

# CONFRONTING THE LANGUAGE OF THE CULTURE OF DEATH

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IN *THE GOSPEL OF LIFE* Pope John Paul II makes an eloquent plea for the creation of a culture of life to displace the encroaching culture of death.<sup>1</sup> This paper focuses primarily on one of the major forces powering the culture of death: the degrading language directed against society's weakest individuals both before and after birth. The terminology underpinning the culture of death consists of an extensive vocabulary of dehumanization that engulfs the most defenseless victims of today as well as throughout history. The paper also explores the significance of positive, life-affirming definitions of the vulnerable for replacing the demeaning rhetoric that has been in use from antiquity to modern times.

## SEMANTIC WARFARE AGAINST THE VULNERABLE

The following set of semantic classifications provides a comprehensive framework for detecting and analyzing a host of pejorative expressions invoked to devalue individuals and groups now and in times past: *deficient human*, *subhuman/nonhuman*, *lower animal*, *parasitic creature*, *infectious disease*, *inanimate object*, *waste product*, and *nonperson*. These demeaning designations have been and continue to be so extensively resorted to that they constitute a veritable *war of words*.

The culture of death, then, consists of two wars: a verbal war and a physical war. Sequentially, the verbal war often precedes and leads to the physical war. When applied to abortion, the war of words against the unborn took place in the minds of the perpetrators long before it was implemented in hospitals and clinics. As so aptly stated by Pulitzer Prize winning editor Paul Greenberg of the *Arkansas Democratic-Gazette*: "Those we want out of the way must first be dehumanized.... The least of these must be aborted in words before it becomes permissible to abort them in deed."<sup>ii</sup>

Any war, semantic or otherwise, requires an identifiable enemy upon whom to impose the derogatory classifications. At one time or another almost every imaginable racial, ethnic, religious, age, and social group has suffered the consequences of linguistic abuse, ranging from discrimination to outright annihilation. The victimized groups selected for analysis in this study include some of the most oppressed on record: *the unborn* (unwanted human lives before birth in contemporary society), *the dependent and disabled* (mainly young

children, people with disabilities, debilitated patients, and the elderly), *women* (past and present), *those exterminated in the Nazi Holocaust* (primarily Jews, but also Gypsies, "asocials," the handicapped, Poles, and others), *the victims of Soviet tyranny* (peasants, religious groups, "deviationists," and others), *African Americans* (especially enslaved blacks before and during the Civil War), and *Native Americans* (North American Indians on the frontier).

*Deficient Human.* Although those placed under this category are officially acknowledged as members of the human species, it is an ambiguous and questionable status fraught with constant scrutiny and endless qualifications. The imposition of such words as "stupid," "defective," "inferior," "unfit," "potential life," and "lives not worth living" are intended to consign those so labeled to the margins of the human race. The image persistently projected is that of hopelessly flawed human beings whose lives are considered so devoid of value that they can be placed in serious jeopardy and exploited at will.

Today unborn humans are viewed as at best "only potential life,"<sup>iii</sup> and severely disabled people are seen as "lives not worth living."<sup>iv</sup> Down through the ages, women were frequently characterized as a "defective" and "inferior sex,"<sup>v</sup> Jews and others in the Third Reich as "inferior" life unworthy of life,<sup>vi</sup> and peasants in the Soviet Union as a "stupid, turgid people."<sup>vii</sup> Black people in the pre-Civil War American South were regarded as a "subordinate and inferior class of beings" incapable of independent existence,<sup>viii</sup> and Indians on the frontier as an "inferior" breed destined to disappear with the coming of white civilization.<sup>ix</sup>

*Subhuman/Nonhuman.* For some perpetrators the *deficient human* classification is not demeaning enough because those relegated to this status are still granted recognition, at least implicitly, as members of the human race. In the world of massive oppression, acknowledgement of even a semblance of humanity is often considered too risky. Extensive victimization therefore requires stripping away all vestiges of humanity from the victims and reducing them to totally "subhuman" or "nonhuman" creatures existing entirely outside the most remote borders of the human community.

