

## M I S C E L L A N E O U S

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### SUBMIT TO PROGRESS OR DIRECT IT ?

In January 1968, *International Review* recalled that Professor Maurice Marois of the Paris Faculty of Medicine addressed the League Board of Governors at The Hague in 1967 on the subject "Science and Responsibility: The Defence of Life". He concluded by pointing out the analogy between the objective of the *Institut de la Vie*, over which he presides, and the Red Cross principles which are based on a constant resolve to protect man's welfare.

In September and October 1968, that *Institut* organized meetings in Geneva. Their theme was "Progress: A Challenge". Scientists, doctors, economists, and sociologists explained the viewpoints of their own particular branches and their fears and hopes, as since the beginning of the century science and technology have made spectacular progress and their development is accelerating, each day changing our living conditions.

Technology multiplies man's power. It changes the world in which he lives and his social environment. It is becoming capable of influencing man biologically and psychologically. Such a growth in man's power increases his responsibilities. It requires him to act with greater awareness, enlightened by exact knowledge of remote effects of his behaviour. It could require a firmer and more lucid moral code. At least it demands a prudence which must be urgently infused in contemporary man.

Some effects of technical progress are serious enough to warrant our earnest consideration, and some of the problems to which it has given rise are the very ones which, in various countries, the Red Cross is endeavouring to solve, such as the heavy toll of road accidents.

Are we becoming a society which no longer respects personality? Will man soon be no more than a slave to efficiency and the community's utilitarian requirements? Professor Marois asked these questions at the meetings of the *Institut de la Vie*.

Human life, he said, is under a constantly greater threat from biological applications. Referring to a meeting of scientists in

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London under the auspices of the CIBA Foundation, he mentioned scientific applications which will convulse the human estate in the near future. Biological technology—the shibboleth of the London meeting—will make conditioning of the individual possible even before his birth, from the moment of conception and during development of the embryo.

“Biology-fiction” is becoming reality: psychotrope drugs tranquilize or stimulate aggressivity; the period of puberty may be prolonged. It will, for example, become possible to control the size of the human brain by intervention before or immediately after birth.

This picture of scientific progress illustrates the efficiency of a soulless world. Such an outlook does not inspire optimism and yet, according to Dr. Marois, “scientists all sing praises to the glory of science”.

With such “progress” threatening to escape control, legislative regulation of applications affecting life and man is essential. Man must react in two ways: by conscience-searching and by assumption of responsibility. Although scientists are aware that their inventions are accelerating the course of history, the problem of responsibility is beyond them. This is a problem for mankind as a whole. The use made of scientific inventions is not a scientific problem, but an ethical one. Indifference through intellectual smugness comes all too easy.

Another attitude is resignation. Questioning the scientific finality, man may reach the conclusion that nothing can be done against the powerful forces at work. One of the ways out of this quandary is the revolt of the scientist. It may take three forms: political involvement, conscientious objection, and desertion, the renunciation of science.

The necessity of ensuring the survival of well-tried, permanent and universal values is ineluctable. Respect for life becomes primordial when it clashes with scientific discovery. According to Mr. Marois, the *Institut de la Vie* endeavours to reply to the problems raised by the advance of science, by bringing the human aspect to the fore in all decisive alternatives affecting man's present and future.