and during World War II was an economic analyst and consultant for the U.S. State Department.

The AVS held Blanshard in high esteem, inviting him to speak at its annual members' meeting in 1948. The admiration was mutual. Blanshard's *American Freedom and Catholic Power* contained not only blistering attacks on the "antidemocratic," "intolerant," "totalitarian," and positively "un-American" nature of Catholicism; but it also had kind words about the AVS (then named Birthright, Inc.). Blanshard was an avowed eugenicist, condemning Roman Catholics for frustrating AVS attempts to persuade state legislators to pass more eugenic sterilization laws. "Meanwhile," Blanshard wrote, "the feebleminded who are at large in our population produce future Americans at a much faster rate than normal citizens."[41] In general, Blanshard agreed with the AVS that the Roman Catholic hierarchy had no business criticizing sterilization, birth control, population control, and artificial insemination when its sexual code was dominated by the ethic of celibacy, a policy that "thwarted instincts and suppressed desires." The fact that Blanshard's book, although stridently anti-Catholic, was praised by people such as Albert Einstein, John Dewey, and Supreme Court justice Hugo Black, proved that his opinions struck a chord among many mid-twentieth-century liberals.[42]

Blanshard articulated a diffuse yet vibrant sentiment that united countless Americans who saw Roman Catholic opposition to eugenics and birth control as just one part of an ongoing Church campaign to subject non-Catholics to Catholic teachings. Science,

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

secularism, pragmatism, and nondogmatic religion appeared more and more attractive as central principles on which to base a progressive democracy in the midst of the Cold War, not the authoritarianism, "absolutism," and "uniformity" the Church seemed to represent. This was a message that distinctly resonated with AVS members.[43]

II

The message that Catholicism posed a threat to democratic freedoms also found a home within the Euthanasia Society of America. The ESA, whose origins roughly coincided with the founding of the AVS, was formed in January 1938 as the National Society for the Legalization of Euthanasia, and renamed the Euthanasia Society of America later that same year.[44] Like the AVS, the ESA had to battle the political power of the Catholic Church between the late 1930s and 1970s. American Catholic opposition to euthanasia, based on Church teaching that life is sacred, a gift from God, and pain a blessing in disguise because it gave individuals the chance to emulate the suffering of Christ, stretched back decades.[45] It intensified in the 1930s, when the ESA was in the process of being formed, and reached a peak in the 1940s and 1950s, when the ESA tried unsuccessfully to persuade New York State legislators to introduce a voluntary euthanasia bill in the State Assembly. In its campaign against the decriminalization of euthanasia, the Church and its fundamentalist Protestant allies frequently targeted the ESA itself.[46]

To help it achieve the legalization of euthanasia, the ESA enlisted the support of physicians and liberal Protestant and Jewish clergymen, including Black, Fosdick, Henry Van Dusen, Henry Sloane Coffin, and Guy Shipler (editor of the anti-Catholic *The Churchman*). Of the fifty New York State religious leaders who signed the 1948 ESA petition in favor of legalizing "painless death for persons desiring it, who are suffering from incurable, fatal and painful disease," twenty were Unitarians.[47] But ESA initiatives simply sparked more Catholic counterattacks. In the midst of growing anti-Communist sentiment throughout the country, Catholic allegations that support for euthanasia was tantamount to support for the "materialism" and "state absolutism" of Soviet Russia were difficult for the ESA to parry.[48]

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

No one voiced the liberal anti-Catholicism of the ESA more eloquently than Charles Potter, its first president. Potter initially rose to national prominence in 1923–24 when he debated biblical fundamentalism on the radio with the Baptist minister John Roach Straton. In 1925 he served as Clarence Darrow's religious adviser at the Scopes trial in Dayton, Tennessee. His life was a long litany of support for liberal causes, such as outlawing war, American participation in the League of Nations, the abolition of capital punishment, and equal rights for women. But he also defended coercive eugenic sterilization and involuntary euthanasia. According to Potter, eugenics, euthanasia, and birth control were simply applied naturalist science, enlightened and humane programs that dissipated religious ignorance and provided individuals with the knowledge they needed to control their own lives and improve society.[49]

Potter, an ex-Unitarian minister, founded the First Humanist Society in 1929. To him, Humanism was "a secular religion" resting on "the conviction that personality is the explanation of the universe, that man is the highest manifestation of this personality." The aim of Humanism was to tap the tremendous potential in human beings in order "to ensure progress toward an ideal society." Elective euthanasia in Potter's eyes was an excellent example of Humanism in action. It enabled individuals to exercise a strong measure of control over their deaths, thereby enriching the terminal experience of life. Participation in the campaign to legalize euthanasia similarly enriched individual character development. From Potter's perspective, involuntary euthanasia also paved the way for "an ideal society" by eliminating undesirable defectives. Indeed, it is hard to exaggerate the importance of euthanasia to Humanism. Religion is human life, stated the "Humanist Manifesto" of 1932–33 (which Potter signed). Whatever enabled human beings to exert control over the final stages of life conferred nobility on individuals while helping them to realize themselves fully.[50]

Joining Potter as a member of both the ESA and his First Humanist Society was the Smith College historian Harry Elmer Barnes. Barnes and Potter thought alike on just about every subject. Barnes was a believer in sex education, eugenic sterilization, birth control, and the decriminalization of abortion. He professed a deep scientism based on Darwinism and the issues raised at the Scopes Trial. Organized religion only bred superstition, ignorance, and bigotry, according to Barnes. Like Potter, he looked toward the march of science both to demolish what was left of traditional religious faith and to

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

erect a new hybrid secular religion combining elements from Unitarianism, positivism, and Ethical Culture. In the meantime, he and Potter prepared to do battle with Roman Catholics, "the cream of the fundamentalists," in Barnes's words.[51]

ESA stalwarts Inez C. Philbrick and Eleanor Dwight Jones basically thought the same way. Both brought years of activist experience in the women's suffrage and birth control campaigns to the euthanasia movement. Philbrick, a Unitarian, physician, and medical educator, was largely responsible for a failed effort in 1937 to have a euthanasia bill considered by Nebraska's unicameral legislature.[52] Jones, also a Unitarian, was president of the American Birth Control League from 1929 to 1935 and eventually became ESA vice president. In the ESA's inaugural years, Jones drafted much of its correspondence, wrote the bulk of its annual reports, and managed most of its public relations.

Jones was an admirer of Potter's brand of liberal Humanism because it stressed solving human problems rather than obeying the doctrines of organized religion. A devout believer in the separation of church and state, she defended the legalization of euthanasia because such a law, she maintained in 1949, besides being a humane reform for those suffering through long, painful, terminal illnesses, would also offer individuals the opportunity to exercise their ultimate right, the freedom to choose the time, place, and manner of their death. It would "leave each religious group free to follow the teaching of its own religion." In opposing the decriminalization of euthanasia, Jones contended, the Catholic Church was attacking this "American ideal of religious freedom," and thus was engaged in an "effort to dominate the rest of us." Hailing the 1948 formation of Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, Jones declared it was time for like-minded Americans to join forces to defeat Catholic political power.[53]

It was no coincidence that Jones, Philbrick, and the twenty Unitarian clergymen who signed the ESA's 1948 petition in support of mercy killing were drawn to the euthanasia movement. Unitarianism, based on a rejection of Christ's divinity, condemned the putative "superstitions," "authoritarianism," and "dogmatism" of orthodox Christianity as threats to human freedom. Unitarian advocates of euthanasia accused Christianity of breeding "fatalism" and discouraging people from trying to improve their conditions of life. By rejecting the notion of God as a creator who willed suffering,

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Unitarians naturally sympathized with mercy killings as one way to deal with painful, chronic illness.[54]

Philbrick and Jones supported both euthanasia and the involuntary sterilization of mental defectives as further illustrations of how humans beings could be merciful to the less fortunate and benefit society at large. They and Potter were just a few of the many eugenicists who served on the ESA's executive and advisory board. To Jones and many others in the ESA, eugenics was the rationale for the "systematic campaign against the present disgenic [*sic*] multiplication of the unfit."[55]

Some eugenicists joined the ESA because of personal experiences during which they had watched relatives or friends die in prolonged agony. Yet while experiences such as these undoubtedly had a powerful emotional impact, ESA members' faith in eugenics and social Darwinism made it easier for them to reject traditional morality and defy religious taboos against taking the lives of other people. As numerous early twentieth-century American intellectuals confessed, their encounter with Darwinism had compelled them to renounce their Christian faith and many of its prohibitions about sex, reproduction, and death.[56]

The eugenic orientation of the early ESA owed much to Mrs. R. L. (Ann) Mitchell, an eccentric and wealthy New Yorker who bankrolled the organization up to the time of her suicide in 1942. Although Potter got most of the public credit for starting the ESA, Mitchell was its true founder. A former asylum patient, she had concluded that euthanasia for incurable mental patients was an urgent necessity. Having seen firsthand the ravages of mental illness in state institutions, she approached Potter and offered to defray the expenses of establishing an organization aimed at the legalization of euthanasia. When World War II broke out, she saw it as a superb opportunity for countries such as the United States to implement "a thorough biological house cleaning." "We must breed human beings as carefully as we do animals," she wrote, urging "euthanasia as a war measure, including euthanasia for the insane, feeble minded monstrosities." Although a firm defender of the Allied struggle against Hitler, she essentially agreed with the Nazi interpretation of war as a life or death contest for biological supremacy.[57]

Mitchell's ideas and the large presence of eugenicists in ESA ranks help to explain why initially the organization hoped that its efforts would convince state legislators to enact laws permitting both voluntary euthanasia and the involuntary mercy killing of hopelessly

