

Heya Fr. John,

So, I wanted to get back to you on that conversation about "is language a weapon". I almost wrote this in a paper letter to you but its actually one I'd like people to see, maybe even weigh in on themselves. So, who are these other ppl you've been discussing this with? You mentioned an editor and inmate.

I have strong opinions on this fad of shifting nomenclature for people in prison. You asked specifically about "offender" and whether its different from "prisoner" or "inmate". First - are you familiar with all the hoopla, at least in CA, about not calling inmates "inmates"? Also not "prisoner" or "convict"... the push is for ridiculous euphemisms like "incarcerated citizen". It honestly makes me sick. Whitewashing a term so people can feel better about what's being done to others (e.g. caging them) isn't progress. Clearly, I am an inmate. Also clearly a prisoner. But how about an offender? That's a whole different class of word, isn't it? Inmate and prisoner describe my condition. They're empirical labels, can be based on observation, they make no assumptions. But "offender" assumes all over the place. Who have I offended? You? Anyone? Did I commit an "offence"? Maybe, maybe not. Plenty of innocent men have hung throughout history. Plenty of beloved ones, too. Socrates, no doubt, offended some. Guess what? Those he offended don't count, in my eyes. Not comparing myself to Socrates here (not directly, anyway), but there are still analogies to be drawn between the long line of people who've suffered for "offending" Power, and the bulk of prisoners today. The word "offender" is presumptuous and deeply judgemental: it also justifies, rationalizes, and embraces the values and judgements of "the system" and its agents. Words like "prisoner" or "inmate" make no moral claim at all and can just as easily describe victims as well as victimizers. There's my 2¢. Want to carry on the conversation? Let me know! 😊