

# The Murder of Down Syndrome Babies Goes Mainstream

By John Horvat II



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There is not much that shocks the readers of *The Atlantic*. The cultural journal is always raising controversy and pushing the envelope with articles defending liberal opinions that often evolve into bestselling books.

However, many were stunned by the cover article in its December print edition. There is no way to deny the conclusion. News Busters managing editor Curtis Houck got the message. He accused *The Atlantic* of cheering eugenics “and the murder of people with Down Syndrome, simply because of who God created them to be.”

“Everyone who works there should be ashamed,” Mr. Houck wrote.

## **The Return of Eugenics**

The scourge of eugenics is back and is going mainstream. Horrified, people used to associate eugenics with Hitler’s crimes, Nazi and other totalitarian regimes. Indeed, once human life is found to be disposable in some circumstances, the policy is easily expanded to other “unwanted” humans—whether physically disabled or those holding unapproved opinions.

*The Atlantic* feature stuns by the casual manner by which the matter is treated. Author Sarah Zhang’s article, “The Last Children of Down Syndrome,” writes that “Prenatal testing is changing who gets born and who doesn’t. This is just the beginning.”

She reports on the mass abortion of children who are determined to have Down syndrome through prenatal testing. Countries like Iceland, for example, have all but eliminated such babies from being born. Her report focuses on Denmark, which aggressively tests expectant mothers. Some 95 percent of the babies testing positive for Down are aborted.

### **A Story that Does Not Need to Be Told**

The story takes the angle of trying to “understand” the problem by interviewing parents of children with Down syndrome, some of which regretted their decision to bring the child to term. She also spoke with parents who aborted their babies upon learning of their condition. Medical experts also give their opinions about the choice. The emphasis is on the decision’s potential difficulty and pain, not its morality.

It is framed as an emotional story that “needs to be told.” Moreover, the article insinuates that with new technologies, “this is only the beginning.”

### **The Other Side of the Story**

The story triggered a Twitterstorm of comments by Americans indignant about the attempt to sugarcoat eugenics. Many parents, siblings and acquaintances of persons with Down syndrome also wrote. They highlighted the joy and happiness that these handicapped Americans have brought to their lives. Others tell of faulty prenatal tests that predict Down syndrome but result in babies without it.

“My brother had Down’s syndrome. He was the bravest, most loving person I will ever know,” wrote one reader. “He was a gift to our family. Down’s people are highly functional. Society should promote that. Giving birth to a Down’s baby is not a burden; it is a blessing.”

“Downs kids that I know are the most loving, wonderful, positive, people I have ever met,” writes another. “Raising one is difficult to say the least, but it is a blessing returned a hundred times over.”

“I can’t speak for every family, but I have a first cousin with Down’s. She is now over 50 and has been a loving gift and joy to the family over the years. She loves everyone, so maybe it is not her but the haters that are truly the mentally challenged after all.”

“Maybe we would have a happy, more loving, kinder society if we all had Down’s.”

“I’d be willing to bet your cousin with Down’s is probably happier than most people in this country. So If we judge whether someone lives/dies predicated on their happiness, then we should terminate most of the people of this country!”

### **Emotionalizing the Debate**

*The Atlantic* story is a summary of everything that is wrong with America. The first false premise of this outlook is that everything must be done to avoid suffering. The most successful person is the one who manages to enjoy life to its fullest without burdens or pain.

Thus, the report’s emotional side concentrates on the “suffering” of parents of Down syndrome babies who must endure the unexpected hardships that the birth will bring.

The presupposition is that the parents’ happiness is the supreme value and worth more than life itself. Thus, a baby can be sacrificed to ensure that parental happiness is not interrupted. It also ignores the fact that raising children always involves suffering and trials.

### **Framing Murder as a Choice**

The second false premise is the worst one. Once life enjoyment is established as the supreme value, the next step is to reduce everything contrary to a mere choice. Thus, parents must make the “agonizing decision” of killing their child. The very real emotional drama is somehow made to justify the choice.

However, murder is never a morally legitimate choice, no matter how it is framed. Thus, Ms. Zhang's article is wrong not because it reports upon an agonizing situation but because she turns it into a morally unacceptable choice. It also does not consider the injustice in terminating the Down child's innocent life. The victim who did nothing to merit the death penalty is executed as a traitor.

### **Excluding God from the Picture**

Finally, the article is based on a purely naturalistic conception of life that admits no higher supernatural reality. This pagan notion sees life as only a random process of matter in motion. Life has no higher meaning or purpose. Thus, the taking of life for one's convenience has no eternal or final consequences. Life is brutal and meaningless.

Those who hold this notion cannot conceive a life in which suffering plays a role in the development of character and virtue. They cannot submit to a loving God Who helps all who call on Him in their trials.

Such a life of avoiding suffering turns the earth into a veritable Hell since everyone is centered upon self to the exclusion of others. In the mad rush to worship self, people become capable of the most horrific cruelties.

Saint Augustine says that there can only be two basic loves: The love of God unto the forgetfulness of self, or the love of self unto the forgetfulness and denial of God. This latter love is the sad state of today's postmodern society so well portrayed in *The Atlantic's* shameful article.