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

handicapped or aged individuals. Members such as Mitchell and Potter thought that euthanizing newborns with gross deformities served a eugenic purpose.[58]

However, it quickly became obvious that the best the ESA could expect realistically was the legalization of elective euthanasia, a lesson reinforced by public reaction to stories about the Nazi euthanasia atrocities committed between 1939 and 1945. Indeed, the word "euthanasia" in the organization's title alone generated bad publicity, encouraging public opinion to associate the ESA with Nazi genocide.[59] The ESA reacted by stressing that it sought only voluntary euthanasia for humane purposes.[60] Yet, try as they might, between the late 1930s and the 1960s, ESA officials never entirely succeeded in erasing this stigma or defeating Roman Catholic opposition and as a result were unable to persuade state politicians to pass statutes that would legalize voluntary euthanasia. Persistent attacks by Roman Catholic theologians and medical ethicists in the 1950s particularly wore down the ESA, many of whose members, belonging to groups such as the Humanists, the Ethical Culture Society, and Protestants and Other Americans United for Separation of Church and State, were angry at the way they imagined the Catholic Church was dictating its values to non-Catholic Americans.[61]

Given these conditions, it is easy to see why the ESA, like the AVS, hailed Paul Blanshard's *American Freedom and Catholic Power* as "a brilliant and scholarly study of the menacing encroachment of the Roman Catholic Church in the fields of education, medicine, and sex-morals." In his book, Blanshard specifically lauded the ESA's "humane" support for the safeguarded right of Americans to seek a "merciful release," depicting the issue as a typical example of uninformed Catholic interference in the lives of democratic citizens.[62]

Nonetheless, the endorsement of people such as Blanshard was not enough to reverse the decline of the ESA in the 1950s. By the early 1960s, the ESA was in the doldrums, frustrated over its failure to mobilize legislative support in states such as New York and Connecticut. Like the AVS, it was still a small-scale, poorly funded operation, with only seven hundred members in 1958.[63] What made the ESA's vicissitudes all the more embarrassing was that its growth stood in stark contrast to the progress of the birth control movement.[64]

The ESA's fortunes revived with the introduction in 1968 of the "Living Will," a legal document signed by a consenting individual and authorizing physicians to withdraw life-sustaining treat-

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ment under certain conditions. The living will spoke to the mounting concerns of Americans about recent developments in life-support medical technology, specifically ventilators, tube-feeding, and heart-lung and kidney dialysis machines. Temporarily, euthanasia advocates had to shelve their hopes of achieving the legalization of "active" euthanasia, laws permitting the elective, deliberate, and assisted hastening of death, in favor of "passive" euthanasia, the right to reject "heroic measures." Enthusiasm for active euthanasia would revive in the 1980s with the rise of Derek Humphry's Hemlock Society and the publicity surrounding Dr. Jack Kevorkian's assisted deaths.[65]

Finally, in view of the conspicuous overlap in membership in the years after World War II, was there any actual collaboration between the ESA and AVS? Beyond exchanging membership lists, it was infrequent at best.[66] Yet there was an implicit understanding that since each single cause they promoted was controversial enough in its own right, official cooperation could only harm their respective organizations.[67] With numerous individuals playing critical roles in both associations, there was also the distinct potential for exchanges of information and advice as well as recruitment of new members. The absence of formal links should not disguise the fact that people who belonged to the two organizations tended to think that euthanasia, eugenic sterilization, and birth control had a great deal in common. Nor should it disguise the fact that, in their view, defending these issues in the teeth of Catholic opposition helped to strengthen American democracy in the 1940s and 1950s.

III

Where the connections among eugenics, euthanasia, and birth control also appear vividly is in the lives and careers of individuals who, like Potter, Fosdick, Blanshard, Chisholm, Jones, and Black, sympathized with all three causes. Margaret Sanger (1879–1966) was a good case in point. Her several biographers have noted that besides playing a leading role in the campaign to preach the virtues of birth control she also expressed decidedly eugenic opinions. What is less well known is that her eugenicism lasted virtually to the end of her life. For example, in 1950 she praised the twenty-seven states where "legislators have been far sighted and fearless enough to provide the cost of sterilization at Government expense in such cases where there

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

is a hereditary disease."[68] In 1953 she assured the head of the English Eugenics Society that "eugenic principles . . . are basically sound in constructing a decent civilization. I speak of the unbalanced birth rate which certainly exists in this country [USA] as well as most of the English-speaking countries. It should be one of our aims to help in this regard by taking our educational work and the practice of birth control into these groups where it is most needed."[69] In 1957 she applauded the mass sterilization programs in postwar India and Japan, where local officials and health-care personnel often used incentives in the form of money and gifts to get men and women to submit to sterilization in the interest of population control. "Within two generations" Japan could become "the most eugenic of all nations," she approvingly informed the novelist Upton Sinclair.[70]

Margaret Sanger was a sponsor of the AVS and a member of the ESA's Advisory Council. In 1959, she announced in the ESA *Bulletin* that not only did she agree with ESA policy, but she spread word of the ESA whenever and wherever she could. Her legendary battles with the Catholic Church convinced her that the struggle to dismantle barriers to birth control was highly akin to the struggle to win individuals the personal freedom to die when, where, and how they chose. Just as religious taboos stood in the way of birth control, so they also delayed the legalization of euthanasia.[71]

The gynecologist and sex educator Robert Latou Dickinson (1861–1950) saw matters much the same way. Dickinson shared Blanshard's views about the dangers the Roman Catholic Church posed to the democratic way of life in America.[72] A pioneer in sex research, marriage counseling, and the use of rubber and plastic pelvic models for medical teaching purposes, Dickinson is best known today for his determined efforts during the interwar period to get the medical profession to recognize the health benefits of birth control. Although he had a troubled relationship with Sanger, he tended to share her opinions about the value of sex education and the emancipating potential of informed and accessible family planning.[73]

As a member of the AVS dating back to 1943, Dickinson regarded sterilization as a valuable birth control tool that could also serve eugenic purposes. He was the first chairman of the AVS Medical and Scientific Committee, originally formed in 1949, and when, in 1950, the name of the organization was switched from Birthright, Inc., to the Human Betterment Association of America, its headquarters were moved from Princeton, New Jersey, to Dickinson's own Manhattan studio at the New York Academy of Medicine.

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Dickinson was also an active member of the ESA, serving as its president from 1946 until his death in 1950. In the late 1940s, he chaired the "Committee of 1776 Physicians for Legalization of Voluntary Euthanasia in New York State," an organization linked to the ESA and engaged in the ultimately unsuccessful campaign to persuade New York State legislators to enact a voluntary euthanasia bill. Whether it was eugenics, euthanasia, birth control, marriage counseling, or sex education, Dickinson saw them all as means for liberating human beings—and especially women—from disease, disability, terminal illness, and ignorance about the physiology of sexuality and reproduction. His goal, as he put it, was to improve the overall quality of life.[74]

As Sanger and Dickinson aged and eventually passed away in the postwar era, a new generation emerged to replace them. Two who stood out were Ruth Proskauer Smith (1907–) and Alan Guttmacher (1898–1974). Guttmacher and Smith both joined the AVS in the 1940s, becoming members of its executive committee, with Guttmacher agreeing to chair its Medical and Scientific Committee in 1952. Both also joined the ESA in the 1950s, serving on its advisory board. In the 1960s, as historian David Garrow has shown, each fought tenaciously for the repeal of America's abortion laws, a struggle that culminated in *Roe v. Wade* (1973).[75]

Smith, after a brief stint with the Planned Parenthood Federation of Massachusetts, was appointed the administrator of Guttmacher's family planning service at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City from 1953 to 1955. Guttmacher, after whom New York City's Alan Guttmacher Institute is named, was the son of a Baltimore rabbi and had graduated from Johns Hopkins University Medical School in 1923. Soon thereafter, he joined the birth control movement, serving in various posts with PPFA, including as its national president in 1962. By that point his reputation within the family planning movement was so enviable that he was often mentioned as the unofficial successor to Margaret Sanger herself.[76]

When Ruth Smith began collaborating with Guttmacher in 1953, she encountered his "law from Mount Sinai," which stated that sterilization was to be performed on women who sought it for birth control purposes according to their age and the number of children they had had. For example, a woman under thirty had to have had at least six living children, while a woman of thirty-five needed only four children to be eligible. Guttmacher admitted that 9 percent of the patients who had had children on his public ward service

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

were sterilized, in contrast to 0.3 percent on the private service, but he denied that prejudice on the part of the medical staff accounted for this difference. Still, he did concede that "the smaller the pocketbook, the larger the family and the better the chance to have one's sterilization request honored."

