in spite of a growing demand for its use, and growing public acceptance of the idea.

The second major issue to receive attention in this book is in-vitro fertilization. This is an interesting area for discussion, if only because it has already engendered a great deal of Press publicity and public debate, and people have adopted entrenched views, well in advance of the birth of the first child ‘conceived in a test tube’, as the Press will have it.

It is good to learn that the working party that produced this excellent book continues to exist, although now re-named the Committee for Social Concern and Biological Advances. Let us hope that they will turn their attention to other and perhaps more pressing problems, such as euthanasia, abortion, homosexuality, and drug addiction, which are probably of more concern for the future welfare of mankind than AI, genetic engineering, or the birth of the world’s first test-tube baby.

R V Short

(Pp 67 with appendices. 85p.)

It is perhaps the case, in discussions for and against voluntary euthanasia, that we tend to exaggerate the importance of the ethical component in the discussion because it is easier to talk about abstract principles and hypothetical situations than to deal with the specific dilemmas of individuals in making good clinical judgments in specific cases. It is also possible that a great deal of the moral earnestness evinced for or against the supposed ‘right to die’ is misdirected towards purely academic discussion of the morality of euthanasia. It should be more properly directed towards the development of greater understanding of the needs of the dying and the bereaved, to the provision of better facilities for the care of the dying and their families, and towards the education of public opinion about the actual treatment of terminal illness, and the facilities and services already available for the alleviation of acute pain and distress and for the support of the families involved. These opinions are strongly canvassed in a new publication of the Church of England.

When one asks what is distinctively Christian about this serious attempt to examine the case for legalizing voluntary euthanasia, it must be said that it is in the quality of the concern which is expressed throughout this study rather than in the specifically theological part which, in any case, appears somewhat trite and perhaps irrelevant. The general ontological significance of death and the Christian vision of the possible transcendent metaphysical meaning of death in the whole scheme of things, which, presumably, serves as the basis of the Christian’s ability to affirm life and to accept his own death as part of life, tends to be neglected in an account which is perhaps too expository and too accommodating to the position of advocates of voluntary euthanasia, too closely focused on the death of the individual and consequently too moralistic in tone (like the opinions it criticises) to inspire confidence as an alternative to voluntary euthanasia.

The real contribution of this book lies in the expression it gives to a care for the facts, attention to the needs of specific individuals and situations, and hence to a restatement of the truth that an ethic of love must be concerned in a central way with issues of casuistry and prudence. Doctors and society must be trained in the kind of sensitivity and discriminating, compassionate judgment upon which all care of our fellow human beings depends. The book begins, continues and ends with the discussion of specific cases. It illustrates the Christian ethic at work in the way they are discussed. Since the case for euthanasia frequently rests on the discussion of exceptional cases, the authors take this concern with specific cases seriously but they insist that ‘a professional ethic cannot be built on altogether exceptional circumstances’ (p 12), because ‘when we normally distinguish between what is “always wrong” and “what is generally wrong” we do so against a background of assumptions, one of which is that we are operating within the conditions of life that we normally encounter’ (p 11). And further they argue that, if this is true of the accepted ethics of the medical profession, it is even more obviously true of the law.’ (p 12).

The illuminating illustration of how an informed medical and Christian prudence would work in particular cases is interleaved with competent discussions of the moral, theological and legal aspects of the subject. The report, which reads remarkably well as a monograph, in spite of being the work of a committee, ultimately agrees with the sentiment of those who fight for the legalization of voluntary euthanasia in recognizing every man’s right to die well and society’s corresponding duty to assist him to do so. However, this is done in such a way that it clarifies some of the dangerous ambiguities in the current usage of the term ‘euthanasia’, disputes that there is any general ‘right to die’ as distinct from the right to die decently and as painlessly as possible, and ultimately recommends that should be no change in the law because, it is argued, the provision of adequate means for men to die well is within the competence of society (and would meet most of the demands of those who would advocate voluntary euthanasia), and the enlightened application of the law as it stands would be sufficient to deal with the truly exceptional cases. The issue is the education of the public and the more adequate preparation of people for death.

I E Thompson