

Twentieth-Century Science Fiction Literature and the Right to Life Issues of Abortion, Infanticide, and Euthanasia

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ABSTRACT: This paper identifies six common themes in twentieth-century science-fiction literature concerned with abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia. The paper first identifies abortion references in the various works, most of which are tied to explicitly stated attitudes towards children. It then examines episodes with reference to infanticide and euthanasia. The paper analyzes the desacralization of science fiction societies and the tragic endings that occur in the majority of the science-fiction works. The paper also treats the hope for a better future that these works suggest, often predicated on a need to restore religious values. Data from the science fiction works are collated in chronological order.

EXPLORING HOW the right-to-life issues of abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia are treated in science fiction literature is a monumental task for two reasons. First, while science fiction as a genre has now existed technically for only about a century (some scholars date works within the early nineteenth century as falling under the science fiction category), reviewing the number of science fiction works published in the past century alone would make the task burdensome. Second, science fiction is often catalogued and indexed as works concerned with other traditional categories: alien ventures like Wells's *War of the Worlds*, stories involving Earth's inner space like those of Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, and space narratives like Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Index entries on the topics of "abortion," "infanticide," and "euthanasia" in standard reference works

are rare since compilers may have felt obligated to collate the three categories most familiar to science fiction readers.¹

Moreover, literary critics themselves have sometimes offered anti-life positions that would baffle ordinary readers' interpretations that the science fiction that they purchase or borrow from libraries is more than just "a good read." Jessie Givner writes, "In her study of science fiction films, Vivian Sobchak notes that astronomy in popular science fiction narratives is figured through metaphors of birth. The virginal astronauts of science fiction films are a sign of birth, of impregnation without women" (p. 236). The political implications are clear; by the end of the article, Givner concludes that "[w]omen and the ways their bodies have historically been controlled constitute the context of the abortion debate.

Women's bodies are the raw material on which anti-abortion narratives progress and yet that material which those narratives repress" (p. 241). Similarly, Patricia S. Mann cites "Donna Haraway [who] has suggested

¹ The following sources may be helpful as general guides to themes discussed in science fiction works: J. O. Bailey's *Pilgrims Through Space and Time: Trends and Patterns in Scientific and Utopian Fiction* (originally published 1947 and reprinted 1972), Peter Brigg's *The Span of Mainstream and Science Fiction: A Critical Study of a New Literary Genre* (2002), and *Science Fiction and Fantasy: An Exhibition*, compiled by David A. Randall, Sigmund Casey Fredericks, and Tim Mitchell (1975).

that we borrow from science fiction the cyborg image of 'creatures simultaneously animal and machine, who populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted,' as a means of portraying some of the peculiarities of women's lived experiences in the late twentieth century" (p. 138). The purpose of such appropriation, of course, is ineluctably anti-life:

I think a cyborgian understanding of reproduction makes a lot of sense today, and I do not see any other way to secure the ethical confidence of women who choose to have abortions than to adopt this postmodern view of procreation.... A cyborgian paradigm of motherhood will provide women with the discursive grounds for ethical confidence in choosing abortion.²

Despite these cataloging, classification, and critical review problems, I claim that a right-to-life perspective on the science fiction

² Mann, pp. 141, 148. Zoe Sofia boldly claims that "[a]bortion maintains reproductive potential in individuals and populations, and is of far less consequence than nuclear war, which would represent an irrevocable choice against life's continuance" (p. 48). She is unable to see that abortion itself is "an irrevocable choice against life's continuance." A more bizarre reading in erudite and deconstructed language that would baffle many science fiction readers unfamiliar with the lexicon of contemporary anti-life feminist criticism follows this moral blindness. Speaking of the Star Child in the film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Sofia further claims that "[t]his extraterrestrial embryo is a perverse and misleading symbol whose engaging organic appearance invokes maternal fertility and belies its origin in the unholy union of man with celestial powers and the tools he's brought to life out of the excremental remains of his cannibalized mother, the planet Earth" (p. 52).

genre can help us not only to appreciate the literature more but also to document attacks against humanity in twentieth-century science fiction works.

While many science fiction titles casually mention the three right-to-life issues of abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia, I will comment on those works that not only mention either one or all of the life issues, but also portray a larger milieu of an anti-life perspective.³ That is, since it would be anachronistic to say that a novel from 1899 concerns what we would customarily call one of the life issues, what is most important for purposes of this study is whether the creative work illustrates the effects of a view of life where personhood is disrespected. I phrase it negatively since virtually all science fiction concerned with the life issues do not present a positive view of human life—a world where the unborn are all welcomed, the handicapped newborn are all assisted, or the elderly are all cared for without hesitation. Granted, literature depicting such worlds where human life is respected may fall more in the category of utopian literature. Often, even the works that seem to prophesy a utopian world convey a negative view of human life and are thus correctly labeled dystopias. The line between utopian and science fiction literature is ambiguous since many if not most science fiction works are futuristic.

Eight science fiction works whose attributes can be discussed in this brief study meet the essential criterion that they present a larger milieu of an anti-life perspective. Proceeding chronologically, these works span the twentieth century.

