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## A New Search and Destroy Mission

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Even before the Nazi Party came to power, the doctors of Weimar Germany began to divide humanity into those who should live and those who should die. They developed the category of “life unworthy of life” in order to designate those whose infirmity, deformity, race, or lifestyle rendered them subhuman in terms of rights.

Similarly, the eugenicists of the twentieth century — in America as well as in Europe — divided humanity into the “fit” and the “unfit,” and called for more children from the fit, less from the unfit.

Now, word comes from London that a physician has used preimplantation genetic testing to allow a woman to become pregnant with a baby that is free of a breast cancer gene. In order to produce this baby, six embryos found to carry the gene were rejected.

As *The Telegraph* [London] explains:

*Only one other woman is believed to have become pregnant after undergoing the same screening technique, called pre-implantation diagnosis (PGD).*

*Critics claim it is unethical because it means viable embryos are destroyed. There are also fears it could lead to the creation of “designer babies” that are chosen for their looks or intelligence.*

*The British woman said she felt she had to go through the invasive IVF treatment even though she and her husband are fertile in order to try and safeguard her child.*

The paper went so far as to label the child a “designer baby.” This is precisely what many ethicists fear. Viable human embryos were discarded because they were found to carry a genetic marker that involves a risk — perhaps a significant risk — of later disease.

Where does this stop? Proponents of the technology complain that using phrases like “designer baby” is unfair, since no current technology allows a parent to “order” a child complete with all chosen traits. But that complaint misses the point. The designation of any trait — even the negative designation — creates a designer baby. Someone has decided that some trait is unacceptable.

In this case it was a gene linked to cancer. What next? We already know that the vast majority of babies diagnosed with Down syndrome are now aborted. How long before there is a preimplantation screen for that syndrome? Couples are now screening embryos for gender. How long before athletic ability or earning potential is linked to a gene? Blond hair? Blue eyes?

The Weimar doctors would be proud. The doctors behind this new technology assure us that their only concern is the improvement of human health. So did the Weimar doctors and the eugenicists. Health can be used as an argument for destroying life, it seems.

The tragedy is that vast millions of couples would almost surely take advantage of this technology should it become more widely available. The end would justify the means, they would rationalize.

The laboratory is now a dangerous place for human embryos. They can be destroyed for stem cell research, frozen pending sale, and rejected after genetic testing. This points to a very sad reality — there is now a search and destroy mission targeting human embryos considered unworthy and unwanted.

*Life unworthy of life.* Where have we heard that before?

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