

name, and some might argue that attaching that name to “deliberate attacks” allows the United States to place the label “terrorist” on the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995, and the attack on the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001, while not placing the same label on U.S. actions such as the bombing of Iraq because the civilian deaths were not “deliberate.” The civilian deaths resulting from U.S. bombing were defined by an obviously value-laden term, *collateral damage*. Another example of a proposition of definition, “a fetus is not a person,” is quite clearly not simply a matter of fact. The definition seeks to dissociate the values normally associated with “person” from the idea of a “fetus.” Whether one is willing to call a fetus a “person” has enormous value implications that set an agenda for actions toward the fetus.

If any kind of proposition were value free, surely it would be the descriptive proposition. Descriptions are frequently held in contrast to values. Logicians say that an argument cannot move from an “is” to an “ought.” But are descriptions really value free? Clearly the proposition “Lee Oswald was the only person involved in the November 22, 1963, assassination of John Kennedy” carries with it the negative value of assassination. More importantly, the proposition implicitly carries the evaluative notion that an act of a single, deranged gunman is not as important as a conspiracy among several actors. For some, the death of a president is so horrible as to be understandable only as a conspiratorial act. Equally obvious evaluative implications are associated with the proposition “O. J. Simpson murdered Nicole Brown Simpson.” Murder is not value-free no matter how many times a judge says the finding of a jury is simply a “finding of fact.”

On the surface, propositions of relationship seem value-free as well. They appear simply to assert a relationship of causality or of similarity between two or more things. On closer examination, however, propositions of relationship also have clear value implications because they seek to transfer values associated with one concept or entity to another. For instance, asserting that “political advertisements contribute to a better understanding of political issues” attempts to transfer the positive values associated with “a better understanding of political issues” to “political advertisements.” Likewise, the proposition “capital punishment is essentially the same as murder” is an attempt to transfer the negative value of “murder” to the concept of “capital punishment.”

The final category of propositions—propositions of evaluation—is the only one that tackles values directly. Furthermore, evaluative propositions ordinarily include issues of definition, description, and relationship as well as values.