Two of these works date from the penultimate year of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century. H. G. Wells's *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899) depicts the life of Graham, a nineteenth-century man who falls into a coma-like state for two

³ Only three of the works that I will discuss explicitly mention the life issues "infanticide" and "euthanasia" (Forster's "The Machine Stops," Resnick's *Kirinyaga*, and Wells's *When the Sleeper Wakes*). That these works mention these issues may either indicate that modern literature became more comfortable with using the terminology or that the adoption of one position of disrespect towards a class of human beings can lead to another form of disrespect.

centuries. Eventually the Sleeper, as he is called, awakes from his limbo state. In the twenty-first century Graham finds himself the effective owner of half the world, thanks to wise investment strategies of those who looked after his property. Unfortunately, the Council that ruled the world in his name has become oligarchic, and Ostrog, a rebel leader, fights with Graham to restore the rights of the lower classes. E. M. Forster's "The Machine Stops" (1909)⁴ concerns a futuristic society where humans have become subterranean dwellers. "The Machine" controls everything about the world, but when Kuno learns that the machine is "stopping," havoc ensues.

Two novels date from the thirties. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) concerns events six hundred years in the future ("After Ford") when human life is apparently fully mechanized: people are created in test tubes and processed through an assembly line where their traits can be determined to fit the needs of a consumption-based society.

Sexual restraints are eliminated, and the drug soma is available to cure any discontent. Robert Herrick's *Sometime* (1933) involves a society a thousand years into the future that has been depopulated after a twentieth-century ice age. Society has learned to control reproduction so that only those with permits are enabled to procreate. Heavily didactic, since it merely reports the pronouncements of Felix, the main character, that the new world of 2998 A.D. is vastly superior to the twentieth-century world, the novel traces the rediscovery of the major cities and indigenous populations of what was the United States.

Two science fiction works span the time from World War II to the

⁴The original publication date of the story is 1909, but the edition that I use has commentary on the collected short stories by Forster himself, dated 1947 at Cambridge.

1960s. James Blish's *A Case of Conscience* (1958) narrates events in the life of Fr. Ramon Ruiz-Sanchez, who is part of an expedition to the planet Lithia. The members of the expedition must decide whether the planet can become a port of embarkation for ships from Earth. William F. Nolan and George Clayton Johnson's *Logan's Run* (1967) involves a futuristic society run by the Thinker where one must succumb to be euthanized in order to control population pressures. One of those destined to be killed is Logan, who hunts those who try to flee their destiny but tries to escape when he himself must surrender his life.

The final two novels I have selected come from the 1990s. Lois Lowry's *The Giver* (1993) involves the adventures of a young man who discovers that the "release" that handicapped newborns and the elderly are given from his "community" involves their deaths. Mike Resnick's *Kirinyaga: A Fable of Utopia* (1998) describes a futuristic society where Kenyans who desire to live by ancient tribal rules are given their own planet, which replicates life on Earth.

All of these titles address six common themes. While I will discuss the abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia content of the works (three of the subdivisions that follow), three important philosophical foundations for the events in the plots must also be considered. I will first discuss the abortion episodes in the various works, most of which are tied to explicitly stated attitudes towards children. I will then examine the second and third categories by looking at the infanticide and euthanasia episodes. One can argue that the fourth common theme, the desacralization of science fiction societies, would have been a necessary prerequisite before any attack on the inalienable right to life could be made, so I will consider the loss and distortion of religious values next in this presentation. Doing so helps to establish the fifth common theme, that such desacralization accounts for the tragic endings that occur in the majority of the science fiction works. The sixth and final common theme concerns the hope for a better future that these works suggest, often predicated on a need to restore religious values. The subdivisions that follow will collate data from the science fiction works in chronological order.

I. ABORTION AND ATTITUDES TOWARD CHILDREN

Abortion as a topic seems to be rarely mentioned in science fiction literature.⁵ However, the instances where it is mentioned are significant, especially since they are couched in larger passages summarizing the attitudes that a particular society has towards children.

Wells's *When the Sleeper Wakes* is the first novel to suggest not so

⁵ I find it curious that abortion is not explicitly mentioned, even when feminist authors' works are discussed. For example, Peter Brigg notes that "Many other feminist writers (such as Ursula Le Guin, Joan Slonczewski and Marge Piercy) have found in science fiction itself a place to explore their positions" (p. 185), but abortion apparently is not something worthy enough to be indexed as a major element in their work. Similarly, Ursula K. Le Guin mentions "social science fiction" and discusses women's fiction in a section of her introduction called "Woman and Other," but the life issues are not mentioned (p. 36). Finally, Jenny Wolmark claims that "the feminist science fiction being published in the 1970s was informed in particular by contemporary political debates about women's rights that were generated by the women's movement" (p. 139). If this is true, then abortion is not one of those issues. In fact, Wolmark's discussion of traditional feminist terminology demonstrates that abortion could hardly be a possible scenario for fiction involving "a community of women which has the capacity to make and remake itself" (p. 170). Feminist science fiction, adopting her estimation, is more concerned about self-creation than the destruction of unborn human life.

much abortion, but the underlying anti-child bias that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. Speaking of the aristocratic people of his time, Ostrog says that they only engage in "Vice and pleasure! They have no children" (p. 199). Perhaps Wells is commenting on the emerging contraceptive mentality of the late nineteenth century in his fiction instead of discussing abortion.

