

deavoured to study the rise of the information age from a human rights perspective in this way. It is a bold book also because the concept of "information society" challenges fundamental assumptions in scientific disciplines such as sociology and economics, and thus is generally dismissed by many of its critics as trendy postmodern rhetoric.

In general, Walters' book revives ideas promoted by critical theorists during the 1970s in the discipline of international communications. Scholars such as Armand Mattelart wrote about the need for a new, world order of information and communication. Mattelart and his peers argued that the international information system perpetuated and strengthened inequality in development, with serious implications for the countries of the South. This political theme was further advanced by UNESCO and culminated in a United Nations Commission chaired by Sean MacBride, the founder of Amnesty International. After the commission issued its report and policy recommendations in a text entitled "Many Voices, One World," both the United States and Britain promptly exited from UNESCO for political reasons. While the UNESCO report is much more socialistic and radical in its tone, it still resembles in substance many of the basic ideas presented by Walters. Both Walters and the UNESCO report address human rights issues from a cultural, economic, and political standpoint.

Walters' text on human rights in the information age will be of some interest to practical theologians and religious scholars concerned with social issues. In a manner similar to the 'correlational method' of Paul Tillich and David Tracy, his study initiates a conversation between the social issue at hand: information technology and the wisdom of the human rights philosophical tradition. Readers will find that this book re-affirms the World Council of Churches' observation that "the interaction between technology and social justice is a crucial issue of our time" (paragraph 46, section 3, Uppsala, 1968). This book offers the reader few answers, but it does help raise our awareness about some issues that often are ignored.

Warren Kappeler

McGill University

Death Talk: The Case against Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide. By Margaret Somerville. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001. ISBN 077352245X. Pp. 433.

Margaret Somerville's latest book, *Death Talk*, represents over twenty-five years of research on euthanasia. This enormous project comprises almost five hundred pages of argumentation, legal documents, personal accounts, poetry, responses, and responses to responses to support her position as stated in the title. It is a relevant and timely study, as there has been an international surge of movements to legalize euthanasia.

As a result of escalations in scientific advances, the life-event of death has become a matter of choice rather than chance. Somerville polices all aspects of euthanasia with a genuine concern for human rights. Because we now have a choice in one of the most mysterious events of human existence—for instance, its timing—this book reminds us that with choice comes responsibility, including knowledge of the issues and alternatives.

Death Talk is so complex it is necessary to isolate the most meaningful items the author explores. There are two striking motifs throughout *Death Talk*: one interpretative, the other existential. The first is the influence of the language of death in the euthanasia debate. The other is the physical and emotional pain often experienced by terminal patients, and how pain contributes to provoking the demand to legalize euthanasia. Both play significant roles in moral judgements, whether one is making decisions in a professional or personal capacity.

Somerville speculates on the manner in which language sways our position in debates such as euthanasia, demonstrating the intimate correlation between the very words we use and our understanding of the issue. For instance, emotive terminology may exaggerate a position that is sentimental and less rational; conversely, a medicalised, technologized lexicon may lend distance and detachment from the subject, promoting greater clarity. Yet it may also strip the topic of its complexity as well as its humanity.

The issue is further complicated, Somerville suggests, by our loss of traditional religious language to describe and experience the intangible, invisible and immeasurable aspects of existence. Nevertheless, religious vocabulary “can cause difficulties for those who reject religion” (xiv). The underlying problem for Somerville is the fact we have not discovered a proper replacement for the forum of religion. What our culture requires is a common language fostering a shared, communal and meaningful understanding of the value of human existence. By drawing upon the vocabulary of law, tempered by the spirit of human rights, in my opinion she succeeds in providing the best possible inclusive language.

While the words we use influence our stance regarding euthanasia, Somerville admits that the experience of the patient is the more immediate source from which we must draw our arguments. Severe pain and the fear of being left in pain advances pro-euthanasia sentiments. Consequently, she proposes that, “it is imperative to change any reality that provides a basis for this fear.... We must seek ways to relieve suffering and to kill pain, not the people who have pain” (230).

Analgesia is thus the crux of the debate, and delineates the line between pro- and anti-euthanasia arguments: “Where we disagree is on what limits to assistance, if any, there should be” (25). The author writes: “if relief is not possible, distress is severe, and the patient asks to have his life ended...the balance of the moral argument...shift(s) towards asking why death should not be assisted” (65). It is important not to take the author out of context; the point is this: why are we seriously considering euthanasia now, in a culture whose pain-relieving powers are greater as they have ever been?

Severe, under-treated pain has profound, far-reaching effects on the patient. One of the main themes of the book is the close relationship between pain and the desire to die, and between pain management (analgesia) and the will to live. An article by Sylvia D. Stolberg included in *Death Talk* is a rebuttal to the pro-euthanasia position, refuting the claim that "human dignity is lost through disability, disease, dependency, or suffering. Human dignity is not a thing that can be lost, and [to think so] involves an impoverished interpretation of human dignity" (256). She makes the pivotal point that the pro-euthanasia debate assumes that dignity is socially-determined judgment, and not, as she believes, an intrinsically human value—an inextricable aspect of human nature.

Death Talk suggests that it is perhaps our fear of death that elicits a need to control it, and that perhaps euthanasia deprives us of unique, meaningful, transcendental experiences that can enrich our understanding of existence and death. In the final analysis, we will all find ourselves in the dilemma of euthanasia, and "We all hope to be included among those who have 'good deaths'" (25).

Sarah J. Roebuck

McGill University

Religious Language and Critical Discourse Analysis: Ideology and Identity in Christian Discourse Today. By Noel Heather. Religions and Discourse Series. Volume 5. New York: Peter Lang, 2000. ISBN 0-8204-4238-0. Pp. 319.

Since the publication of *The Postmodern Bible* by the Bible and Culture Collective in 1995, it has become quite common to find theologians and religious scholars interacting with specialists in critical theory and cultural studies in order to address the politics of religious identity. Noel Heather's recent book broadens this dialogue to include the theoretical work in critical discourse analysis by linguists such as Norman Fairclough and Teun Van Dijk. Readers will find an insightful example of theology's "linguistic turn" in Heather's study of evangelical Christians' discursive practices in Great Britain. In his analysis of Church texts, worship service rubrics, and transcripts from conversations, the author endeavours to understand the role that ideology holds in contemporary Christian discourse.

Heather states that his exploration into the social construction of Christian identity was inspired by two recent books, Martyn Percy's *Power and the Church: Ecclesiology in an Age of Transition* (1998) and Anthony Thiselton's *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self: on Meaning, Manipulation, and Promise* (1995). These two books serve to frame the context and reference point by which Heather examines interactions in the Church. Both Percy and Thiselton are concerned with the use and abuse of power, a theme very much related to critical discourse analysis. There is an anti-objectivist thrust in Critical discourse analysis research and this tends to place an emphasis on the presence of