

## ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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### *The Language of the Unthinkable*

As I have mentioned several times on *Issues in Perspective*, words are important. Hence, the actual words one uses in framing a particular ethical issue are quite crucial. But, without any agreed upon set of ethical absolutes, a clever, even devious person (or organization) can use words to completely reshape an ethical issue so that people willingly embrace something they once held to be abhorrent. In other words, what was once unthinkable becomes debatable and gradually becomes acceptable. [This process brings to mind that haunting verse in Isaiah 5:20: “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness.”] This clever, deceptive process is very much at work in American civilization today. And, as I stated, if there is no agreed upon set of ethical absolutes, there is nothing to stop this process of reshaping and reframing ethical issues. Permit me to present two examples.

- First, consider pedophilia. *World* magazine writer, Andree Seu Peterson, cites a January 2103 article in the British newspaper, *The Guardian*, “Paedophilia: Bringing Dark Desire to Light.” An astonishing sentence leads the article: “There is little agreement about paedophilia [the British spelling], even among those considered experts on the subject.” When I first read that sentence, I remember saying, “how can that be?” What is there that is debatable or controversial about this egregious sin? Quite brilliantly, Peterson suggests a three-part strategy that the “dark side” (her words) uses in embracing the language of the unthinkable to legitimize pedophilia. Strategy # 1: Suggest that something evil is really “controversial.” In some ways, the dark side has already won the battle, for to even suggest that evil is debatable is to suggest that pedophilia is something about which reasonable people disagree. Thus, we must be merciful, understanding and gracious. Peterson writes: “The purveyors of darkness are looking for a sign from us too, for mercy unmoored to truth corrodes to leniency. Relinquish the word ‘wrong,’ accept the softer ‘reasonable difference of opinion,’ and the camel’s nose is well under the tent.” Strategy # 2: Formulate distinctions, degrees of this evil, in which, among the distinctions, there is a degree of legitimacy, of acceptability. In *The Guardian* article there is another sentence that shocks: “A paedophile is someone who has a primary or exclusive sexual interest in prepubescent children. Savile [Jimmy Savile, high-profile English pedophile] appears to have been primarily an ephebophile, defined as someone who has a similar preferential attraction to adolescents.” Do you see the effectiveness of this strategy? If there are distinctions of something such as pedophilia, then, presumably, there are degrees of severity of this evil, and if there are degrees of severity, then perhaps some are not as harmful as others. Some, in fact, may be legitimate!! Strategy # 3: Bring in the professionals to help frame the debate, to help us understand the complexities of these differences within the evil. Listen to *The Guardian* article again: “Sarah Goode, a senior lecturer at the University of Winchester and author of two major 2009 and 2011 sociological studies on paedophilia in society, says the best current

estimate . . . is that one in five of all men are, to some degree, capable of being sexually aroused by children. . . There is a growing conviction, notably in Canada, that paedophilia should probably be classified as a distinct sexual orientation, like heterosexuality or homosexuality. Two eminent researchers testified to that effect to a Canadian parliamentary commission last year, and the Harvard Mental Health Letter of July 2010 stated baldly that paedophilia ‘is a sexual orientation.’” You see the point? Only people smarter than most us can figure this out!! These experts will now be debating whether pedophilia is innate or acquired, because few experts really agree on what causes it!! Unbelievably, Tom O’Carroll, a former chairman of PIE [Paedophile Information Exchange], insists “that society’s outrage at paedophilic relationships is essentially emotional, irrational, and not justified by science. ‘It is the quality of the relationship that matters.’” Instead of using terms such as “abuse” or “victim,” O’Carroll surprises us when he uses the term “relationships,” a term of legitimacy, of acceptance. What was once unthinkable becomes debatable and gradually becomes acceptable. In regards to pedophilia, we are almost there! As a culture, the academic specialists have begun the debate. And O’Carroll has provided the language of acceptance—a “quality relationship”!!!

- Second is the language used by the pro-abortion movement. Quite surprisingly, an abortion advocate, Mary Elizabeth Williams of Salon.com, recently agreed with the pro-life movement when she accepted the premise that life does indeed begin at conception and that the unborn child is a human life. But, Williams argues, if a woman desires an abortion, she should have that right, for the child’s life is “a life worth sacrificing.” As theologian Albert Mohler observes, “Williams skewers the ‘pro-choice’ evasion. The fetus is a human life, she asserts—every fetus, wanted or unwanted by its mother, planned or unplanned as a pregnancy. She even affirms that life begins at conception. But, she quickly argues, the fact that the unborn child is a human life doesn’t mean that it should not be aborted.” Listen to Williams’s explanation: “Here’s the complicated reality in which we live: All life is not equal. That’s a difficult thing for liberals like me to talk about, lest we wind up looking like death-panel-loving, kill-your-grandma-and-precious-baby storm troopers. Yet a fetus can be a human life without having the same rights as the woman in whose body it resides. She’s the boss. Her life and what is right for her circumstances and her health should automatically trump the rights of the non-autonomous entity inside of her. Always.” The heart of Williams’s argument is that the mother is autonomous; the child in her womb is not. She forcefully declares that “I would put the life of the mother over the life of the fetus every single time—even if I still need to acknowledge my conviction that the fetus is indeed a life.” It is a “life worth sacrificing.” This is boldly, egregiously taking the Culture of Death to an extreme. Williams is acknowledging truths that no other major pro-abortion leader has acknowledged—that the fetus is a human being; that conception is when life begins—but that this life is worth killing solely because the mother declares that life void of all respect, all dignity and all value. This is indeed the language of the unthinkable!!! This is human depravity at its worse.

See Andree Seu Peterson in *World* (9 February 2013), p. 75 and Albert Mohler in [www.albertmohler.com](http://www.albertmohler.com) (1 February 2013).