Huxley's *Brave New World* has one explicit reference to abortion. The mother of John, one of the main characters, asks Lenina if the "Abortion Centre" is still "down in Chelsea" (p. 102). The text surrounding this passage presents a more involved attitude toward children. At this point in the novel, Linda (John's mother), who had been abandoned by her lover, the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning, states that having a child was a hardship, but she admits that John "was a great comfort" (p. 104; italics in original). Of course, throughout the novel (in fact, from the very first page) the reader knows that the "viviparous" way is excoriated in the world of 632 AF (After Ford). Children are no longer produced with loving mothers and fathers, but from scientific apparatuses that move along their reproductive assembly lines.

One science fiction work explicitly refers to an extraterrestrial people who may have a positive attitude towards offspring. Blish writes in *A Case of Conscience* that the Lithians do not want birth control but fertility control (p. 71). Even more striking is the finding that even aliens recognize that life begins at fertilization. Chtexa, the alien who befriends the main character, states that Egtverchi, his child, began "his independent life, as a zygote or fertilized egg" (p. 85). The attitude of the alien contrasts even more strikingly when a human countess is defined as one with "no children" (p. 120).

Of course, every population control effort mentioned in science fiction should be interrogated thoroughly not only as an expression of women's control over their reproductive freedom, but also as evidence that children themselves have been devalued because sexual activity *per se* has increased in value. Population control efforts in *Logan's Run* reverse such thinking, however, since population control efforts are expressly predicated on the devaluation of the elderly that occurred in that futuristic society. (It must be remembered that the novel was

written in the 1960s, when the youth “revolution” seemed to threaten social stability.) What is more appropriate for this section, however, is that, except for the most casual reference to “children” who can be frightened by “a story” of “the world’s oldest man” (p. 28), despite the dominance of the young in future culture, there is no significant instance of a baby or child in the novel.

By the time of the futuristic society in Lowry’s *The Giver*, social strictures on population have settled the number of children allowed to be born, anticipating Communist China’s forced abortion policy. The rule is that there should be “two children—one male, one female—to each family unit. It was written very clearly in the rules” (p. 8).

Resnick’s *Kirinyaga* presents an interesting commentary on attitudes toward children. While the people on the planet of Kirinyaga practice infanticide, the narrator notes that Wanda, one of the immigrants to the planet from the real Kenya on Earth, does not want to have children (p. 120). This fact of her reproductive choice clearly not only upsets but also shocks the mundumugu, the tribal leader of the planet, who “determines what is right and what is wrong” (pp. 167-68). It is also a schizophrenic moral outrage to profess, for it is the mundumugu who performs the infanticides.⁶

II. INFANTICIDE

As with abortion, infanticide is not a major topic in most science fiction literature. Some of the instances where it is mentioned, however, are significant not only for their shock value, but also for vehicles to express the cultural devaluation of newborns that results from the lack of respect for prenatal life.

Wells’s *When the Sleeper Wakes* alludes to Victorian infanticide. The striking thing about this allusion, though, is that in the world to

⁶ Lois Tilton clearly identifies the moral conflict in the novel when she writes: “The dilemma in *Kirinyaga* is this: if relativism is correct, then Koriba’s [the mundumugu’s] ritual infanticide is morally justified and must be tolerated. But if infanticide is absolutely intolerable, Maintenance has the obligation to violate the Kikuyu right to moral self-determination, a right which Maintenance, not the Kikuyu, considers universally valid” (p. 12).

which the Sleeper has awakened, the practice of infanticide has been “remedied” not by caring for mothers faced with untimely pregnancies or by correcting economic conditions that would have motivated mothers to kill their newborns. The twenty-second century’s cure for infanticide is automated nursing (pp. 214-15).

Forster’s “The Machine Stops” reverses the historical rationale by which infanticide has traditionally been justified. In fact, the work specifically refers to the practice of ancient Spartans who abandoned infants not strong enough to survive on their own, but counters ancient practice by killing those infants who are muscular at birth. They are killed because muscular infants would not have been happy in the life designed for them by the Machine. Significantly, even as late as this work (1947), the vocabulary either had not yet been discriminated or the author himself chose not to: the infanticide of such infants is called “euthanasia” (p. 100).

While abortion is not mentioned at all in Herrick’s *Sometime*, there are infanticide episodes affecting abortion policy in the world of 2998 A.D. that can more properly be discussed here. In this future world a permit is necessary for childbearing; in fact, children are loved more because of their rarity. However, children born of mothers who have not received their childbearing permit are “stillborn” (p. 69); the presumption is that they are all born dead since they are defective genetically or that they are killed before birth. Thus, while “everybody [is] allowed to be born” (p. 123), “defective births” are killed “painlessly” (p. 126). If this is true, then the world that Felix claims is vastly superior to twentieth-century life is either patriarchal or severely uneconomical. Why be squeamish about mentioning abortion when the novel is not squeamish about discussing euthanasia or forced sterilizations? Logically speaking, why should mothers be forced to bear children who will be stillborn when they could easily abort them? These errors could be attributed either to the didactic tone of most of the novel or to an obvious logical error on the author’s part.

