

'Politricks' and the English Language

Posted By [David Solway](#) On November 27, 2014 @ 10:27 pm In [Art,Books,Culture,Education,History,Media,Politics,US News](#) | [9 Comments](#)

An infallible sign of cognitive degradation is the mutilation of language, a phenomenon that is becoming increasingly widespread in the current (anti) intellectual milieu. What George Orwell despaired of in the chronic usages of political language in his 1946 essay "[Politics and the English Language](#)"^[1]—it is "designed to make lies truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind"—seems even more so today. Orwell's "[six rules](#)"^[2] for good writing are not so much the issue here, and some of these have been ably contested by reputable authors. But he is right when he says that clear thinking "is a necessary first step toward political regeneration." Poor thinking corrupts language; slovenly language corrupts thinking—and the inevitable result of these twin perversions is moral corruption and political barbarism.

Of course, one frequently comes across in the political writing of both the left and the right, "progressivists" and conservatives, all manner of less degrading blemishes—grammatical solecisms, logical infelicities, bad paragraphing, sloppy editing practices generating an abundance of typos (my favorites: the "Untied States," the "Pubic Wars"), and the like. This is to be expected in the Age of the Internet, when one writes an article in the morning and posts it in the afternoon, rather than submit it to several days' worth of revision. The Age of Rapidly Breaking News leads to critically broken prose. That we also live in the Age of Declining Educational Standards in which rigorous language training—spelling, punctuation, vocabulary, grammatical concinnity, reading with understanding—has gone by the board and in which the Image has come to predominate over the Word almost guarantees that far too many professional journalists and bloggers can no longer write properly—which means that they can no longer think coherently or even string two or three sentences into a meaningful thought-unit.

But such misfortunes seem like mere peccadilloes when compared to the willful devastation of language used almost exclusively for the transmission of lies and the practice of slander rather than for disciplined argument and conveying empirical verities. Regrettably, linguistic debasement has always been a mainstay of political discourse, whether for "reasons of state," military purposes, electoral advantage, self-promotion, or the arts of persuasion. What we might call "word deformation" is a staple of political life and should not surprise us.

It must also be said that the receiver of the message is equally complicit with the sender, having put his critical faculties to sleep and accepted the eidolon for the thought. The legions of the credulous are ready to take it all in, crook, crime and stinker. Fiction and subterfuge serve the strategic purpose of convincing a pampered and affluent society of its moral virtue, as James Burnham points out in [Suicide of the West](#)^[3], "by affirming [its] loyalty to the correct egalitarian principles...without costing undue personal inconvenience." In other words, we need to feel good about what we feel bad about. We accomplish this feat by a kind of moral polarity, reversing the actual valence of objects or events in order to represent what they are not, and thus sparing ourselves the need to examine our motives, make genuine sacrifices, grapple with disagreeable issues and actively seek out truth.

There are, however, degrees of semantic depravity. Its most malignant form is inexorably associated with totalitarian regimes, wholly invested in the dissemination of what Goebbels called "the Big Lie," the suppression or vitiation of truth and the inflation of its opposite as a systemic function of both governance and statecraft. Orwell's [1984](#)^[4] is the classic text in the study and exposure of totalitarian discourse, though it is a mistake to read the book solely as an example of dystopian fiction or as a cautionary tale. It is a mirror held up to the actual practice of tyrannical and oppressively monolithic regimes. In recent historical times we have seen its pestilential force in fascist, communist and theo-political systems of mind-control: Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia, and now triumphalist Islam.

This, too, should not surprise us. But what should not cease to astonish is the extent to which the language sickness has spread to the democratic West. Far from a mere aberration or an occupational hazard, the Big Lie has been installed among us as the primary form of political and cultural address along the entire gamut of disinformation, from outright interment of fact and customizing of inconvenient truths to unmitigated calumny and virulent libel. The Western media and the "progressivist" left-liberal political class have, over the years, incrementally adopted the discursive techniques of totalitarian states and theocratic dispensations.

One sees the neutralizing or flattening of language intended to mislead especially with regard to Islam. Muslim rapists and felons in the UK and Scandinavia are routinely referred to as "Asians"—a demographic blend that serves as a linguistic cowcatcher sweeping law-abiding Korean, Chinese, Indian, Vietnamese and Filipino immigrants into its purview. The distinction between "Islamic" and "Islamist" is another such evasion. A recent [column](#)^[5] in the *National Post*, relying on the default position of the MSM, speaks of "the perverted values governing entire *Islamist*-dominated regimes" (italics mine). But where are such "Islamist" regimes to be found? Pakistan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Qatar, Indonesia, Algeria, Morocco, Mali, Syria, Iraq, Hizbollah/Lebanon and Iran, among the [49](#)^[6] Muslim-majority countries in the world, are not Islamist regimes, but self-avowedly Islamic. Indeed, Pakistan designates itself officially as the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, not the Islamist Republic of Pakistan. Iran is the Islamic Republic of Iran, not the Islamist Republic of Iran. The terror regime that now controls one third of Iraq calls itself the Islamic State, not the Islamist State.