Ultimately, he concluded that "for poorly motivated people sterilization is a much better technique than [temporary forms of] contraception." Although he rejected compulsory eugenic sterilization, Guttmacher found it difficult simultaneously to defend widening access to sterilization as a contraceptive method to include the poor and avoid sounding like someone intent on meeting eugenic goals. As he stated in 1962, a surefire way to break the cycle of underclass poverty was to offer voluntary sterilization services to "all who are unable to utilize other methods of conception control." As an example of the type of person he meant, he cited an unmarried Philadelphia woman "on relief all her life" who had "added 11 illegitimate children in 12 years to the community burdens." Guttmacher's reflexive assumption, not unlike H. Curtis Wood's, was that such a woman would gladly consent to sterilization. This was inseparable from his equally potent conviction that she *ought* to do so.[77]

As a physician who was elected president of Planned Parenthood–World Population in the 1960s, Guttmacher avoided discussing publicly his striking affiliation with eugenic, euthanasia, and birth control organizations for fear of alienating any prospective followers. Ruth Proskauer Smith—a formidable woman with rare candor—seemed to have no such fears. In 1988, on the occasion of the ESA's fiftieth anniversary, she announced that "death with dignity" is based on the same right as "the right to choose all forms of birth control," including abortion. By the 1990s, the octogenarian Smith was, like the better-known Hemlock Society co-founder Derek Humphry, a vocal supporter of physician-assisted suicide.[78]

Smith was born in 1907 in Deal, New Jersey, to Joseph M. Proskauer, a noted jurist, and Alice (Namburg) Proskauer, a tireless campaigner for world peace, both of whom helped to found the ESA. Like Algernon Black and many other supporters of euthanasia, Smith attended the Ethical Culture School in New York City. She then headed to Radcliffe College, where she received her bachelor's degree in 1929 and master's degree in fine arts in 1932. Besides the ESA, AVS, and Planned Parenthood Federation of Massachusetts, she was deeply involved in the activities of the Association for the Study of Abortion, the National Association for Repeal of Abortion

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Laws (now the National Abortion Rights Action League, or NARAL), and the Abortion Rights Association of New York (renamed the Abortion Rights Association after *Roe v. Wade*).[79]

Like Guttmacher, Smith believed wholeheartedly that all forms of contraception—and especially sterilization—should be made available to all consenting American women, but that the poor and ignorant deserved particular attention from family planners because they contributed most heavily to the incidence of social problems. This attitude emerged full-blown in 1959, when the National Conference of (Roman) Catholic Bishops issued a statement opposing "any public assistance, whether at home or abroad to promote artificial birth control, abortion, or sterilization." The Bishops' declaration caused President Dwight D. Eisenhower to state that funding for domestic or overseas birth control programs should come from private agencies, not U.S. government sources. Smith vehemently disagreed, and speaking on behalf of the AVS in the *New York Post* later that year she argued that "this interference by the Catholic hierarchy in matters pertaining to government" was itself a drain on "public tax money." "For example," she wrote,

> let us sum up one of the cases a court psychiatrist encountered in New York's Children's Court: Both neglectful parents had I.Q.'s under 50, and were themselves so mentally defective and emotionally ill that they could barely keep themselves going, without assuming the responsibility of raising their *12* children. All six children under 16 needed to be placed; four were severe mental defectives and two were emotionally disturbed with dull normal intelligence. All six over 16 were in prison. As you doubtless know it takes $5,500 to keep one man in prison one year.

Smith's point was that Roman Catholic political intimidation prevented New York City employees from referring such families to community family planning clinics. Tax money was "being poured into a bottomless pit here in New York," she contended, "consumed in supporting quantity production of these many unloved, unwanted and neglected children, rather than in adding facilities for education, recreation and housing for a smaller group with a higher potential."[80] Catholic policy was costing taxpayers dearly and imposing Catholic doctrine on society, as she complained in a 1961 letter to President John F. Kennedy. To Smith, such policies amounted to a denial of

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

"freedom of choice." Her position echoed that of Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State: Catholics had no right to participate in a debate over public policy when the possible result was that their moral views would restrict individual autonomy in private matters of sexuality and reproduction. As an ESA member, Smith felt that personal choice should also embrace matters of death, but on that topic she knew that mainstream public opinion would not support her nearly as much as it did on birth control.[81]

Yet another liberal whose career combined loyalty to the eugenics, euthanasia, and birth control causes and membership in the AVS and ESA was the theologian Joseph Fletcher (1905–91). A pioneer in the field of medical ethics while teaching at the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Fletcher gained notoriety with his *Morals and Medicine* (1954). He is best known today as the founder of "situational" medical ethics, the cornerstone of the current discipline of biomedical ethics. The original edition of his *Situation Ethics* (1979) sold more than a million copies. Fletcher defined situational ethics as an approach to medical ethics that started with the question, What is the patient's situation? Since the answer to that question, he reasoned, was different in every case, there were no hard and fast ethical rules to guide medical conduct. The only consideration that mattered was what suited the patient's situation. Christian doctrine, he concluded, with its categorical prohibitions against euthanasia, eugenics, and abortion, was "weird and utterly untenable."[82]

Situation ethics was the bedrock of a new morality that extended beyond medical ethics. This "new morality," Fletcher wrote, "declares that anything and everything is right or wrong, according to the situation." The crucial point was an individual's decision in each situation, the free choice to act in a certain way. Situation ethics sought to "widen freedom" of choice, as well as responsibility, a goal that promised to strengthen democracy. How this was compatible with his robust defense of compulsory sterilization of the mentally retarded was something Fletcher never entirely explained.[83]

Fletcher is noteworthy because, along with Ruth Proskauer Smith, he epitomized the congruence in thought and deed between the ESA and the AVS. A member of the AVS by the early 1950s, he became its president in 1962.[84] He remained active in the ESA between the 1940s and the late 1980s, a vocal defender of the legalization of physician-assisted suicide. Like Smith's and Guttmacher's

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

lives, his was an odyssey stretching from involvement in the American Birth Control League to activism in NARAL.[85]

Thus Fletcher, like Potter, Sanger, Smith, Jones, and others believed it made perfect sense for one person simultaneously to believe in euthanasia, birth control, eugenic sterilization, and abortion. Fletcher echoed their opinions when he stated that "[d]eath control, like birth control, is a matter of human dignity. Without it persons become puppets." Eugenics, euthanasia, and birth control were all means that could be employed to achieve the same liberal goal: the empowerment of individuals so they could invest their lives with dignity and autonomy. Science, medicine, and technology, when guided by reason, could liberate human beings and ultimately change human nature. As they all agreed, the most formidable obstacle standing in the way was the Catholic Church.[86]

IV

By the 1970s, people such as Smith and Fletcher, who accented the social benefits of birth control, were increasingly viewed as extreme. Justifications for family planning could win broad support only if they stressed how birth control could expand the freedom of individual women, not how they might save taxpayers money or reduce crime. The entire cultural landscape of America was changing dramatically, emphasizing privacy, personal choice, and individual autonomy. As countercultural and antiestablishment currents swept American society, more and more individuals sought to exercise self-determination in matters relating to sex, birth, and death. The women's movement played a leading role in this transformation, as feminists chanted "Our Bodies, Ourselves" and demanded a franker, less authoritarian relationship with their doctors.[87] These attitudes, alongside accumulating evidence that intelligence was not a single hereditary trait and that nurture and environment were at least as powerful as nature, biology, and instinct, sounded the death knell of eugenics as favored by individuals such as Marian Olden. Eugenics, identified closely with Nazi racial theories since World War II, "virtually became a dirty word in the United States."[88]

No one's career reflected this transition from a toleration of compulsion in family planning to an ethos of choice better than Hugh Moore's. The millionaire Moore (1887–1972), a believer in the urgent need for world population control, was president of and chief

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

donor to the AVS from 1964 to 1969, and when he died in 1972 he left the ESA $1 million. A longtime enemy of Catholicism because of the Church's condemnation of artificial contraception and population control, Moore helped to organize a massive counterattack against Pope Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae* (1968), which reaffirmed Church prohibitions against birth control and sterilization.[89]

His chief claim to fame rested on his invention of the Dixie Cup, the first sanitary paper drinking vessel. Moore had a consuming curiosity about almost everything. Early in life he became interested in socialism, anarchism, Eastern religions, and Unitarianism. In the 1930s, his attention began to shift decisively to international affairs and world peace. A consultant to the State Department at the United Nations Conference in 1945, Moore grew increasingly anti-Communist after World War II. Like many contemporaries, Moore blamed population growth as the cause of war and the reason Communism made inroads in the developing world. In 1954, he published the pamphlet "The Population Bomb," the first time the phrase was used, warning that communism thrived on the poverty and scarcity that overpopulation produced. Moore subsequently helped to found the International Planned Parenthood Federation, and by 1961, when it became Planned Parenthood–World Population, he had raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for the cause of reducing population growth around the globe.[90]

During the 1950s, Moore had begun contributing financially to the AVS as he gradually recognized sterilization to be the best contraceptive method of population control. By the early 1960s, thanks to his wealth and the organization's desperate need for funding, he was able to shape AVS policy to suit his own agenda. Under Moore's presidency, the Human Betterment Association of America became the AVS and shifted its focus from the domestic to the international scene, from widening access to sterilization services in the United States to introducing mass sterilization programs in overpopulated and impoverished countries such as India.[91] He brought to the AVS his friends and allies in the population control field. By the end of the 1960s, the AVS bore the unmistakable Hugh Moore stamp.[92]

Eugenic notions informed Moore's thinking about population control. In 1966, he cited predictions that America's population would exceed 350 million in the next thirty years, resulting in "overcrowded cities, polluted air and water, countless unwanted and suffering children, skyrocketing taxes for welfare! Half of the babies now born in some cities are from indigent families on relief. Need

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

we say more?"[93] In 1968 he paid a New York City firm to develop advertisements that linked overpopulation to urban crime, poverty, and pollution. One ad, entitled "Have You Been Mugged Today?" depicted what many believed was a young black man mugging a victim. The ad sparked charges of racism and accusations that Moore was blaming the poor for the "population explosion" and the crime it supposedly caused.[94]

Officially Moore supported only voluntary sterilization, but like other activists in the population control field, he believed that, unless elective sterilization was widespread, especially among those classes and in those countries that most needed it, then broad programs of compulsory sterilization would be urgently required. Moore's views and actions, seemingly targeting vulnerable and disadvantaged social groups, rekindled bad memories of the coercive eugenic sterilization practices of America's past. His attitude could be defined as "voluntary sterilization now, or else."[95]

Yet Moore also was influenced by the momentous changes American society and culture underwent in the 1960s.[96] He duly took note of the emergence of the abortion rights and environmentalist movements, and saw them as potential allies in the crusade to control population. In 1969, he referred to the "mounting interest on the part of students in the problems of environment, conservation, and population growth. It seems that many students are getting tired of their Vietnam campaign and are swinging to this new cause—our cause. . . . I am inclined to think that this could turn out to be the most important development in our movement to date."[97] Moore's funding of Stanford University biologist Paul R. Ehrlich, author of the best-seller *The Population Bomb* (1968), was an apposite example of his shifting strategy during these years. He also grew more supportive of proabortion activists, such as Lawrence Lader, and organizations such as NARAL.