The infanticide passages in Lowry’s *The Giver* are explicit. Jonas, the main character, is aware that “those who were released—even as newchildren—were sent Elsewhere and never returned to the community” (p. 43), but he does not understand what “release” actually means.

In this excerpt, Jonas is watching a video of his father evaluating male twins, one of whom is inferior to his brother:

Jonas watched as his father bent over the squirming newchild on the bed. “And you, little guy, you’re only five pounds ten ounces. *A shrimp!*”....

His father turned and opened the cupboard. He took out a syringe and a small bottle. Very carefully he inserted the needle into the bottle and began to fill the syringe with a clear liquid....

To his surprise, his father began very carefully to direct the needle into the top of the newchild’s forehead, puncturing the place where the fragile skin pulsed. The newborn squirmed, and wailed faintly.

“Why’s he—”....

He pushed the plunger very slowly, injecting the liquid into the scalp vein until the syringe was empty....

As he continued to watch, the newchild, no longer crying, moved his arms and legs in a jerking motion. Then he went limp. [His] head fell to the side, his eyes half open. Then he was still...

He killed it! My father killed it! Jonas said to himself, stunned at what he was realizing. He continued to stare at the screen numbly. (pp. 148-51; italics in original)

Although it is primarily concerned with tribal racial purity, Resnick’s *Kirinyaga* contains several infanticide passages worthy of discussion. The planet Kirinyaga is politically autonomous—the space authority “Maintenance” does not interfere in Kirinyaga activities, and infanticide is openly practiced based on ancient, pre-Christian tribal beliefs. (This infanticide, however, becomes the basis for the possibility that Maintenance may re-evaluate not only the planet’s charter, but also the euthanasia practiced on the planet.) In one case, a child was born with the “thahu,” the curse of being born feet first, and was thus a candidate for infanticide (p. 21). Similarly, according to tribal custom, the firstborn of twins must be killed (p. 28). In language that mimics reasoning distorted by certain intellectuals who claim more rights for animals than humans, the mundumugu asserts that the infanticide is permissible because “the torture of animals as a religious ritual and the murder of a human baby...are one and the same” (p. 22).

III. EUTHANASIA

While most examples of euthanasia in science fiction works are presented as obvious solutions offered for various problems, some of the references to euthanasia are subtle. For example, in Wells's *When the Sleeper Wakes*, once he has slipped into a coma, Graham is described as "sliding slowly, very slowly and tediously, down a long slope, if you can understand me" (p. 16) by others around him. Significantly, much like contemporary society when a loved one becomes incommunicative, their conversation turns to concerns over money and who will take care of him. This foreshadowing becomes full-scale euthanasia in the twenty-second century, where the dominant philosophy is that euthanasia is preferable when one is caught in "dreary life instead of speedy death" (p. 144). Moreover, euthanasia has become a class issue. By the twenty-second century, a "Euthanasia" is too costly for the poor (p. 190), and this is confirmed later when "the Euthanasia" is called "the rich man's refuge from life" (p. 192). Euthanasia is called "convenient" and "is the way to improve the race" (p. 199); in fact, for ordinary people, "their duty—it's a fine duty too!—is to die" (p. 200).⁷ As will be repeated in later science fiction that mentions euthanasia, in this twenty-first century world people do not live to be old because of the availability of euthanasia outlets such as The Euthanasia Company (p. 219).

Euthanasia is denoted by a variety of literary devices in "The Machine Stops." In Forster's futuristic society people ask for "Euthanasia" (p. 112). When the world begins to collapse, however, euthanasia becomes "out of order" and "pain had reappeared among man" (p. 115). This metonym is interesting for two reasons. First, it indicates the loss of the salvific value of suffering that had occurred by the time of Forster's futuristic society. Second, using the metonym suggests that euthanasia had become the cure to any situation of pain instead of the obvious nonlethal means, such as counseling or medicine.

Huxley's *Brave New World* contains more common elements of

⁷ The tone of the embedded independent clause could be read in two ways. Thus, if the speaker means to praise the poor for dying, then "their duty" is truly "a fine duty." If the speaker is being ironic, then asserting that "it's a fine duty too!" can be read as exacerbation against those who assert such a proposition (especially heightened with the exclamation point).

euthanasia. The philosophy of this futuristic society is encoded in the rhythmic phrase “ending is better than mending” (p. 41)—used not only in the context of encouraging mass consumption of goods but also in the attitude towards aging. The Resident World Controller confirms as much when he says that he has no “use for old things” (p. 191). Children are exposed or conditioned to experience death on special “death days” at any “Hospital for the Dying” such as Park Lane Hospital for the Dying, where all who enter are not healed but die (pp. 173-74).

