📌 The Fabian Society: Background

Founded in 1884, the Fabian Society was a British socialist organisation committed to gradual, reformist socialism rather than revolution. Its core founding members included Sidney Webb, Beatrice Webb, George Bernard Shaw, and H.G. Wells. They emphasised expert knowledge, scientific social planning, and the state as a rational force for improving society — rather than leaving outcomes to chance, poverty, or individual ignorance.

A famous (and controversial) strand of early Fabian thinking linked social progress to eugenics — the idea of "improving" the human population through selective breeding, discouraging reproduction among those deemed "unfit," and state oversight of family life. This overlaps with both euthanasia debates and the phrase you cited.

⚖️ Euthanasia and "Life Unworthy of Life" in Early Fabian/Eugenics Circles

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many Fabians were influenced by eugenicist ideas that were mainstream among progressive intellectuals at the time. Key points:

- Euthanasia was discussed not as modern voluntary assisted dying, but in the context of "negative eugenics" — ending the lives of people considered "mentally deficient," "physically unfit," or a burden on society. The phrase "life unworthy of life" was coined and debated in this era, later infamously adopted by Nazi Germany.
- Fabian thinkers such as George Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells wrote openly about the need for scientific control of population quality. Shaw suggested that the state should decide who may have children; Wells argued for "racial improvement" and discouraging the "unfit" from reproducing.
- The sentiment "we can look after your children better than you" directly reflects this mindset: the state, guided by scientific experts, was seen as more capable of raising healthy, useful citizens than poor, "unfit," or ignorant parents. This justified proposals for state-run boarding schools, removal of children from certain families, and restrictions on who could become parents.

⚠️ Crucial distinction: These views were part of the early Fabian period, roughly 1890–1930. Later, as the horrors of Nazi eugenics became known, the Fabian Society and mainstream socialism rejected eugenics and coercive euthanasia completely. Modern debates over voluntary euthanasia have no connection to those early eugenicist proposals.

📋 Summary Table

Table

Aspect	Early Fabian View (c.1890–1930)	Modern Fabian/Left View
Role of experts & state	State scientists should guide family life, as they "know better"	State supports families, but respects parental & individual rights
Euthanasia	Discussed as *coercive elimination* of the "unfit" under eugenics	Supports voluntary, regulated assisted dying for terminally ill adults
Who should raise children	State may intervene if parents deemed "inferior"	Parental responsibility protected; state aids, does not replace families
Eugenics	Widely accepted by leading members	Universally rejected as racist, inhumane, and pseudoscientific

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☑ Key Takeaway

Your phrase "we can look after your children better than you" is a direct echo of early Fabian eugenic and paternalist thinking: the belief that scientific, state-appointed experts were better qualified than ordinary parents to shape the next generation. In that same intellectual circle, euthanasia was sometimes discussed not as a mercy to the dying, but as a tool to "improve the race" — an idea that has long been repudiated, and which has nothing in common with today's debates over voluntary assisted dying.

Would you like me to dig deeper into specific Fabian figures (Shaw, Webb, Wells) and their exact writings on these topics, or trace how the society's official stance shifted after the 1930s?