Contemporary abortion and euthanasia proponents often call their respective victims "not human," "subhuman," "only human forms," and "nothing." Sociologist Amitai Etzioni, for example, once called the so-called "preivable" unborn "subhuman and relatively close to a piece of tissue,"<sup>x</sup> while situation-ethics founder Joseph Fletcher referred to the child with Down's syndrome as "a sadly non- or un- or subhuman creature."<sup>xi</sup> The expressions "not human" and "nothing" comprise mainstays in the longstanding war of words against women.<sup>xii</sup> Images of Jews as "not human," "subhuman," and "nothing" furnished a semantic foundation for racial

genocide in Nazi Germany.<sup>xiii</sup> The designation "not human" was imposed on farmers who resisted the Soviet collectivization of agriculture.<sup>xiv</sup> Acceptance of slavery was helped along by perceptions of African Americans as "not human" and "subhuman."<sup>xv</sup> Portrayals of Native Americans as "not human" and just human "shapes" supplied a rationalization for their extermination on the frontier.<sup>xvi</sup>

*Lower Animal.* A commonly employed method of removing undesired individuals completely from membership in the human race is to re-classify them as a species of "lower animals." Animal analogies are meant to denigrate the victims in two basic ways: the victims are reduced to the insignificant level of primitive animals whose fate is of no consequence, or they are portrayed as dangerous, wild beasts that need to be subdued, hunted down, or destroyed.

Today's abortion and euthanasia defenders compare the expendable preborn and born to "lower animals." Neurologist Hart Peterson likens fetal movement to "that of a primitive animal that's poked with a stick"<sup>xvii</sup> and animal-liberation philosopher Peter Singer reduces severely handicapped infants to a status below that of some animals.<sup>xviii</sup> For millennia women have been referred to as "domestic animals."<sup>xix</sup> The Nazis relegated disabled people to entities "far down in the animal kingdom" and Jews to "experimental animals."<sup>xx</sup> Marxists labeled Russian peasants "beasts of burden."<sup>xxi</sup> Slaveholders viewed African Americans as "work animals" ordained to serve white civilization.<sup>xxii</sup> Native Americans were frequently maligned as "wild animals" doomed to extinction.<sup>xxiii</sup>

*Parasitic Creature.* Another degrading metaphor involves relegating the unwanted to the despicable level of "parasites," "vermin," and "lice." The two most common parasitic qualities attributed to undesired human beings are their total dependence on the host and the threat they pose to the survival of the host. The fact that the parasite is an alien organism differing markedly from the host serves as a convenient pretext for depicting vulnerable human beings as a repugnant species with no rightful claim to membership in the human family.

Currently unborn humans are depicted as "parasites" in the woman's body<sup>xxiv</sup> and debilitated patients as "parasites" on the health-care system.<sup>xxv</sup> Women have been persistently portrayed as "parasites" on men,<sup>xxvi</sup> Jews as "parasites in the body of other peoples,"<sup>xxvii</sup> Kulaks as "parasites" on the Soviet economy,<sup>xxviii</sup> African Americans as "parasites" in need of bondage for survival,<sup>xxix</sup> and Native Americans as "vermin" necessitating eradication.<sup>xxx</sup>

*Infectious Disease.* Likening human beings to "infectious diseases" ranks among the most degrading uses of metaphor. In many instances people

suffering from real illnesses have borne an enormous brunt of the disease-infested rhetoric. For the most part, however, the malignant metaphors have nothing to do with real diseases; they are aimed at perfectly healthy human beings whose main deficiency is being unwanted. When combined with the expressions "infection," "contagion," "epidemic," "plague," and "pestilence," disease-analogies are intended to project an ominous image of undesired, vulnerable humans as dangerous epidemics that threaten the health and life of those who count—the wanted segments of society.

Today unwanted pregnancy is defined as an "infection," a "venereal disease" and an "epidemic,"<sup>xxxix</sup> while troublesome patients are viewed as "diseases" and forms of "pathology."<sup>xxxix</sup> Down through the years women have been equated with "plagues" and "contaminations."<sup>xxxix</sup> The Nazi nomenclature is replete with images of Jews as a "pestilence," "plague," and "syphilis."<sup>xxxix</sup> Soviet propagandists reduced their victims to "diseases," "epidemics," and "contagions."<sup>xxxix</sup> Images of black people as a "contagion" and "pestilence" were widely circulated in the American South before and after the Civil War.<sup>xxxix</sup> North American Indians were linked with the spread of "syphilis," "contagions," and "pestilences."<sup>xxxix</sup>

*Inanimate Object.* The semantic transformation of undesired humans into inanimate objects—mere things with no semblance of personality, humanity, consciousness, or vitality—comprises one of the most radical and pervasive forms of denigration. In this process of extreme objectification, the perpetrators view themselves as owners of others who are reduced to the level of simply "matter" and "material" or as mere "property," "possessions," "merchandise," and "commodities" to be used, exploited, and disposed of at the owner's whim.