Herrick’s *Sometime* contains several passages discussing the “Lethal Chambers” where euthanasia is performed. Few people want to be euthanized because “the creative spirit in men” is strong (p. 59), and only a score in five years selected euthanasia (p. 62). By the time of this future world the Lethal Chambers have become quasi-religious, since they are also known as “Lethal Temples” (p. 46). The elderly could choose the Lethal Chamber for explicitly aesthetic reasons: “so that they might not be doomed to unlovely decay and dissolution” (p. 51). However, a conversation between Felix and Claude, a man headed for the Lethal Chamber, suggests that one of the reasons why some would choose to be killed is a significant weariness of life. When they discuss the exploration of the New World just emerging from the ice age that buried it in the late twentieth century, Felix is optimistic about the venture while Claude replies with a third millennium version of *cui bono*: “what of it?” (p. 54).

As with Forster’s short story above, euthanasia is represented by specific literary figures of speech in Nolan and Johnson’s *Logan’s Run* where it is called “sleep” (p. 36). This use of “sleep” can either be metonymic or a synecdoche. If a metonym, then the effect of being killed is implied in a term that has a much more positive connotation. If a synecdoche, then the first step in a futuristic euthanasia process, the slide into unconsciousness (similar to the colloquial sense of euthanizing pets as “putting them to sleep”), is what the reader focuses on, not the end result of killing a human life.

In Lowry’s *The Giver* euthanasia is euphemistically called “release of the elderly, which was a time of celebration for a life well and fully lived” (p. 7). Interestingly, euthanasia is coupled with infanticide: “There were only two occasions of release which were not punishment.

Release of the elderly, which was a time of celebration for a life well and fully lived; and release of a newchild, which always brought a sense of what-could-we-have-done" (p. 7). When Jonas asks Larissa about the "release" of one man, her account is given in rapturous terms:

"Tell me about the celebration."

"Well, there was the telling of his life. That is always first. Then the toast. We all raised our glasses and cheered. We chanted the anthem. He made a lovely good-bye speech. And several of us made little speeches wishing him well. I didn't, though. I've never been fond of public speaking.

"He was thrilled. You should have seen the look on his face when they let him go."

Jonas slowed the strokes of his hand on her back thoughtfully. "Larissa," he asked, "what happens when they make the actual release? Where exactly did Roberto go?"

She lifted her bare wet shoulders in a small shrug. "I don't know. I don't think anybody does, except the committee. He just bowed to all of us and then walked, like they all do, through the special door in the Releasing Room. But you should have seen his look. Pure happiness, I'd call it" (p. 32).⁸

Euthanasia on Resnick's planet Kirinyaga is clearly schizophrenic. The mundumugu pronounces early in the novel that it is "an act of mercy" to leave the old and the sick out for the hyenas (p. 65). Later he asserts that "it is our tradition to care for our elders" (p. 156). A final assertion of the mundumugu is that a person suffering from incurable disease is left "out for the hyenas" (p. 176)—and this is what the reader last remembers on finishing the novel.

IV. LOSS AND DISTORTION OF RELIGIOUS VALUES

While the idea of losing religious values is separate from the idea that one purposefully acts to distort religious values, I combine the categories here since most of the science fiction works that I am considering merely note the loss of the influence or power of religious doctrine. Although there are a few science fiction works that place blame on

⁸ Perhaps the oddest phrase in this passage is "let him go," as if the individual who is the victim of state-sanctioned euthanasia is pleading for release from life when the opposite is the case.

social elements for the collapse of religious beliefs, most simply record the activities of those who misstate religious practices or perform corrupted versions of those practices.

Christianity survives in Wells's *When the Sleeper Wakes*, but it is mentioned in connection with other strange sects such as "the Incubus Worshippers, the Furniture Worshippers, and so forth" (p. 141). Significantly, moral decay followed the collapse of "supernatural religion" (p. 143). There are some interesting quasi-religious elements in the novel that may further indicate the erosion of the religious basis for this twenty-first century society. The original Council that supervised Graham's estate (which, it will be remembered, made him effectively the ruler of half the world) was composed of "twelve men" (p. 145). The possible allusion to the Twelve Apostles is especially evident when Graham himself is hailed by the lower classes of society not only as "Owner" but also "Master"—another quasi-religious term used to refer to Christ (p. 77).

Forster's "The Machine Stops" includes some interesting distortions of religious character traits and values. Vashti, the mother of Kuno, the main character, reveres the "Book of the Machine" in the same way that some would revere the Bible (p. 91). An exorcism ritual of bell, book, and candle is revised in this world devoid of religion. These sacramental distortions occur when worship replaces mere reverence of the Machine (p. 110).

