

Wanted or Unwanted: Does it change the value of life?

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I have a 6-month-old cousin named Clare. This beautiful baby girl lives in Virginia with her family and I have only gotten to see her once. At that time, I held the 2 ½ -week-old sleeping child in my arms and marveled at how small and soft she was, how peaceful and innocent her little face was. As I gazed down at this sweet little girl, I felt it was impossible not to love her. At 2 ½ weeks, was her life valuable, worthy of love and protection? Now, at 6 months, does her life have value? Well, yes. Most anyone would say so.

Now here's a tougher question: Did Clare's life have any value 7 months ago? First, let's quickly address that age-old question: What is the unborn? It is hardly a question of opinion of when human life begins, and it seems illogical that life could begin at different times for different people. So let's assume that Clare's life began at conception, which biologically speaking, indeed it did. 7 months ago, I'm sure Clare's parents would say that their unborn daughter's life had value. Now, Clare's parents are married, financially secure, and they planned for this child. They were overjoyed when the pregnancy test came back positive. They prepared a bedroom, bought toys and clothes, and eagerly anticipated their child's arrival. In short, Clare's parents *wanted* her.

Wanted or unwanted: Does it change the value of life? Human life has intrinsic value. Many a philosopher has come to this conclusion, and the vast majority of people believe that there is something special about being a human person. *Intrinsic value* is value in and of itself, without regard to whether or not the subject has *instrumental value*, which is benefit or value to another. A woman who discovers she is pregnant and reacts with distress and shame rather than joy, for whatever reason, may call her pregnancy unplanned and unwanted. But that unwanted child still has intrinsic value regardless of the benefits or costs faced by his or her mother.

Wanted or unwanted: Does it make a difference? Historically and presently, problems arise when society answers "yes." Blacks: no one wanted them; use them as slaves and count them as a fraction of a person. Neglected children: no one wants them; abuse them and pass their wants and needs off to someone else. The elderly and handicapped: no one wants them; they are just a nuisance and should be put away. Victims of war: no one wants them; might as well forget them. Wait a minute. *Who* doesn't want these people? The people in power? The ones able to control these situations? Yet these examples and more are recognized as social injustices. And as Martin Luther King, Jr., said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Human life has intrinsic value, and no one has the right to decide whether someone is worthy of life based on their wanted or unwanted status. Doing this constitutes an abuse of power – dominion over the less powerful – and our society understands this to be wrong.

Yes, 7 months ago, unborn Clare was worthy of life. 15 months ago, her newly-conceived self was valuable. She was and is wanted, but that little boy or little girl somewhere in the womb of some woman who doesn't want a child is also worthy of life. Every child, born or unborn; every adult, healthy or unhealthy; every person, no matter what color, circumstance, or stage of life is worthy of life and has something beautiful to offer the world. Wanted or unwanted: Does it change the value of life? No. And it is only when society finally answers with a resounding "no" that justice, peace, and respect for every human life will be realized.