Contemporary portrayals feature the unborn as "property" of the woman and "material" for fetal research,<sup>xxxix</sup> and nursing-home patients as discardable "objects."<sup>xxxix</sup> For centuries rape was defined in law, not as violence against the woman, but as "trespass against" another man's "property."<sup>xl</sup> The targets of Nazi genocide were processed as "merchandise" for shipment to the death-camps where they were exploited as "experimental material" in terminal research projects and "raw material" in the I.G. Farben factories at Auschwitz.<sup>xli</sup> Prisoners in the Soviet Gulag became "raw material" for death-inducing work projects.<sup>xlii</sup> Slaveowners viewed African Americans as "a species of property" for slave labor and "articles of merchandise" for public auction.<sup>xliii</sup> Native Americans have been frequently exiled to the status of "anthropological specimens" and "museum pieces."<sup>xliii</sup>

*Waste Product.* Equating human beings with noxious "waste matter" places them at the lowermost depths of the subhuman scrap pile. Such terms as

"garbage," "trash," "rubbish," "debris," and "refuse" have been invoked against victims at all phases of the human life cycle. The oppressors consider garbage-designations as especially apt characterizations because many victims share the same ultimate fate as real waste-matter: disintegration through incineration.

The epithets "garbage," "refuse," "debris," and "rubbish" are regularly imposed on today's unwanted before and after birth.<sup>xlv</sup> Women's bodies have been commonly referred to as "sewers" for the emptying of "refuse."<sup>xlvi</sup> Nazi word distorters labeled Jews "garbage," "rubbish," and "trash" for disposal in crematory ovens.<sup>xlvii</sup> People, groups, and ideas viewed with disfavor by the Soviet regime were consigned to "garbage," "debris," "rubbish," and "refuse" on history's "garbage heap."<sup>xlviii</sup> African American culture was once maligned as "a heritage of organic and psychic debris" and slaves as "refuse."<sup>xlix</sup> Native Americans on the frontier were equated with "garbage" and accused of reducing the environment to a vast "red wasteland."<sup>l</sup>

*Nonperson.* Among the expressions constructed to devalue human lives, the term "nonperson" is the most devastating epithet of all because it alone has been enshrined into law and a legal nonperson is an entity devoid of basic rights, including, in many instances, the most fundamental right, life itself. "Nonperson" is fast becoming the designation of choice for devaluing human beings before and after birth. It has inaugurated a new litmus test for survival: no longer is one's humanity a sufficient basis for meriting the right to life. One must also be a person, and the definition of personhood required for existence is an increasingly elitist one whereby expanding numbers of individuals are declared expendable and consigned to the rightless category of "legal nonpersons."

In 1973 the U.S. Supreme Court in its *Roe v. Wade* decision ushered in the modern era of legal nonpersonhood by maintaining that "the unborn have never been recognized in the law as persons in the whole sense" and by ruling that "the word 'person,' as used in the Fourteenth Amendment, does not include the unborn."<sup>li</sup> Today the word "nonperson" is increasingly invoked to devalue debilitated patients after birth.<sup>lii</sup> Through much of history women as a class have been treated as "less than persons" before the law.<sup>liii</sup> A 1936 German high court decision "refused to recognize Jews living in Germany as 'persons' in the legal sense."<sup>liv</sup> The designation "unperson" served as a weapon for erasing from public records people purged by the Soviet regime.<sup>lv</sup> According to the *Dred Scott* and other court decisions, slaves were defined as "non-citizens" and "nonpersons" under the law.<sup>lvi</sup> The longstanding assaults on Native American territories and lives by federal agencies and state-governments were based on a perception of the Indian as

"not a person within the meaning of the Constitution."<sup>lvii</sup>

The above examples of defamatory terminology scratch only the surface. Many others can and should be cited along with the extensive documentation that backs them up. A table, "The Semantics of Oppression," containing some of these disparaging classifications and accompanying documentation can be found in *Dehumanizing the Vulnerable: When Word Games Take Lives*. This highly condensed tabular version reveals at a glance the startling similarities among the demeaning expressions and their pervasive scope. *Dehumanizing the Vulnerable* also includes an extensive analysis of these and other degrading designations as well as insights on how to counteract them.<sup>lviii</sup>