Huxley's *Brave New World* is loaded with instances that distort the religious values that form the basis of respect for life. The first evidence that religious terms have been distorted (or, in this case, attacked outright) is linguistic. In the six hundredth year of Ford, the physical nature of parental love and sex and the terms "parents" and "mother" constitute bad concepts and bad words (p. 19). Anything having to do with the domestic nature of family life is assaulted, not by violence, but by ridicule: "home" is described in horrible terms (pp. 30-31), chastity is viewed as a perversion (p. 32), and emotions are to be avoided (p. 36). Christianity itself is to blame for having "forced [women] to go on being viviparous" (p. 38). If one does not engage or delight in sexual activity, then he or she is viewed as aberrant. A little boy who does not want "to join in the ordinary erotic play" is ridiculed (p. 25). One of the ancient

practices of Christianity, asceticism, is reduced to sexual terms by being called “artificial impotence” (p. 58). Adults who are compelled to participate weekly in quasi-religious services (significantly, they are twelve in number) perform sexually titillating acts reminiscent of an adolescent sleepover: they spank each other in “orgy-porgy” (p. 71). When they go to New Mexico for a vacation, Lenina and Bernard deride the natives in New Mexico who retain old, despised habits, including marriage and Christianity (p. 87). Similarly, religious practices of “the *Penitentes*” are ridiculed (p. 140) because “religious sentiment is superfluous” (p. 204) now that the people in this future world have soma, the drug that cures all negative feelings and frustrated emotions. In fact, soma is defined as “Christianity without tears—that’s what *soma* is” (p. 208).

Felix in Herrick’s *Sometime* is openly hostile not only to anything American (he excoriates American businesspeople and politicians of the era leading up to and including the Great Depression) but also to Christianity. The novel identifies the Old World as the “so-called Christian era,” but more frequently as the “Xian era” (p. 3). In this novel steeped in didactic pronouncements against the capitalist United States of the Depression era, Christ is merely an “enlightened person” who spoke against money (p. 114). “Religious cults” and “priests” have been displaced by an amorphous “religious impulse in its essence of veneration of life and exaltation of all its ecstasies” (p. 101).

The status of religion in 2050 in Blish’s *A Case of Conscience* fares no better. Thanks to the intellectual role of Jesuits, Rome was probably the “sanest major capital on the planet” because Italy was “least thoroughly entombed” in the economic catastrophe that affected Earth (p. 134). One of the aliens from Lithia becomes a popular media commentator, and when he conducts an unscientific poll meant to gauge whether humans are satisfied with their lives or not, he discovers that one-third of people in the twenty-first century “loathed” their own society (p. 153). The disgust that one-third of humanity has for contemporary life cannot with certainty be attributed to the loss of religious values; however, given the focus of the author thus far in the novel contrasting Lithian values to Earth values, such an assumption can be validly asserted.

Nolan and Johnson's *Logan's Run* presents some interesting dialogue about not only the purposelessness of life but also the loss of religious values in the future. One foil character speaks about the meaninglessness of life: "There were real issues to fight for then,' the officer went on. 'Liberty, freedom, justice. Now things have changed. Now everything comes to us on a platter. Man's got nothing left to fight for'" (p. 103). Another character casually mentions in conversation with Logan that he "used to have religion, used to figure that there was a better place beyond Sleep. I don't know anymore. Really can't be sure. I was a Zen-Baptist for awhile, then switched to-" (pp. 103-04). Fortunately, since the technique of abbreviating the dialogue at this point enables the reader to focus on the words just spoken, one can see that Christianity may have lost its mission as a religion broadcasting transcendental values and instead may have become another sect trying to adapt to the then-current popular religious sentiment. Finally, the novel indicates that the terms and practices of religions have been desacralization in the future world. "God" is used merely as an interjection (pp. 4, 46). The Sanctuary for those who want to escape their socially-appointed deaths is called "Hell," and it is explained for the reader as having been "named after the ancient religious concept of eternal punishment" (p. 50). This apposition is especially interesting because of its ambiguity. Perhaps Hell is named because the religious concept is not only acknowledged but also in continuous lexical use, or perhaps it is named after a concept that is no longer relevant in the twenty-second century vocabulary.⁹

⁹ Some other religious concepts are suggested, but the religious value of the terms have been desacralized. A fellow Sandman, the ones responsible for

V. TRAGIC ENDINGS

An interesting feature of the fiction covered here is that the denouements that end the works are tragic. The denouements of two of the works illustrate the protagonists escaping the controlled worlds of their respective dystopias (Jonas in *The Giver* and Logan and his girlfriend in *Logan's Run*); these escapes could be construed as a satisfactory (if not happy) ending. However, it is not certain that their futures are secure away from their dystopian societies. Five of the works end tragically, either with the protagonists' deaths or suicides. Graham in Wells's *When the Sleeper Wakes* heroically fights off an invasion of airships and thus defends London, but he dies when his transport crashes into the ground. He does not die in vain, though. The presumption is that the invasion by the twenty-second century version of the Armada under control of

hunting those who want to escape their "Lastday" of life, is named "Francis," and his job of killing people who try to escape their Lastdays starkly contrasts against the association connected with Saint Francis. Similarly, Sanctuary is doubly desacralized; it is called Hell by one character, and the reader comes to understand toward the end of the novel that the Sanctuary that Logan seeks is not a religious place but a space station around Mars. Perhaps, however, there is further irony that the place of sanctuary is in space, in "the heavens."

rebel factions has been crushed. Perhaps, if Graham is a Christ-figure, then his death is the parallel necessary for people of the future world to have someone to believe in.