Moore's involvement in the ESA likewise intensified in the 1960s. He and his wife, Louise, started contributing financially to the ESA in the mid-1960s and attended the First Euthanasia Conference held at the Carnegie Endowment Center in New York City in 1968.[98] In 1972, he donated $1,000 to the Euthanasia Educational Fund. In May of that same year, he congratulated the Atlanta Conference of the United Methodist Church for recommending that abortion be removed from the criminal code and for asserting "the right of every person to die in dignity."[99] Moore may have viewed the issues of abortion and euthanasia mainly through the prism of

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

population control, but his endorsement of both was a powerful boost to the diffuse social movement to establish a right to privacy and the principle of individual autonomy. It was also a sign of how his overall message had changed subtly to fit the shifting cultural mood of the country.[100]

Singly, figures such as Potter, Moore, Fletcher, Smith, Guttmacher, and Dickinson stand out as unique individuals in their own right, each customarily identified with one particular reform cause. However, viewed as a group, their similarities eclipse their differences, and the common causes they espoused look less important in themselves than the broad viewpoint that tended to unite them. Although some took a more hurried approach to the world's problems than others, and some bickered over strategy and tactics, they basically agreed that they were engaged in a critical struggle to destroy age-old taboos that prevented individuals and society from realizing their full human potential. As one euthanasia supporter wrote in 1975, the time had come to "break the stranglehold of tradition and religious dogma" that gripped American society.[101] Their unity was strengthened by the fact that they believed they faced the same enemy: Christian fundamentalists, orthodox Protestants, and—in particular—Roman Catholicism. Their anxiety, and hence their intermittent impatience with moderate measures, was due to their conviction that the fate of American democracy hung in the balance.

V

Even as some individuals such as Ruth Proskauer Smith continued to behave in the 1970s as if the times had never changed, the truth is that general concern over Catholicism had actually begun declining during the 1950s. As John McGreevy has argued, this was because of the dawning awareness of many anti-Communist liberals during the Cold War that the Church was far from being the danger to American democratic values that Soviet Communism was. Nondenominational support for John F. Kennedy's presidential candidacy also undermined anti-Catholicism. In addition, American Catholics, led by John Courtney Murray and John Noonan, became less combative, a process that peaked in the 1960s, when the power of prelates such as Francis Cardinal Spellman waned, the Vatican formally abandoned its preference for unity of church and state, and

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

U.S. Catholics supported the civil rights movement and President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty.[102]

Yet, while shifting political realities and evolving Vatican attitudes temporarily helped to defuse tensions between liberals and American Catholics in the 1960s and 1970s, the familiar divisions have reemerged since the 1980s. Church policy regarding sex and reproduction has budged very little. Despite hopes that the Second Vatican Council would usher in new teachings on sexuality and contraception, *Humanae Vitae* was a huge disappointment to liberal Catholics and non-Catholics alike. *Roe v. Wade* revived the old conflicts over reproductive rights that had characterized the 1940s and 1950s and polarized the country into "prolife" and "prochoice" communities.

The same could be said for euthanasia. Church teaching on euthanasia has actually been more flexible than its doctrines on sex and reproduction. In 1957, Pius XII announced that terminally ill Catholics had the right to refuse futile medical treatment.[103] And, despite initial opposition to the legalization of living wills, the American Church accepts the removal of life-sustaining technology when it is shown to be ineffective and permits pain medication to be given to patients whose suffering is unbearable, even if the medication leads to death. But the Church has drawn the line at assisted suicide, and where, as in the state of Oregon, its legalization has been debated, the old battle lines have crystallized. On the one side are the Catholics and their secular, Protestant, and Orthodox Jewish allies, and on the other side are organizations such as the Hemlock Society that see the campaign to decriminalize physician-assisted suicide as "the last frontier for personal choice," "the ultimate human rights crusade."[104] To Hemlock and its allies, the Roman Catholic Church is the main foe, dedicated as ever to jeopardizing personal freedom and self-actualization for all Americans by violating "the bedrock American concept of separation between church and state."[105] Today's supporters of physician-assisted suicide celebrate choice, personal privacy, and the ability of individuals to exert control over their lives. The result has been a particularly resonant interpretation of individual autonomy that posits the self as being absolutely free from government interference in private matters concerning birth, sex, and death. In recent years this notion of an "unencumbered self" has become widely accepted.[106]

On the other hand, in the early twenty-first century, more and more Americans wonder if a society based on this twentieth-century

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

philosophy of individualism and liberalism, instead of generating a uniquely cohesive form of community, has actually destroyed the delicate balance between private and public realms, rights and responsibilities.[107] These doubts are not groundless. As this article has shown, many of the men and women engaged in the struggle for personal autonomy expressed views that are difficult to reconcile with current popular attitudes toward individual freedom and justice. Yet, a properly contextualized examination of the careers of people such as Charles Potter, Eleanor Dwight Jones, Margaret Sanger, Robert Latou Dickinson, Joseph Fletcher, Ruth Proskauer Smith, Alan Guttmacher, and Hugh Moore reveals that they themselves had no such doubts. To them the task at hand was clear. They saw themselves constructing a new theory of citizenship for an age that demanded radically new thinking about the relationship between self and society. There is something distinctly familiar as well as dated in what they had to say. Their story, although rooted in the past, is no less the story of modern times.

University of Prince Edward Island

Notes

1. "Euthanasia: An Important Social Measure," 16 January 1940 address to the Euthanasia Society of America, Partnership for Caring Records, Lewis Associates, Baltimore, Maryland, Box C-4 (hereafter cited as PFC). My emphasis. For Van Dusen's comments of 23 November 1968, at the First Euthanasia Conference of the Euthanasia Educational Fund, see *The Right to Die with Dignity* (New York: Euthanasia Educational Fund, Inc., 1971). In 1975, Van Dusen and his wife, she suffering from debilitating arthritis and he from the effects of a severe stroke, committed joint suicide. In the words of one commentator, they felt there was little dignity left in their lives and "didn't like the idea of taking up space in a world with too many mouths and too little food." This comment indicates that justifications for euthanasia did not just derive from eugenic sources but were also advanced for population control reasons. "Suicide Pact Preceded Deaths of Dr. Van Dusen and his Wife," *New York Times,* 26 February 1975, 1; "The Right to Die," *Saturday Review,* 14 June 1975, 4. For an incisive account of how population control issues shaped the abortion and family planning movements, see Donald T. Critchlow, *Intended Consequences: Birth Control, Abortion, and the Federal Government in Modern America* (New York, 1999).

2. "Eugenics" is the term coined in 1883 by Francis Galton (1822–1911), Charles Darwin's cousin, based on the Greek word for "well-born." Galton's own definitions of eugenics changed over time, which helps to account for its shifting meanings since his day. However, eugenics is commonly defined as the science of good breeding, or the ability to choose the kind of children we (as individuals and society) wish. This latter definition includes many of the reproductive technologies available today, such as genetic screening, in vitro fertilization, and sperm banks.

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

For the "protean" things eugenics has meant to different people over time, see Diane B. Paul, *Controlling Human Heredity: 1865 to the Present* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1995), 2. See also Troy Duster, *Backdoor to Eugenics* (London: Routledge, 1990). The version of eugenics that appealed to Americans after World War II and was most relevant to the people discussed in this article is best defined as "reform eugenics," the term Daniel Kevles has coined to describe the approach toward reproduction and genetics favored by individuals who rejected the obvious race and class prejudices of prior generations of eugenicists. Reform eugenicists were inclined to replace the older, rigid hereditarianism that had marked the early eugenics movement with theories that also emphasized the influence of environment over the health of future generations. Common to both "mainline" and "reform" eugenicists, however, was a deep faith in the need and practicality of social engineering. Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (New York, 1985), 172–73.

As for euthanasia, it is a term taken from the Greek word meaning "good death." Before the twentieth century, it was largely considered to mean letting nature take its course while providing whatever doses of drugs were necessary to make the experience as painless as possible. In the twentieth century, euthanasia has been mainly identified with the notion of mercy killing, yet over the course of the last few decades, as interest has grown in the issue, people increasingly have become aware of the distinctions between voluntary and involuntary euthanasia. For a discussion of pre-twentieth-century euthanasia and these distinctions, see Peter G. Filene, *In the Arms of Others: A Cultural History of the Right-to-Die* (Chicago, 1998), 3–4, 100–101, 191–93. Throughout the period described by this article, euthanasia was understood by both its supporters and opponents as active euthanasia, that is, the hastening of death by a doctor, rather than passive euthanasia, or the removal of treatment that kept someone alive.