#### COMBATting THE SEMANTIC WAR AGAINST THE VULNERABLE

This research points to an urgent need for a major transformation in language, perception, and thought. Such a transformation will involve challenging the degrading designations and replacing them with positive, life-affirming words and phrases. The following comprise six steps that can be taken to counter the escalating war of words:

1. *Bring to greater awareness the pervasive scope of the dehumanizing terminology.* The degrading words have become a prominent part of the politically correct discourse dominating contemporary society. Many people, however, remain oblivious to how extensively such terminology has taken hold. The public, therefore, needs to be informed each time the expressions *deficient human, non-human/subhuman, lower animal, parasitic creature, infectious disease, inanimate object, waste matter, and nonperson* are invoked against the unwanted unborn and born.

A prime illustration of the deeply rooted nature of the name-calling is Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens' ringing defense of the nonperson construct in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992), almost two decades after *Roe v. Wade* first defined human beings before birth as legal nonpersons:

The Court [in *Roe*] concluded that... 'the unborn have never been recognized in the law as persons in the whole sense.' Accordingly, an abortion is not 'the termination of life entitled to Fourteenth Amendment protection.'

From this holding, there was no dissent, indeed, no member of the Court has ever questioned this fundamental proposition.<sup>lix</sup>

Similar kinds of fully entrenched and deeply degrading portrayals led Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger Brooke Taney to put forth in the *Dred Scott* decision of 1857 the rationale for declaring that Negroes "have never been regarded as a part of the people or citizens of the State":

They had for more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order... and treated as an ordinary article of merchandise. This opinion was at that time fixed and universal in the civilized portion of the white race. It was regarded as an axiom in morals, as well as in politics, which no one thought of disputing or supposed to be open to dispute.<sup>18</sup>

Thus the *Dred Scott*, *Roe v. Wade*, and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* decisions—so completely bogged down by the oppressive weight of prejudicial precedents and pejorative stereotypes—have proven to be totally devoid of the expansive vision needed for recognizing black people and unborn children as legitimate human lives entitled to the same rights and protections enjoyed by other members of the human community.

2. *Expose the draconian ideology underpinning the language of the culture of death.* The dehumanizing designations, it should be emphasized, do not suddenly appear out of the blue in a random, chaotic fashion. Instead, behind almost every widespread proliferation of name-calling is some kind of deliberate, systematically-constructed ideology; that is, a philosophy, a social theory, or a set of interrelated ideas, concepts, and myths that generate and sustain the dissemination of pejorative rhetoric.

A prophetic editorial, "A New Ethic for Medicine and Society," which appeared in the September 1970 issue of *California Medicine*, proposes the ideology needed to bring about the public acceptance of abortion and euthanasia—a quality-of-life ethic intended to "violate and ultimately destroy" the Judeo-Christian ethic of "intrinsic and equal value for every human life regardless of its stage, condition, or status," and replace it with an ethic in which "relative rather than absolute values" are placed "on such things as human lives."<sup>19</sup> It is this elitist ideology which is powering today's culture of death. In the practical order it too often translates to mean the quality of life for some at the expense of life for others.

Few have probed the significance of malevolent ideology with keener insight than Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. He writes:

To do evil a human being must first of all believe that what he's doing is good, or else that it's a well-considered act in conformity with natural law.... Shakespeare's evildoers stopped short at a dozen corpses. Because they had no *ideology*.

Ideology—that is what gives evildoing its long-sought justification and gives the evildoer the necessary steadfastness and determination. That is the social theory which helps to make his acts seem good instead of bad in his own and others' eyes, so that he won't hear reproaches and curses but will receive praise and honors....

Thanks to *ideology*, the twentieth century was fated to experience evildoing on a scale calculated in the millions.<sup>lxiii</sup>

Throughout history a host of ideologies have furnished the theoretical sparks for igniting scores of inflammatory designations accompanied by aggression on a monumental scale. "The Great Chain of Being," an imposing theory which ranked the world's races according to a hierarchy of worth, was invoked to justify atrocities against Indians and Blacks during the 1800s. The myth of Aryan Supremacy generated an extensive nomenclature of defamation that had its most disastrous impact in the Third Reich. The dogma of reproductive freedom is deployed to justify the tyranny of killing human lives inside the womb.

These and other ideologies, whatever their benevolent guise, share one essential ingredient—they are based on a constricted, elitist definition of the human race. And it is this deplorable notion that has fueled and continues to fuel the unrelenting litany of pejorative expressions directed against vulnerable individuals today and in times past.