Vashti and Kuno in Forster's "The Machine Stops" apparently die along with others in their subterranean world once the Machine stopped controlling everything. John, the sensitive young man who grew up on a New Mexico reservation away from the highly controlled future society, commits suicide at the end of *Brave New World*. Felix in Herrick's *Sometime* dies at novel's end, not only because he is over ninety years old (he is often referred to as "the old man"), but also because he is discouraged that the younger generations may be enticed to explore the New World and to colonize it just as European explorers did in the fifteenth and later centuries. As directed by the pope, Fr. Ramon in Blish's *A Case of Conscience* begins an exorcism of the planet Lithia that results in its having "melted away" (p. 180). At the end of Resnick's *Kirinyaga* the mundumugu has returned to Kenya because the tribe has abandoned the ancient ways that he tried to compel them to respect. He vows to ascend Mount Marsabit, where he will die alone.

Perhaps the tragic endings of these works can be attributed to the negative attitude that science fiction had to contend with since its origin.

While some critics have pointed out that science fiction is generally positive about the progress of scientific advances,¹⁰ many more are

¹⁰ See, for example, J. O. Bailey's summation of what he categorizes as the "optimistic idea" that science will "develop tremendously": "A hundred years of progress in science and invention proceeding at an accelerated pace toward horizons that are constantly receding leaves little room for doubt that science and invention will continue toward some development now unheard of. At least no such doubt appears in scientific fiction, except in a few pieces in which men wilfully halt invention when it becomes dangerous."

Bailey wrote this in 1947, so his final statement at the end of this paragraph may be more telling: "It is possible that the latest major product of science, the atomic bomb and the probable development of atomic power, will prove to be the long-predicted agent of revolutionary change" (p. 296).

Joseph O. Milner identifies the approaches to science fiction as either meliorist or Spenglerian: "'To boldly go where no man has gone before' is the questing oath of the [Star Trek] series; it suggests a courage and a hope that new worlds will be better world. This is the *meliorist* worldview.... The worldview

cautious about science's ability to improve human life more than other fields of endeavor. The first work to illustrate this pessimism against scientific progress was Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1831) which is more an admonition against human interference in the divine attribute of giving life than it is just an ordinary fright tale.

VI. HOPE FOR A BETTER WORLD BASED ON A RESTORATION OF RELIGIOUS VALUES

or rhetoric that shines through [Dr. Who] says there is no progress; everywhere we tread, there is a throwback to the dark ages. Things get worse, if anything. This is the *Spenglerian* worldview." (pp. 11-12, italics in original)

Despite the tragic endings of virtually all of the science fiction studied here, these same works offer substantial hope for readers who may be dismayed that a century that gave such political horror to the world has nothing better to offer than more of the same in fiction purported to depict the future of humanity.¹¹ Discovering the hope that science fiction works of the last century offer can be compared to an archaeological dig. Moreover, I claim that only a right-to-life perspective has the adequate tools to identify life-affirming elements in such literature.¹²

Having said this, and having shown how dismal science fiction worlds are regarding the life issues, where is the “hope for a better world based on a restoration of religious values” that I claim in this subsection? Wells’s *When the Sleeper Wakes* is not all without hope. When he concludes that twenty-second century society had the same economic conditions of oppression against the poor as the nineteenth century, Graham discovers that “there came to him an irresistible impulse to pray” (p. 148). This prayer then leads to an impulse of affection for his nineteenth-century roots as well as a reflection on the loss of the family home and, eventually, an epideictic for other elements of his Victorian background. Soon after, this prayerful attitude and reminiscence of his

¹¹ Noel Perrin claims that there is a more didactic purpose to science fiction than we may think. Few of us read philosophical treatises. Thus, “science fiction,” Perrin argues, “immensely sophisticated about technology, has stayed naive about metaphysics—naive in the sense that most science fiction writers continue to suppose that questions of value can be meaningfully discussed.... It is where you go in literature if you want to hear people openly and seriously talking about meaning, and especially meaning in a world increasingly made and controlled by ourselves.” (p. 602)

¹² Compare, for example, the perspectives of other literary theories. Deconstruction aims to demonstrate that a text subverts its own meaning, even that which the author may have wanted the reader to derive. Feminist theory focuses either on emphasizing how women’s writing is different from men’s writing or on patriarchy at work (both being negative projects, the former especially since the presumption is that men’s writing is necessarily more aggressive than that of women). Marxist criticism seeks to expose power structures embedded in ideological bases on which the literature rests. While the other theories are omitted here for brevity, I can argue that the dominant theories in the academy are biased against positive, life-affirming discoveries.

homeland encourage Graham to exclaim, "Something still remained in life to be fought for" (p. 223).¹³

Even though he dies at the end of the novel, Kuno in Forster's "The Machine Stops" affirms that the "Homeless" people he saw (humans who were expelled to the surface of the earth), still live for he saw them when he once escaped to the surface of the planet (p. 118). Earlier, Kuno expressed his *raison d'être* in language that seems to secularize two concepts of the Nicene Creed. "We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come" is transformed by Kuno as "the spirits of the dead comforted me" and "even as the dead were comforting me, so I was comforting the unborn" (p. 102).