3. Nancy Mamis to Robert Kotlowitz, 24 February 1966, PFC, Box C-2. See also "Address by Dr. Joseph Fletcher, Society for the Right to Die Annual Meeting, 9 December 1986," PFC, Box F-4.

4. For an example of this kind of thinking on the part of American social scientists, see James Jones's biography of the sexologist Alfred Kinsey, *Alfred C. Kinsey: A Public/Private Life* (New York, 1997), especially 751.

5. This historiographic oversight is all the more curious since there is a considerable literature on the connections between the eugenics and euthanasia movements in Nazi Germany. For the history of German eugenics in particular and Nazi medicine in general, including the Third Reich's euthanasia program, see Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York, 1986); Robert N. Proctor, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine Under the Nazis* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988); Paul Weindling, *Health, Race, and German Politics Between National Unification and Nazism* (Cambridge, 1989); Michael H. Kater, *Doctors Under Hitler* (Chapel Hill, 1989); Gotz Aly, Peter Chroust, and Christian Pross, *Cleansing the Fatherland: Nazi Medicine and Racial Hygiene*, trans. Belinda Cooper (Baltimore, 1994); Michael Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: "Euthanasia" in Germany, 1900–1945* (Cambridge, 1994); Henry Friedlander, *The Origin of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill, 1995).

6. For the history of American eugenics, see Mark H. Haller, *Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1963); Donald K. Pickens, *Eugenics and the Progressives* (Nashville, 1969); Kenneth M. Ludmerer, *Genetics and American Society: A Historical Appraisal* (Baltimore, 1972); Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics;* Barry Alan Mehler, "A History of the American Eugenics Society, 1921–1940" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign, 1988); Philip R. Reilly, *The Surgical Solution: A History of Involuntary Sterilization in the United States* (Baltimore, 1991); Edward J. Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science: Eu-*

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

genics in the Deep South (Baltimore, 1995); Marouf A. Hasian, *The Rhetoric of Eugenics in Anglo-American Thought* (Athens, Ga., 1996); Ian R. Dowbiggin, *Keeping America Sane: Psychiatry and Eugenics in the United States and Canada, 1880–1940* (Ithaca, 1997); Nicole H. Rafter, *Creating Born Criminals: Biological Theories of Crime and Eugenics* (Urbana, 1997).

7. The best treatment of the topic so far is Martin S. Pernick, *The Black Stork: Eugenics and the Death of "Defective" Babies in American Medicine and Motion Pictures Since 1915* (New York, 1996). See also Stephen Louis Kuepper, "Euthanasia in America, 1890–1960: The Controversy, the Movement, and the Law" (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1981), 98–127; Valerie Garrett, "The Last Civil Right? Euthanasia Policy and Politics in the United States, 1938–1991" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Santa Barbara, 1998). An account of how Christians have viewed euthanasia over the centuries, and which also dispels myths spread by current defenders of physician-assisted suicide, is Edward J. Larson and Darrell W. Amundsen, *A Different Death: Euthanasia and the Christian Tradition* (Downers Grove, Ill., 1998). For the links between American and Nazi advocates of eugenics and euthanasia, see Stefan Kuhl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism* (New York, 1994), especially 100–102. For "the close, often uncomfortable relationship" between the eugenics and birth control movements in particular, see Richard A. Soloway, "The 'Perfect Contraceptive': Eugenics and Birth Control Research in Britain and America in the Interwar Years," *Journal of Contemporary History* 30 (1995): 637–64, at 637. Close ties among the eugenics, euthanasia, and birth control movements were not limited to the United States. See Ian Dowbiggin, "'A Prey on Normal People': C. Killick Millard and the Euthanasia Movement in Great Britain, 1930–1955," *Journal of Contemporary History* 36 (2001): 59–85.

8. John T. McGreevy, "Thinking on One's Own: Catholicism in the American Intellectual Imagination, 1928–1960," *Journal of American History* 84 (1997): 97–131, at 98. This article also confirms Donald Critchlow's thesis that "the ability of groups, whether a small collection of powerful individuals or democratically mobilized interests, to affect public policy remains dependent on the larger culture" (Critchlow, *Intended Consequences*, 9). Among population control liberals, "family planning became an ideology in itself," writes Critchlow (18). For a similar characterization of twentieth-century liberalism, see Paul Edward Gottfried, *After Liberalism: Mass Democracy in the Managerial State* (Princeton, 1999). Of course, the appeal of post–World War II eugenics in America was not limited to liberal, progressive circles. See Andrew S. Winston, "Science in the Service of the Far Right: Henry E. Garrett, the IAAEE, and the Liberty Lobby," *Journal of Social Issues* 54 (1998): 179–210.

9. The ESA, now a part of Partnership for Caring: America's Voices for the Dying, a national, nonprofit consumer organization devoted to improving care for the dying and their families, has been in the forefront of the twentieth-century campaign to establish a right to die for Americans. This is just the latest in a series of reorganizations and name changes the ESA has undergone since its inception in 1938. By the 1970s the old ESA had divided into the Society for the Right to Die (SRD) and the Euthanasia Educational Council (EEC). In 1978 the EEC became Concern for Dying (CFD) and split from the SRD in 1980. Then in 1991 the SRD and CFD reunited as Choice in Dying. Seven years later, Choice in Dying decided to dissolve its corporate identity and take most of its programs and staff into Partnership for Caring.

10. Now called EngenderHealth, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development and dedicated to promoting surgical contraceptive practices especially in overpopulated countries, it was largely responsible for making tubal ligation the most popular form of contra-

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ception among contemporary American women between the ages of fifteen and forty-five. L. J. Piccinino and W. D. Mosher, "Trends in Contraceptive Use in the United States," *Family Planning Perspectives* 30 (January–February 1998): 4–10; M. Moore, "Most U.S. Couples Who Seek Surgical Sterilization Do So for Contraception; Fewer than 25% Desire Reversal," *Family Planning Perspectives* 31 (March–April 1999): 102.

11. For exceptions, see Kuepper, "Euthanasia in America"; William Ray Vanessendelft, "A History of the Association for Voluntary Sterilization, 1935–1964" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1978). See also Philip R. Reilly's informative *The Surgical Solution,* 120–21, 131–35, 144–47; and Thomas M. Shapiro, *Population Control Politics: Women, Sterilization, and Reproductive Choice* (Philadelphia, 1985), 54–58, 137–70.

12. Those who have written about the life and career of Margaret Sanger (1879–1966) have debated the exact nature of her frequent references to the eugenics dimension of birth control. What no biographer of Sanger has observed is that she, like Annie Besant, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and other birth control activists before her, was also an ardent supporter of the legalization of euthanasia. For Gilman's suicide and defense of both voluntary and involuntary euthanasia, see Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Right to Die—I," *Forum Magazine,* vol. 94, 1935, 297–300. As Sanger maintained in 1951, birth control and euthanasia were part of a single project designed "to bring the entrance into life" and the "exit of life . . . under control of reason." Sanger quoted by Eleanor Dwight Jones, Jones to Mr. [?] Churchill, 24 April 1951, PFC, Box C-1. If, as I argue, it is hard to disentangle eugenics, euthanasia, and birth control in the thinking of reformers like Sanger, then it suggests that her often positive opinions about eugenics can neither be dismissed as secondary interests nor reduced to mere rhetorical strategies to gain support for birth control. For variations on this interpretation of Sanger, see James Reed, *From Private Vice to Public Virtue: The Birth Control Movement and American Society Since 1830* (New York, 1978); Ellen Chesler, *Woman of Valor: Margaret Sanger and the Birth Control Movement in America* (New York, 1992); and Carole R. McCann, *Birth Control Politics in the United States, 1916–1945* (Ithaca, 1994). See also David Kennedy, *Birth Control in America: The Career of Margaret Sanger* (New Haven, 1970). Linda Gordon, in her *Woman's Body, Woman's Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America* (Harmondsworth, 1977), largely agreed with Kennedy, but in recent years has modified her views. See her Preface to the revised (1990) edition of *Woman's Body, Woman's Right,* v–ix. Other biographies of Margaret Sanger included Lawrence Lader's *The Margaret Sanger Story* (New York, 1955), and Madeline Gray's *Margaret Sanger* (New York, 1979). While there is no discounting Sanger's primary interest in birth control, her example and that of others like her demonstrate that the triangular nexus among eugenics, euthanasia, and birth control survived long after the end of World War II.

13. For an expression of this perception, see Mrs. [Eleanor Dwight] Robertson Jones to Guy Shipler, 18 February 1947, PFC, Box C-1. For an account of the debates between modernists and orthodox Christians in twentieth-century America, see Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate over Science and Religion* (New York, 1997), especially 33–34, 116–21; Paul K. Conkin, *When All the Gods Trembled: Darwinism, Scopes, and American Intellectuals* (Lanham, Md., 1998). See also William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976).

14. Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge, 1991), 328–29.

15. See Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism,* 24–40. See also Robert Moats Miller, *American Protestantism and Social Issues, 1919–1939*

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(Chapel Hill, 1958); David Robinson, *The Unitarians and the Universalists* (Westport, Conn., 1985).

16. For an insightful discussion of the historical tension between similar definitions of individualism and the quest for a sense of community and solidarity, see Wilfred M. McClay, *The Masterless: Self and Society in Modern America* (Chapel Hill, 1994), especially 226–95.

17. This is not to deny that personality conflicts and differences of opinion, of which there were many, created hard-to-mend rifts among these educated, normally strong-willed individuals. Gender, too, was a divisive factor; women who joined the ESA and AVS often contested the patronizing attitude of men, who were convinced that they should wield exclusive control and dictate strategy. For reflections on this theme, see McCann, *Birth Control Politics*, 197–98.