3. *Uncover the blatant falsity of the disparaging expressions.* These designations, it needs to be reiterated, are pernicious, outlandish stereotypes completely out-of-line with reality and common sense. Phillip Knightley, a close observer of wartime propaganda, once concluded that when war comes, the first casualty is the truth.<sup>lxiii</sup> Consequently, a feature common to any war of words, whomever the victims, is the patent falsehood of the designations concocted. The words fabricated not only degrade the victims but also totally falsify their human nature. Some in the pro-abortion movement have actually made startling admissions about the necessity of bold-faced lying in the service of killing. Such acknowledgements must be brought to public attention. Biology professor Garrett Hardin's rhetoric furnishes a prime example of how recklessly abortion proponents manipulate language in order to devalue preborn life:

Whether the fetus is or is not a human being is a matter of definition, not fact; and we can define in any way we wish.... It would be unwise to define the fetus as human..., unwise ever to refer to the fetus as an "unborn child."<sup>lxiv</sup>

The sheer arrogance and arbitrariness in Hardin's admonition to make words mean anything one chooses is comparable to Humpty Dumpty's oration on linguistic abuse delivered to Alice in Wonderland. When Alice challenged Humpty Dumpty's definition of glory as "a nice knock-down argument," he replied:



"When I use a word... it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all."<sup>lxv</sup>

Therefore, in abortionland as in wonderland, he who controls words controls thoughts. And eventually language corrupts thought itself.

In addition to identifying the quality-of-life ideology as a means of obtaining public acceptance of abortion and euthanasia, the 1970 *California Medicine* editorial also proposed a flagrant form of lying about the nature of prenatal life: "avoidance of the scientific fact, which everyone really knows, that human life begins at conception." The editorial places this avoidance of the scientific fact about the intrinsic humanity of the unborn under the heading "semantic gymnastics," an apt classification indeed since it connotes the twisting and manipulation of language. The editorial then likens "the very considerable semantic gymnastics which are required to rationalize abortion as anything but taking a human life" to "a schizophrenic sort of subterfuge" and asserts that "this schizophrenic sort of subterfuge is necessary because while a new ethic [the quality-of-life ethic] is being accepted the old one [the sanctity-of-life ethic] has not yet been rejected."<sup>lxvi</sup> The form of duplicity advocated here involves not just a fib, but lying so extreme that it qualifies as a major mental disorder, schizophrenia.

More recently, leading feminist author Naomi Wolf disclosed that the Second Wave feminists of the early 1970s "reacted to the dehumanization of women by dehumanizing the creatures within them": "The fetus-is-nothing paradigm of the pro-choice movement," she admits, is based on deliberate deception. "Clinging to a rhetoric about abortion in which there is no life and no death, we entangle our beliefs in a series of self-delusions, fibs, and evasions." Wolf is especially alarmed that "too often our rhetoric leads us to tell untruths" and to "a hardness of heart," resulting in "callous, selfish and casually destructive men and women who share a cheapened view of life." Her remedy is to take what she considers the high moral ground: "a new abortion rights language" devoid of lying which squares "a recognition of the humanity of the fetus, and the moral gravity of destroying it, with a pro-choice position," a moral framework of "sin and redemption" in which abortion is defined as "a necessary evil" and "the mother must be able to decide that the fetus, in its full humanity, must die."<sup>lxvii</sup>

Wolf's revelations are nothing short of revolutionary. They violate two sacrosanct principles of semantic gymnastics—denial of the humanity of the

preborn and the portrayal of abortion as something other than killing. Her call for abandoning the deceitful rhetoric bolstering the killing while continuing to justify the killing, however, is seriously flawed. She fails to comprehend that once the destruction-inducing terminology is exposed for what it is, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to keep on rationalizing the destruction accompanying this terminology. Abortion proponents depend upon the oppressive language to continue justifying their defense of the indefensible.

Whether this atypical foray into the alien world of truth-in-telling constitutes the beginning of the unraveling of the "pro-choice" rhetoric, only time will tell. But it is, nevertheless, a pertinent example to cite in demonstrating the blatant duplicity powering this rhetoric.