Even *Brave New World* is not as hopeless as it seems. When John says "God" (p. 181), it is more than just an interjection, but a moment of epiphany (he discovers that his purpose in life is to bring freedom to people). This is not an expression of someone who has no faith, whether

¹³ The idea that there is something worth living or fighting for was mentioned in Wells's short story, "A Story of the Days to Come" (1897), preceding *When the Sleeper Wakes* by two years. In this short story Denton, the leading male character, asserts that "there is so little in life that is worth being violent about" (p. 68). Of course, Denton is fighting for the right to marry Elizabeth, his girlfriend, but his statement is indicative of the plight of mankind in the twenty-second century.

temporal (in his fellow human beings) or spiritual (in a divine being). Moreover, it is significant that the plot for much of the balance of the book from this point in the narrative onward seems to have ended. This later fifth of the novel concerns deep philosophical and religious elements: a discussion of how “high art” was sacrificed for social stability (p. 193), an account of society’s move “from truth and beauty to comfort and happiness” (p. 199), and a lengthy quote from Newman’s discussion about how the love of God compensates for what is lost when one ages (pp. 202-04).

Herrick’s *Sometime* suggests that not all is perfect in the idealized world that Felix propounds. There is a restlessness in the young people that cannot be squelched by the perfection of life of 2998 AD. Several young women want to be mothers, even though Felix declares breeding was “the old loose way, the animal way” to reproduce (pp. 14-15). His control over society is pithily expressed in the admonition that “We’ll ration ‘em—or sterilize ‘em!” (p. 44). Felix and others in the upper echelons of society have a fear of humanity; once in the ruins of New York, people on a subway are described as “sweaty evil-smelling humanity” (p. 222). Despite this, some couples on the expedition decide that it would be romantic to live alone in the Niagara Falls region or among the “Esquimaux” (the Eskimo or Inuit). Apparently, the perfect world of 2998 A.D. cannot give the young people what they most desire and what Felix expresses as “the spice of danger in their lives” (p. 297). Surprisingly, in terms of overt religious practice, devotion to the Virgin Mary survives among the Pueblo people, though it has degenerated into a love for motherhood and for humanity only.

Blish writes in *A Case of Conscience* that the adults on Earth “no longer had hopes even for their children, let alone for themselves” (p. 122). This statement functions as an admonition for the contemporary reader instead of a mere notation of life in that future world. In contrast, the “pre-Adamic paradise” (p. 69) of the Lithian world houses “a Christian people, lacking nothing but the specific proper names and the symbolic appurtenances of Christianity” (p. 71). The Lithians hold the interesting idea that, if nothing exists, at least a person will have God (p. 78).

The philosophical point of Nolan’s *Logan’s Run* is stated expressly

two pages before the end. Just before he is about to leave for Sanctuary, Logan considers what he would say to Francis, a fellow Sandman:

There was so much to say to Francis. That the world was coming apart, that it was dying, this system, this culture. That the Thinker was no longer able to hold it together. A new world would be formed. Living is better than dying, Francis. Dying young is a waste and a shame and a perversion. The young don't build. They use. The wonders of Man were achieved by the mature, the wise, who lived in this world before we did. (p. 131)

At the end of *The Giver*, Jonas saves Gabriel, a newborn child about to be euthanized, and leaves the comfort and security of the "community." Although he is starving in the wilderness, Jonas ruminates that

If he had stayed, he would have starved in other ways. He would have lived a life hungry for feelings, for color, for love.

And Gabriel? For Gabriel there would have been no life at all. So there had not really been a choice. (p. 174)

Thus, in Jonas's syllogism, life preempts any concern for choice, a quite contemporary lesson from a future world for us.

The novel that illustrates the most connection with a need for religious values, even though they are the most distorted, is Resnick's *Kirinyaga*. The mundumugu is clear that "Ngai is the creator of all things" (p. 1), but his devotion to Ngai is based on extreme racism; in the mundumugu's estimation, there is a battle between Ngai and "the god of the Europeans" (p. 1). He despises European culture to the point of boldly proclaiming the hasty generalization fallacy twice: "we [the Kikuyu people] can never become like them [Maasai or Europeans]" (p. 88) and that "there is nothing to be learned from the Europeans" (p. 217).

Hopefully, the illogic of the mundumugu's statements is obvious to the reader.

VI. CONCLUSION

My intention in this paper was to perform a literary archaeological dig on certain science fiction works that, in my estimation, form the base on

which later science fiction literature rests.¹⁴ Of course, the grounds offered here are subject to future research, and I hope that some interested academic or student may accept a challenge to investigate the following two questions. First, do the premises that form the base of science fiction literature in the early twentieth century support such literature produced post-war and towards the end of the twentieth century? Second, can it be determined that the early twentieth-century foundations still support science fiction works produced in this new millennium or have they been eradicated in favor of other foundations? Researching these questions is not merely an academic question, helping us catalog instances of science fiction's presentation of the life issues, for answering them may help us determine not only how to respond to, but also how to prevent attacks on human life.

¹⁴ I would like to thank participants at the University Faculty for Life conference held at Ave Maria School of Law, where this paper was presented on 4 June 2005, for their conversation in the question-and-answer session which followed. Many more items of science fiction literature affirming life—television episodes and film sequences, mostly—could be added to this study. Their recommendations indicate that the bases that I have identified here can be supported by many more examples from the popular culture that we can then transmit to our students.

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