18. Critchlow, *Intended Consequences*, 9.

19. In 1984 it was renamed the Association for Voluntary Surgical Contraception and in 1994 AVSC International. For Moore's involvement with AVS, see Hugh Moore Fund Collection, Seeley G. Mudd Library, Princeton University, Box 15, Folders 1–15 (hereafter cited as HM).

20. Marian Olden was born Marian Stephenson. Olden was the surname of her fourth and last husband, Roger G. Olden, whom she married in 1941. In 1943 she began spelling Marian with an "a" instead of an "o" so correspondents would not mistake her for a man. Vannessendelft, "A History of the Association for Voluntary Sterilization, 1935–1964," 16n.

21. The bulk of Olden's papers can be found in the records of the Association for Voluntary Sterilization, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis (hereafter cited as AVS). For the history of Georgia's sterilization law, see Edward J. Larson, "Belated Progress: The Enactment of Eugenic Legislation in Georgia," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 46 (1991): 44–64.

22. Reilly, *The Surgical Solution*, 120–21.

23. Marian Olden to Charles Potter, 2 February 1947, PFC, Box C-4.

24. Vanessendelft, "A History of the Association for Voluntary Sterilization, 1935–1964," 37–38.

25. Charles R. Morris, *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners Who Built America's Most Powerful Church* (New York, 1997), 195.

26. Ibid., 165–227. See also John Cooney, *The American Pope: The Life and Times of Francis Cardinal Spellman* (New York, 1984).

27. Morris, *American Catholic*, 153–54, 354–59. See also Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950–1985* (Ithaca, 1993), 163–66. For the impact of Freudianism, see John C. Burnham, "The Influence of Psychoanalysis upon American Culture," in John C. Burnham, ed., *Paths into American Culture: Psychology, Medicine, and Morals* (Philadelphia, 1988), 96–112. Kinsey's data have not stood the test of time. For confirmation, see Jones, *Alfred C. Kinsey*.

28. See the minutes of the HBAA debate of 3 April 1963, AVS, SWD 15, Box 5, Folder 43.

29. For an example of this attitude, see Irene Headley Armes to Douglas Arant, 9 November 1950, AVS, SWD 15, Box 4, Folder 33.

30. Before the 1970s, demographic, environmental, and eugenic concerns tended to overshadow women's rights issues for AVS members. But the presence in AVS ranks of many women who had played constructive roles in the birth control movement indicated that interests in expanding women's reproductive choices were far from absent. Indeed, since the 1970s women's reproductive health and "informed choice" in contraception have become the cornerstones of the organization's mission alongside population control. See "Anne Howat," *AVSC News* 38 (Spring 2000) (http://www.avsc.org/avscnews/sp00/015-anne.html).

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

31. Ruth Proskauer Smith to Harry Emerson Fosdick, 28 April 1959, AVS, SW15.1, Box 23. Sentiments of this nature made it possible for the AVS to attract birth control activists from the Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA). These PPFA renegades were impatient with that organization's reluctance to approve of sterilization as a family planning method or address the question of the fertility of the mentally handicapped.

32. H. Curtis Wood to Robert Latou Dickinson, 22 November 1948, AVS, SWD 15, Box 2, Folder 15.

33. As Wood wrote in 1969, "The one big thing I would like to see A.V.S. accomplish is to put pressure in the right places so *all* women, black or white, rich or poor are offered *all* methods of fertility control at our hospitals, and public health and welfare institutions." H. Curtis Wood to Louise Mills, 16 August 1969, HM, Series 3, Box 15, Folder 8.

34. For an example of Catholic pressure on physicians who supported birth control, see Sister Anna Rita to Armand M. DeRosa, M.D., 8 January 1942, AVS, SWD 15, Box 1, Folder 4. In 1945 part of the AVS membership wanted to reprint Harold E. Fey's series of articles from the *Christian Century* entitled "Can Catholicism Win America?" The articles raised the specter of Catholics winning "control" of America thanks to the influence of the Pope over the minds of U.S. Catholics. Vanessendelft, "A History of the Association for Voluntary Sterilization, 1935–1964," 101.

35. Reilly, *The Surgical Solution,* 144. For other examples of Catholic hospitals pressuring doctors if they did not sever their connections with birth control organizations, see AVS, SWD15, Box 11, Folder 94.

36. Vanessendelft, "A History of the Association for Voluntary Sterilization," 220.

37. Fosdick quoted by Wood, in Wood, "The Case for Voluntary Sterilization," *The Humanist* 29 (1969): 3. See also H. Curtis Wood, "Sterilization: A Reasonable Alternative," *The Humanist* 25 (1965): 16–18; Wood, "The Case for Voluntary Sterilization," 3–4; Olden to Fosdick, 22 May 1945, Fosdick to Olden, 14 June 1945, AVS, SWD 15, Box 2, Folder 12. For more on Fosdick, see Conkin, *When All the Gods Trembled,* 121–28.

38. For Fosdick's comments on "planned parenthood" and the ESA, see Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Living of These Days: An Autobiography* (New York, 1956), 284–85.

39. The Society for Ethical Culture was founded by Felix Adler (1851–1933), a scholar who taught at Columbia and Cornell. In 1891 Adler publicly defended the right of chronic invalids to request "a cup of relief" from their physicians. See his *An Ethical Philosophy of Life: Presented in Its Main Outlines* (Hicksville, N.Y., 1975; reprint of 1919 edition), 154–62. Kuepper, "Euthanasia in America," 31–32. For the definition of religion embraced by the Society for Ethical Culture, see the masthead to its journal, *The Ethical Outlook* (formerly *The Standard*). See also Algernon D. Black, "Can Humanism Meet Man's Spiritual need?" *The Humanist* 19 (1959): 195–206; "Algernon Black, Leader of Society for Ethical Culture, Is Dead," *New York Times,* 11 May 1993, B6. For Black's theory of how euthanasia is consistent with Ethical Culture, see Gerald A. Larue, *Euthanasia and Religion: A Survey of the Attitudes of World Religions to the Right-to-Die* (Los Angeles: The Hemlock Society, 1985), 127–30. One of Black's quotations included in this volume is an excerpt taken from a Black speech on 3 March 1963 to the New York Society for Ethical Culture. Black was one of a group of public figures, including Linus Pauling, Sidney Hook, and Ernest Nagel, who in 1974 signed "A Plea for Beneficent Euthanasia" (*The Humanist* [July–August 1974], 4–5). Another well-known Society for Ethical Culture figure was Benjamin Miller, who delivered the address "Euthanasia and the

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Ethics of Self-Fulfillment" at the ESA annual meeting of 19 January 1959 (ESA *Bulletin* [March–April], 2–4).

40. See Allan Irving, *Brock Chisholm: Doctor to the World* (Markham, Ontario, 1998), 132. Chisholm's acceptance speech upon being elected "Humanist of the Year" was "Safe Conformity Is Dangerous," *The Humanist* 19 (1959): 323–30.

41. Paul Blanshard, *American Freedom and Catholic Power* (Boston, 1949), 152. Blanshard also attacked the Church for directing Catholic judges to prevent eugenic sterilization laws from operating where they were on the statute books (51–52). For other Blanshard references to eugenics, see chapter 7, "Sex, Birth Control, and Eugenics," 132–55. In 1951 he confided in an AVS official that he was "thinking of a work which would attempt to popularize eugenic ideals." Blanshard to Irene Headley Armes, 4 October 1951, AVS, SW 15.1, Box 22.

42. Blanshard, *American Freedom and Catholic Power,* 154. Blanshard's personal papers are housed at the Bentley Historical Library, the University of Michigan.

43. Winfred E. Garrison, *Catholicism and the American Mind* (Chicago, 1928), 200. Quoted in McGreevy, "Thinking on One's Own," 106–7.

44. In 1967, the ESA decided to form the Euthanasia Educational Fund (renamed the Euthanasia Education Council in 1972), a tax-exempt organization. The ESA was virtually dormant between 1967 and 1974, when it was revived as the Society for the Right to Die.

45. For Catholic opposition to euthanasia in the early years of the twentieth century, see Pernick, *The Black Stork,* 34–35.

46. Garrett, "The Last Civil Right?" 47–51.

47. See "Legalization of Voluntary Euthanasia: Statement on the Ethical Aspects by Fifty Religious Leaders of N.Y. State," PFC, Box C-3.

48. Joining the Catholic Church in its attack on the ESA was the American Council of Christian Churches with its fifteen separate denominations and a million and a half members, as well as the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church. "Euthanasia Forbidden by the Bible," *News from the American Council of Christian Churches,* February 1949, PFC, Box C-3.

49. For Potter's role at the Scopes Trial, see Larson, *Summer for the Gods,* 166–68, 157–58. See also Charles Potter, *Humanism: A New Religion* (New York, 1930). Potter's autobiography is *The Preacher and I* (New York, 1951).

50. Potter, *Humanism: A New Religion,* 14. See also Robinson, *The Unitarians and the Universalists,* 145–47.

51. "Lindsey and Barnes Assail Encyclical," *New York Times,* 31 January 1931, 14. See also Harry Elmer Barnes, *The Twilight of Christianity* (New York, 1929), 338–50, 426–27, 456–60. See also Conkin, *When All the Gods Trembled,* 150–54.