*4. Reveal the awesome power of semantic gymnastics under socially impeccable auspices.*

One need only quote again from the *California Medicine* editorial of 1970 to demonstrate the indispensable role played by prestigious individuals in transforming the big lie about abortion and prenatal life into the new truth: "The very considerable semantic gymnastics required to rationalize abortion as anything but taking a human life would be ludicrous if they were not often put forth under *socially impeccable auspices*."<sup>lxviii</sup>

Not too long ago anyone who went around calling human beings, either before or after birth, "deficient humans," "nonhumans," "animals," "parasites," "diseases," "inanimate objects," "waste products," or "nonpersons" would have been deemed deranged. Today, however, when these ludicrous expressions of semantic gymnastics are put forth under the socially impeccable auspices of organized medicine, academia, the law, or the media elite, they are embraced as gospel. What had once been the undisputed "scientific fact, which everyone really knows, that human life begins at conception" has been reduced to the suspect status of an outmoded, sectarian bias. Thanks to the awesome power of semantic gymnastics in the hands of prestigious purveyors, no longer does everyone really know that human life begins at conception.

It should also be emphasized that throughout history highly respected personages rank among the most steadfast purveyors of degrading terminology. George Washington, a prominent slaveowner, called slaves "a very troublesome species of property."<sup>lxix</sup> One of America's greatest historians, Francis Parkman, equated Indians with "leeches" and "contagions."<sup>lxx</sup> Nobel Prize-winning scientist Francis H. Crick once stated that "no newborn infant should be declared human until it has passed certain tests regarding its genetic endowments and that if it fails these tests it forfeits

the right to live."<sup>lxxi</sup>

Such revelations are not intended to detract from the monumental achievements of these individuals, but to demonstrate that even they became agents of the prevailing rhetoric. The weakest and most defenseless victims have much more to fear from the relentless outpouring of name-calling constructed by society's so-called "best and brightest" than from the occasional outbursts of invective from mobs in the streets.

Furthermore, it needs to be underscored that the widespread resort to semantic gymnastics in the service of oppression by so many professors, physicians, scientists, jurists, and other impeccable sources constitutes a deplorable assault on some of the core elements intrinsic to any academic discipline or profession—the pursuit of truth, knowledge, and understanding.

5. *Document the extraordinarily close kinship between the dehumanizing designations of the present and the past.* Today's perpetrators must be continually confronted with the alarming reality that the words they are using against the unwanted unborn and born are, in many instances, the exact same words invoked against some of history's most reviled peoples.

Whenever, for example, individuals such as astronomer Carl Sagan call the preborn human "a kind of parasite" that "sucks blood from capillaries,"<sup>lxxii</sup> they should be made aware that Hitler, Lenin, and Stalin resorted to identical terminology against their respective victims: Hitler referred to Jews as "a parasite" that repeatedly "squeezed and sucked... blood" from "the masses,"<sup>lxxiii</sup> Lenin branded farmers "parasites" that "sucked the blood of the working people,"<sup>lxxiv</sup> and in 1934, after millions of peasants had been eradicated, Stalin announced "the elimination of the parasitic... kulak-exploiters, the bloodsucking usurer."<sup>lxxv</sup>

When the radical feminists Lori Andrews and Rachel Conrad Wahlberg reduce the unborn child to "personal property" and the woman's "possession,"<sup>lxxvi</sup> they need to be reminded that throughout history some men often defined women as the man's "property"<sup>lxxvii</sup> and the *Dred Scott* decision of 1857 consigned slaves to being "articles of property."<sup>lxxviii</sup>

When doctors such as Martti Kekomaki label aborted babies "just garbage... just refuse"<sup>lxxix</sup> and emergency room physicians refer to troublesome patients as "a lot of rubbish,"<sup>lxxx</sup> they should be told that pornographers portray women's bodies as "sewers" for the emptying of "refuse,"<sup>lxxxi</sup> Nazi extermination specialist Christian Wierth equated Holocaust victims with "garbage,"<sup>lxxxii</sup> 1938 Purge Trial prosecutor Andrei Vyshinsky maligned former Communist officials as a "heap of human garbage,"<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Virginia plantation-owner William Fitzhugh relegated black slaves to the status of

"refuse,"<sup>lxxxiv</sup> and poet Christopher Brooke characterized Native Americans on the frontier as "garbage... of Earth."<sup>lxxxv</sup>

When the wording in *Roe v. Wade* is cited to justify reducing the unborn to the status of legal nonpersons, it should be compared with the wording in court decisions of the past defining other groups as nonpersons before the law:

