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A “Duty” to Abort? You Have Been Warned

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Patricia E. Bauer, a former reporter and bureau chief for *The Washington Post*, warns that prenatal testing techniques have shifted the medical question from an ability to abort babies judged to be defective to a *duty* to abort. She’s right of course, and the shift in this logic is inevitable. Once human dignity is redefined in terms of “acceptable” and “unacceptable” babies, it is only a short jump to the argument that no one should be allowed to impose a “defective” baby on the society.

In the October 18 edition of the *Post*, Bauer, who now lives in California, writes movingly of her own daughter Margaret, born with Down syndrome:

Whenever I am out with Margaret, I’m conscious that she represents a group whose ranks are shrinking because of the wide availability of prenatal testing and abortion. I don’t know how many pregnancies are terminated because of prenatal diagnoses of Down syndrome, but some studies estimate 80 to 90 percent.

Imagine. As Margaret bounces through life, especially out here in the land of the perfect body, I see the way people look at her: curious, surprised, sometimes wary, occasionally disapproving or alarmed. I know that most women of childbearing age that we may encounter have judged her and her cohort, and have found their lives to be not worth living.

To them, Margaret falls into the category of avoidable human suffering. At best, a tragic mistake. At worst, a living embodiment of the pro-life movement. Less than human. A drain on society. That someone I love is regarded this way is unspeakably painful to me.

Look carefully at this: *In ancient Greece, babies with disabilities were left out in the elements to die. We in America rely on prenatal genetic testing to make our selections in private, but the effect on society is the same.*

Margaret’s old pediatrician tells me that years ago he used to have a steady stream of patients with Down syndrome. Not anymore. Where did they go, I wonder: On the west side of L.A., they aren’t being born anymore, he says.

They aren’t being born anymore. Bauer concludes: *I have to think that there are many pro-choicers who, while paying obeisance to the rights of people with disabilities, want at the same time to preserve their right to ensure that no one with disabilities will be born into their own families. The abortion debate is not just about a woman’s right to choose whether to have a baby; it’s also about a woman’s right to choose which baby she wants to have.*

This is a truly chilling article, and it is a sign of things to come. The “duty to die” argument is gaining momentum, along with the argument that only those babies judged to be “acceptable” should be allowed to live.

Earlier this year, George Neumayr reported: *Each year in America fewer and fewer disabled infants are born. The reason is eugenic abortion. Doctors and their patients use prenatal technology to screen unborn children for disabilities, then they use that information to abort a high percentage of them. Without much scrutiny or debate, a eugenics designed to weed out the disabled has become commonplace.*

Not wishing to publicize a practice most doctors prefer to keep secret, the medical community releases only sketchy information on the frequency of eugenic abortion against the disabled. But to the extent that the numbers are known, they

indicate that the vast majority of unborn children prenatally diagnosed as disabled are killed.

Medical researchers estimate that 80 percent or more of babies now prenatally diagnosed with Down syndrome are aborted. (They estimate that since 1989, 70 percent of Down syndrome fetuses have been aborted.) A high percentage of fetuses with cystic fibrosis are aborted, as evident in Kaiser Permanente's admission to The New York Times that 95 percent of its patients in Northern California choose abortion after they find out through prenatal screening that their fetus will have the disease.

Columnist George F. Will, father of Jon Will, an ardent baseball fan also born with Down syndrome, writes: *In Britain, more babies with Down syndrome are aborted than are allowed to be born. In America, more than 80 percent of the babies diagnosed prenatally with Down syndrome are aborted. This is dismaying to, among others, the American Association of People with Disabilities, whose premise is that "disability is a natural part of the human experience."*

The AAPD worries that increasingly sophisticated prenatal genetic testing technologies will mean that parents who are told their expected babies are less than perfect "will experience pressures to terminate their pregnancies from medical professionals and insurers." The worry is not groundless.

Will is absolutely right — this worry is not groundless. The Brave New World of prenatal diagnosis threatens to undermine the very foundation of human dignity and to replace the sanctity of life with a sliding scale of "acceptable" human beings. The unacceptable are simply to be aborted. Eventually, some will no doubt argue that the unacceptable must be eliminated. It's happened before.

Think of this the next time you look into the beautiful face of a person with Down syndrome — and the next time you head for the obstetrician's office.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: Patricia E. Bauer, "[The Abortion Debate No One Wants to Have](#)," *The Washington Post*, October 18, 2005. George Neumayr, "[The Abortion Debate That Wasn't Under the Radar](#)," (originally published in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*), AAPD Web site. George F. Will, "[Eugenics by Abortion — Is Perfection an Entitlement?](#)," (originally published in *The Washington Post*), AAPD Web site. For additional resources, visit the Web site of the [American Association of People with Disabilities](#).

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