52. Philbrick's bill represented only the second such attempt in U.S. history to that date. The first was in Ohio in 1906, when a single legislator introduced a voluntary euthanasia bill. It said that a competent individual, suffering from an incurable illness or fatal injury, could ask his or her physician to administer a lethal dose. The request would be granted if three other physicians agreed recovery was impossible (Kuepper, "Euthanasia in America," 38). One of Philbrick's main allies in her campaign to legalize euthanasia in Nebraska was Arthur L. Weatherly, a Unitarian minister from Lincoln. Inez Celia Philbrick Papers, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, MS 1058, Scrapbook (hereafter cited as ICP).

53. Eleanor Dwight Jones to Bert Voorhees, 14 February 1948; Jones to Harry S. Meserve, 23 February 1949, PFC, Box C-3. As the head of the English Voluntary Euthanasia Legislation Society wrote Jones in 1950: "It is rather remarkable that we should have so much in common–voluntary euthanasia, Unitarianism, birth control, [and] temperance." C. Killick Millard to Jones, 3 September 1950, PFC, Box C-3. See also Kuepper, "Euthanasia in America," 114.

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

54. ESA officials were the first to admit that Unitarian ministers were "very much interested" in euthanasia. See Elizabeth Halsey to Mrs. M. Hughes, 7 October 1971, PFC, Box C-2. A former president of the Euthanasia Educational Council, Donald McKinney, himself a Unitarian minister, confirmed that Unitarians favored the legalization of euthanasia in a telephone interview with the author on 21 December 1999. For references to the support of Unitarians for the legalization of physician-assisted suicide, see Derek Humphry and Mary Clement, *Freedom to Die: People, Politics, and the Right-to-Die Movement* (New York, 2000), 195, 271, 370. In 1988 the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations passed a national resolution affirming a right to die, becoming the first religious body in America to do so. See also Gerald Larue, *Playing God: Fifty Religious Views on Your Right to Die* (Wakefield, R.I., 1996).

55. Eleanor Dwight Jones to Lawrence B. Dunham, 3 November 1930, RG2 Medical Interests, Box 1, Rockefeller Family Archives, Tarrytown, New York. Quoted by Donald T. Critchlow, "Birth Control, Population Control, and Family Planning: An Overview," in Critchlow, ed., *The Politics of Abortion and Birth Control in Historical Perspective*, 6. In 1933 Jones had proposed a merger between the American Birth Control League, of which she was president, and the American Eugenics Society. The merger never took place. See McCann, *Birth Control Politics in the United States, 1916–1945*, 181. The list of ESA eugenicists included Henry H. Goddard, Edward A. Ross, Arthur A. Estabrook, William McDougall, Albert E. Wiggam, Wyllistine Goodsell, Samuel J. Holmes, Oscar Riddle, Clarence Cook Little, and Leon F. Whitney.

56. Conkin, *When All the Gods Trembled*, viii. Professor Richard Weikart has made the same point, based on his research on the history of German eugenics, euthanasia, and social Darwinism (Weikart, "Darwinism and Death," paper presented at the West Coast History of Science Society, University of California, Berkeley, May 2000).

57. For Mitchell's role in founding the ESA, see Eleanor Dwight Jones to Inez Celia Philbrick, n.d., ICP, Folder 3. For Mitchell's views, see her correspondence with C. Killick Millard, head of the British Voluntary Euthanasia Legislation Society (VELS), Contemporary Medical Archives Centre, Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, London, UK, SA/VES/A.19–20/Box 3 (hereafter cited as CMAC). Mitchell's ESA records are in PFC, Box E-1; see also Kuepper, "Euthanasia in America," 108. After disinheriting her two sons, Mitchell bequeathed the bulk of her estate to the ESA, and in the event it ceased to exist, the VELS. She had divorced her husband in June 1942, tried unsuccessfully to kill herself with an overdose of morphine on 24 September, and on 2 October threw herself out of a Miami hotel window.

58. One of the ESA's first presidents, the neurologist Foster Kennedy, argued that only compulsory euthanasia laws were warranted because the only people who truly needed mercy killing were those persons congenitally and hereditarily incapable of giving consent. Foster Kennedy, "The Problem of Social Control of the Congenital Defective," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 99 (1942): 1–4.

59. Eleanor Dwight Jones to Members of the ESA Advisory Council, ca. 1952, PFC, Box C-1.

60. There remained, however, a hard core of members who like Foster Kennedy felt "that euthanasia for imbeciles, idiots, and congenital monstrosities is even more important and should be included in our program" (Eleanor Dwight Jones to the Coronet Round Table, 17 November 1944, PFC, Box C-1). Most, like Potter, were willing to settle for the legalization of voluntary euthanasia because they believed that winning such a victory would act as "an entering wedge," at least "stimulat[ing] discussion of euthanasia for mental defectives." For Potter's comments, see the minutes of NSLE Board of Directors Meeting, 30 March 1938, PFC, Box C-1. See also

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

form letter, n.d. (probably 1950), re: "another 'mercy-killer' is being prosecuted as a murderer," PFC, Box C-1.

61. In 1959 the American Humanist Association adopted a resolution endorsing euthanasia. *Euthanasia Society of America Bulletin* 8 (1959): 1–4.

62. Blanshard, *American Freedom and Catholic Power,* 125–27. For a discussion of the sometimes fierce battles over the moral and ethical dimensions of euthanasia between the ESA and its religious foes, see Kuepper, "Euthanasia in America," 303–7. For the review of Blanshard's book, see *Euthanasia Society of America Bulletin* (August–September 1949): 4, cited in Kuepper, "Euthanasia in America," 306.

63. A. Kent MacDougall, "Euthanasia: Murder or Mercy?" *The Humanist,* no. 1 (1958): 38–47, at 41.

64. Filene, *In the Arms of Others,* 7–8. As one correspondent asked the ESA in 1960: "Is the Society completely inactive?" Mrs. Robert Avery to the ESA, 16 March 1960, PFC, Box C-2.

65. Garrett, "The Last Civil Right?" 143–297.

66. For the swapping of membership lists, see "Minutes of the Meeting of the [Birthright] Executive Committee," 23 November 1943, AVS, SWD 15, Box 1, Folder 7; Mrs. Myron Goldstein to Mrs. Robert Edwards, 10 May 1950, PFC, Box C-1. See also Mrs. Robert Edwards to Birthright, 28 June 1949 [?], AVS, SWD 15, Box 2, Folder 16: "For the past few years we have exchanged membership lists with your organization to our mutual benefit." Eleanor Dwight Jones of the ESA saw the symmetry among eugenics, euthanasia, and birth control. As she told Marian Olden, 28 May 1945, she "spoke as strongly as I could in favor of close cooperation between [PPFA] and Birthright, Inc. It seems to me that the two supplement each other. Neither movement can achieve its aim without the other." AVS, SWD 15, Box 2, Folder 12.

67. One example of this kind of dilemma arose in 1965, when an ESA representative was invited to "The New Hampshire Conference on Population Problems." Held in Concord, it featured speakers like Alan Guttmacher, president of Planned Parenthood–World Population, H. Curtis Wood of the AVS, Robert E. Hall, president of the Association for Humane Abortion, and Frederick Osborne of the American Eugenics Society. The ESA declined to accept the invitation to send a speaker on euthanasia under one umbrella . . . would tend to paralyze and possibly antagonize the press and public." Nancy Mamis to Donald McKinney and Kay Mali, 29 July 1965, PFC, Box D-1. Addressing the issue of cooperation with other birth control associations, the AVS as late as 1983 conceded that advocacy of sterilization was "still controversial, and established family planning organizations are reluctant to risk their hard-won gains by advancing sterilization. AVS and the groups it collaborates with have nothing to lose and are able to take the heat" (Association for Voluntary Sterilization, Inc., *1983 Annual Report:* Agency for International Development, Activity Data Sheet, FY84, 11; quoted in Jacqueline Kasun, *The War Against Population: The Economics and Ideology of Population Control* [San Francisco, 1988], 178).

68. "Sterilization," Sanger concluded, is the best contraceptive method "in cases where the person's mentality is not adequate for the usual techniques necessary in regular birth control methods." See "Copy," "Addresses by Margaret Sanger," and "Sterilization: A Modern Medical Program for Human Health and Welfare," AVS, SW 15.1, Box 18, Sanger Folder. In her *Woman of Valor,* Ellen Chesler writes that the main reason for Sanger's PPFA speech was her "tragic regimen of drugs and alcohol" to dull the mounting pain she was feeling from her declining health. Yet, that ignores the fact that her comments were not all that different from what she had been writing and saying in the 1920s, when her health had been much better, and the fact that her pro-eugenic statements continued throughout the 1950s, be-

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

lying Chesler's claim that Sanger "never mentioned the idea again." Chesler, *Woman of Valor,* 417.

69. Margaret Sanger to CPB, 19 May 1953, CMAC, SA/EUG/Box 22, C. 304.

70. Margaret Sanger to Upton Sinclair, 17 February 1957, Margaret Sanger Papers, *Collected Documents,* Subseries 1, Correspondence, 1956–n.d. That these theories were no liability for Sanger in liberal circles was confirmed when, in 1957, the American Humanist Association named her Humanist of the Year. Harold R. Rafton to Sanger, 24 January 1957, in ibid.

71. Joseph Fletcher remembers joining the ESA along with Sanger during World War II. "Address by Dr. Joseph Fletcher, Society for the Right to Die Annual Dinner Meeting, 9 December 1986," PFC, Box F-4.

72. Blanshard consulted with Dickinson when writing *American Freedom and Catholic Power,* and quoted him approvingly on several occasions in the book. Blanshard, *American Freedom and Catholic Power,* 7, 136, 140, 142.