"The word 'person,' as used in the Fourteenth Amendment, does not include the unborn." (*Roe v. Wade*, 1973)<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

"The word 'person' as used in the act could not rightly be interpreted to include women in those entitled to sit in the House of Lords." (*Viscountess Rhonda's Claim*, 1922)<sup>lxxxvii</sup>

"The unborn have never been recognized in the law as persons." (*Roe v. Wade*, 1973)<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

"In the eyes of the law... the slave is not a person." (*Bailey et al. v. Poindexter's Ex'or*, 1858)<sup>lxxxix</sup>

"The unborn have never been recognized in the law as persons." (*Roe v. Wade*, 1973)<sup>xc</sup>

"Standing Bear was not... a person under the law." (District Attorney, *Standing Bear v. Crook*, 1879)<sup>xc</sup>

Thus a compelling way of discrediting today's dehumanizing rhetoric is to document how it ranks with the most extreme forms of name-calling in the annals of inhumanity.

*6. Replace the language of dehumanization with a life-affirming lexicon of humanization.*

It is not enough to curse the darkness by revealing the pervasiveness, shortcomings, perniciousness, falsity, and absurdity of the demeaning terminology. Positive, life-affirming characterizations of vulnerable individuals at risk possess an enormous potential in their own right for challenging and supplanting the derogatory rhetoric. Even during historical periods when the most defamatory definitions of the oppressed dominated the public consciousness, countervailing voices could be heard referring to those being victimized as "human beings," "brothers," "sisters," "men," "women," "brethren," and "children." Today right-to-life proponents, disability-rights activists, and like-minded defenders of society's most defenseless groups are employing the same life-sustaining words to counter the demeaning designations prevailing against undesired human beings inside and outside the womb. Forging links between the humanizing images of the present and the past places the contemporary pro-life movement where it rightfully belongs: on common ground with the great human rights movements throughout history.

In today's world where the global slaughter of the unborn is dismissed as the mere removal of "fetal material" and "waste products," Pope John Paul II emphasizes the urgent need "*to call things by their proper names.*" Words celebrating the humanity and sacredness of all human lives, especially the most defenseless individuals, comprise a cornerstone of his compelling, evangelical call for building a new and enduring culture of love and life.<sup>xcii</sup>

Against the contemporary view of severely disabled persons as parasitic, vegetative lives not worth living, nursing-administrator Jeryl Turco opposed the removal of a feeding-tube from Nancy Ellen Jobes by insisting that Jobes "is not a vegetable but a human being who is as deserving of food and water as you and I."<sup>xci</sup>

When characterizations of women as inferior beings, plagues, and domestic animals dominated the historical scene, the Bible served as an authoritative source for calling attention to the equality, humanity, nobility, and spirituality of women.<sup>xci</sup>

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn countered the Soviet regime's definitions of prisoners as raw material for slave labor in the Arctic death-camps of the Gulag with portrayals of them as "human beings," "wise spiritual beings," "our own people," "the innocent," "my own Brothers."<sup>xci</sup> On August 3, 1941 in response to the thousands of mentally ill and handicapped patients being exterminated in German hospitals and institutions, Bishop August von Galen gave a powerful anti-euthanasia sermon in which he declared: "We are speaking here of human beings, of our neighbors, our brothers and sisters."<sup>xci</sup> While African American slaves were being sold as "articles of merchandise," Angelina Grimke asserted, "Man cannot rightfully hold his fellow man as property."<sup>xci</sup> When the war of words against Native Americans was at its zenith during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Lydia Maria Child in her *An Appeal for the Indians* maintained that North America's original inhabitants were "human beings," "members of the human family," and "red brethren."<sup>xci</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Exposing the pernicious nature of denigrating language and substituting positive, personalized terminology will not alone put an end to massive oppression, but they constitute long overdue steps toward achieving such an essential goal. The war against the vulnerable will never end until the war of words against them also ceases and is replaced by a vocabulary of life-supporting designations. The purpose of historical inquiry is not merely to learn about the past, but also to learn about the present from the past. The comprehensive set of degrading classifications and their life-affirming

replacements furnish indispensable frameworks for a better understanding of what happened then and how it relates to what is happening now. Heightened awareness of these past and present linguistic parallels provides an essential perspective for recognizing and challenging modern-day threats to human life before and after birth as constituting an unconscionable repetition of some of history's most horrendous atrocities. Only when we draw lessons from the past, and apply them to the present, can there be hope for the future.

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