73. For Dickinson's relationship to Alfred Kinsey, see Jones, *Alfred C. Kinsey: A Public/Private Life,* 291, 503–8. It was Dickinson who introduced Kinsey to "Mr. X," the polymorphously erotic man whom Kinsey studied closely and on whom he based many of his theories about human sexual behavior.

74. James Reed has written that Dickinson was "a cautious supporter of euthanasia" (Reed, *From Private Vice to Public Virtue,* 153). That certainly was the view of Dickinson's daughter, Dorothy Dickinson Barbour, who insisted after his death that just before he passed away he was considering resigning from the ESA. Dorothy Dickinson Barbour to Mrs. Gertrude Anne Edwards, 12 February 1951, Box 1, Folder 42, Robert Latou Dickinson Papers, Francis Countway Library, Rare Books Department, Boston. On the other hand, Dickinson's active involvement in the ESA suggests that his feelings about euthanasia may have been considerably stronger. For Dickinson's vision of "a broad program to improve the quality of life," see Reed, *From Private Vice to Public Virtue,* 185.

75. David J. Garrow, *Liberty and Sexuality: The Right to Privacy and the Making of Roe v. Wade* (New York, 1994), 270–72, 275–85, 288–99, 308, 359, 361, 368, 384, 484, 507.

76. Among his friends and admirers was the writer H. L. Mencken. "Alan Guttmacher, Pioneer in Family Planning, Dies," *New York Times,* 19 March 1974, 40.

77. Alan F. Guttmacher, "Memorandum" (11 January 1962) and "The Place of Sterilization" (1964), AVS, SW 15.1, Box 16, Guttmacher Folder. Guttmacher also noted that "many of the PPFA Board are also on the Human Betterment Board, and vice versa."

78. "Remarks by Ruth P. Smith at SRD's 50th Anniversary Celebration, December 7, 1988," PFC, Uncatalogued.

79. Author interview with Ruth Proskauer Smith, 11 November 2000, New York City.

80. Ruth Proskauer Smith to the Editor of the *New York Post,* 10 December 1959, AVS, SWD 15, Box 4, Folder 37. Her emphasis.

81. Ruth Proskauer Smith to John F. Kennedy, 20 July 1961, AVS, SW 15.1, Box 18, Ruth Proskauer Smith Folder. The Catholic Bishops were responding to the presidential committee report on U.S. foreign aid, chaired by retired General William Draper, a noted population control advocate and friend of later AVS president Hugh Moore. Draper concluded that there could be no realistic hopes for economic development in Asia and Latin America, no matter how much American foreign aid, unless steps were taken to reduce population growth. The Draper committee also urged funding for medical research into the physiology of human reproduction. See Critchlow, *Intended Consequences,* 41–45; see also John Sharpless, "World Population Growth, Family Planning, and American Foreign Policy," in

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Donald T. Critchlow, ed., *The Politics of Abortion and Birth Control in Historical Perspective* (University Park, Pa., 1996), 72–102, especially 85–86.

82. Quoted in Richard Taylor, "Joseph Fletcher: The Father of Biomedical Ethics," *Free Inquiry* (Spring 1984): 19. See also Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia, 1967), especially 26–31.

83. Fletcher, *Situation Ethics,* 84, 124. Like many of his generation who joined the right-to-die movement, Fletcher saw no inconsistency in defending both voluntary and involuntary sterilization and euthanasia. As late as 1979, he believed that compulsory sterilization was good for mentally handicapped patients and was justified from a social perspective as well. He also maintained that people whose pain, sickness, or infirmity were so severe as to compromise their ability to reason lost their quality of "personhood" and thus could be put to death out of compassion for their suffering. See Joseph Fletcher, *Morals and Medicine: The Moral Problems of the Patient's Right to Know the Truth About Contraception, Artificial Insemination, Sterilization, Euthanasia* (Princeton, 1979; edition of first 1954 edition), 162–69; *Humanhood: Essays in Biomedical Ethics* (New York, 1979), 16, 151–52.

84. Contact between HBAA and Fletcher dated back to 1953, due in part to the fact that he was the nephew of Irene Headley Armes (1855–1955), HBAA executive director until her death in 1955. During the 1950s, Fletcher had little to do formally with HBAA, though he told Ruth Proskauer Smith in 1956 to "count me in the company of your sympathizers. I only wish there was more I could do" (AVS, SW15.1, Supplement, Box 15, Fletcher Folder).

85. "Address by Dr. Joseph Fletcher, Society for the Right to Die Annual Dinner Meeting, 9 December 1986," PFC, Box F-4.

86. The Euthanasia Educational Fund, among other parties, used this quote in its fund-raising and membership drives. See Donald W. McKinney's 3 November 1970 letter to "Fellow Unitarian-Universalists." To McKinney, at the time vice president of the EEF, there was "no doubt that the questions of Euthanasia are as critical to our time as were those of family planning a generation or so ago" (PFC, Box D-1). McKinney was to change his mind in the 1970s, arguing that "death control is a far more awesome matter than birth control" (Donald W. McKinney, *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* Brooklyn First Unitarian Church, n.d., 2. PFC, Box D-1). McKinney was pastor at the Unitarian Riverside Drive Church in Brooklyn Heights. Author's telephone interview with Donald McKinney, 21 December 1999.

87. Filene, *In the Arms of Others,* 69–71; James T. Patterson, *The Dread Disease: Cancer and Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), 255–80. The change from the "modern" to the "postmodern" patient has been described insightfully by Edward Shorter in *Bedside Manners: The Troubled History of Doctors and Their Patients* (New York, 1986).

88. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics,* 251.

89. Critchlow, *Intended Consequences,* 131.

90. A recent and revealing look at Moore's contributions to the population control and birth control movements in twentieth-century America is Donald Critchlow's *Intended Consequences,* 4–5, 16–18, 20–33, 150–54.

91. As Moore stated in 1963, his interest in the AVS "was not primarily domestic but rather international—in the hope that through sterilization something might be done to ease the social strains which bring on war." Hugh Moore to Ruth Proskauer Smith, 23 September 1963, HM, Series 3, Box 15, Folder 6. As Moore told John D. Rockefeller III in 1954, his support for birth control was based less on its "sociological or humanitarian aspects" than on "the use which Communists make of hungry people in their drive to conquer the earth." Hugh Moore, Will L. Clayton, and Ellsworth Bunker to John D. Rockefeller III, 26 November 1954, RA, RG 2, Box 45. Quoted in Critchlow, *Intended Consequences,* 32.

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press

92. Yet ties to the past were not entirely severed. Showing he both agreed with Wood's opinions and admired outspokenness, Moore kept H. Curtis Wood on as chief AVS medical consultant and defended him when Wood's sporadically contentious remarks aroused unwanted publicity in the media.

93. Hugh Moore, "Dear Friend" letter, November 1966, HM, Series 3, Box 15, Folder 7.

94. Critchlow, *Intended Consequences*, 151.

95. In 1972, he gave $1,000 to Compulsory Birth Control for all Americans. See the comments of Edward J. Ennis, General Counsel of the ACLU, at the AVS "National Conference on Voluntary Sterilization: Its Role in Averting World Starvation," 28 November 1967; see also Frank Rosa to Hugh Moore, 23 November 1967, HM, Series 3, Box 15, Folder 3. Frederick Jaffe of PPFA and (later) the Alan Guttmacher Institute, wrote in 1970 that compulsory sterilization for all people with two children was necessary to slow U.S. population growth. *Family Planning Perspectives*, Special Supplement, U.S. Population Growth and Family Planning: A Review of the Literature, vol. 2, no. 4, October 1970, 24.

96. As Donald Critchlow argues, Moore's "anticommunism was largely rhetorical and was intended to rally American officials to support international family planning" (*Intended Consequences*, 16).

97. Hugh Moore to Cass Canfield, 10 December 1969, HM, Series 2, Box 1, Folder 15.

98. He told the ESA he had been "impressed with the meeting" and wanted to increase their financial support "in the hopes that the [ESA's] work may be facilitated." Hugh Moore to Kay Mali, 26 December 1968, HM, Series 3, Box 15, Folder 29.

99. Hugh Moore, "Atlantic Conference of the United Methodist Church," 2 May 1972, PFC, Box E-1. See also "Contributions," HM, Series 3, Box 15, Folder 29; "Estate of Hugh Moore," 3 January 1974, PFC, Box E-1.

100. In 1974, Moore's widow, Louise Wilde Moore, married Joseph Van Vleck, a noted member of PPFA, IPPF, and the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS). He died in 1985. Louise Van Vleck was still active in the euthanasia movement as late as 1990.

101. Olive Ruth Russell, *Freedom to Die: Moral and Legal Aspects of Euthanasia*, rev. ed. (New York, 1977), 396.

102. McGreevy, "Thinking on One's Own," 127–29. See also Cooney, *The American Pope*, 263–327.

103. Pope Pius XII, "The Prolongation of Life," *The Pope Speaks*, 4 (1958). Cited in Marjorie B. Zucker, ed., *The Right to Die Debate* (Westport, Conn., 1999), 62–63.

104. Sue Woodman, *Last Rights: The Struggle over the Right to Die* (New York, 1998), 19. See also Filene, *In the Arms of Others*.

105. Humphry and Clement, *Freedom to Die*, 185, 187.

106. For the term "unencumbered self," see Michael J. Sandel, "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self," *Political Theory* 12 (1984): 81–96. See also idem, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge, 1982).

107. For thoughtful reflections on these issues, see Wilfred M. McClay, *The Masterless: Self and Society in Modern America* (Chapel Hill, 1994).

https://doi.org/10.1353/jph.2002.0017 Published online by Cambridge University Press