What, then, is Islamism? [According to Daniel Pipes](#)^[7], Islamism is "the radical Islamic impulse to apply Sharia." However, despite a process of re-interpretation and adaptation to changing circumstances over time, the application of Sharia—that is, Islamic law—is mandated in the Koran and constitutes the solemn duty of every believing Muslim. *It is not radical but canonical*. That many Muslims are indifferent to the command, or seek to edulcorate it, changes nothing; it is "on the books" and will remain in force or constantly be revived when it is neglected. Islam, not Islamism, is the source of Sharia law and the fount of all that we reprehend as radical or extreme or, as our Procrustean Bowdlerizers like to say, "anti-Islamic." As Diana West [puts it](#)^[8], the "anti-Christianity, anti-Judaism law under consideration here is itself Islamic—as quintessentially Islamic as the prayers themselves...sharia is the codified mainstay of Islam." Note: of Islam, not Islamism. It behooves us to get the language right. Are we so timorous that our greatest fear is of contravening the detours of political correctness—the technique of evasion—rather than of an adversary who aims to destroy us, whether through terror or demography? I confess that I am still hunting in vain for a credible definition of "Islamism" or for that mysterious entity known as an "Islamist."

The slippery slope has now become a precipitous cliff-face. We note how academia has come to resemble the German universities of the 1930s, centers not of learning and scholarship but of political indoctrination. Our media outlets are like the *Pravdas* and *Izvestias* of the Soviet Union but to a more effective degree, since they operate under the guise of freedom and openness, thus deceiving a lazy and gullible clientele unaware that "News" has morphed into propaganda. The occupant of the most powerful office in the world, the American presidency, is the living incarnation of the Prince of Lies (the latest in an endless series of lies being that the Ebola virus is definitely not [airborne](#)^[9] and that the U.S. will not put boots on the ground in Iraq) and yet he continues to energize his electoral base and wealthy donors with an appealing façade and typically suave rhetoric. And the political elite with its hangers-on—feminists, race mongers, journalists, "pro-choicers," radical bloggers, anti-Zionists, "social justice" activists, community organizers, liberation theologians—no longer even try, for the most part, to engage in argument and honest debate but have resorted to a broad range of rhetorical expedients: barefaced falsehoods, gross defamation, character assassination, crude hyperbole, and flagrant vulgarity. So much for the public conversation of ideas. Saul Alinsky would be proud.

One comes across innumerable instances of such malpractice every day. Just one hour of desultory Internet scanning yielded the following:

- John Kerry, another master of mendacity, informs the world that global warming (the greatest scam of the modern age) is a more "[fearsome threat](#)"^[10] than Ebola or ISIS.
- A Kuwaiti imam delivers a *khutbah* in which he [affirms](#)^[11] that ISIS is selling women, young girls and children to the Israelis.
- MSNBC airs a segment in which [Republicans are blamed](#)^[12] for the outbreak of Ebola in the U.S.
- Texas Democrat Wendy Davis publishes a [wheelchair ad](#)^[13] targeting rival gubernatorial candidate Greg Abbott, who is paralyzed from the waist down. Shades of Texas state Rep. Trey Martinez Fischer, who [said](#)^[14] at a state Democratic convention that the GOP stands for "gringos y otras pendagos," or "white and other assholes"; informed that Abbott was in attendance he replied "if I had known that I would toll [sic] him directly to his face." (Interestingly, Abbott's wife is Mexican American.)
- The blog [Another angry woman](#)^[15] instructs us that we live in a culture of gendered violence and that the patriarchy "oppresses the f**k out of women."
- A [feminist video site](#)^[16] employs young girls, who look to be about five or six years old, launching a barrage of F-words to further the cause.
- Mustafa Hussein, aka Theodore Barrett, a convicted child molester helping to foment the Ferguson race riots, is the subject of "[fawning, quishing profiles](#)"^[17] by NPR, *Washington Post*, *Huffington Post*, MSNBC, Bloomberg, and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*."
- Feminist diva Sarah Silverman attempts to justify voter fraud to benefit Obama and the Democrats, [brazenly asserting](#)^[18] that "lawmakers are trying to f**k you in your asshole"; not content with concealing the fact that photo ID is required for almost every official transaction in the public sphere, Silverman proceeds to pound the drum for unlimited [abortion rights](#)^[19], entertains an encouraging visit from "Jesus fu**ing Christ," deplors that women seeking abortions are "forced to look at an ultrasound of the foetus" (horror of horrors); and continues to fracture language with a blizzard of jargonny "likes" and generous dollops of sleaze and smut.
- South Carolina Democrat gubernatorial candidate state Senator Vincent Sheheen [tells supporters](#)^[20] re. his opponent Republican governor Nikki Haley, "We are going to escort whore...her...out the door." A gaffe? A Freudian slip, perhaps, but judging from Shaheen's pleased laughter, one that points to a real sentiment.
- A brilliant and passionate [Rosh Hashanah sermon](#)^[21] by Rabbi Shalom Lewis of Marietta, Georgia, anatomizing the spread of evil in our time, in which every sentence contains a lode of verifiable truth, is met by a cyber onslaught of obloquy, vile assertions, character innuendo, and lies of consummate vulgarity, while no attempt is made to rebut the rabbi's claims with rational or evidentiary counter-arguments.

One recalls late French ambassador Daniel Bernard, a socialist of impeccable credentials, who rose to the heights of analytical brilliance and coruscating eloquence in his assessment of international complexities by [proclaiming](#)^[22] that "all the current troubles in the world are because of that sh**ty little country Israel." *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*.

This from an hour's worth of random Internet surfing. There are slip-ups on the right as well, obviously: the occasional use of intemperate language and defamatory episodes

during in-house controversies, which I deplore but which are, thankfully, comparatively infrequent. Nonetheless, as Andrew Klavan consulting the [Lefese dictionary](#) ^[23] has explained, "We stodgy conservatives are mired in the old-fashioned practice of using language to convey thoughts and ideas, but zippy, forward-looking, youth-oriented leftists use words that aren't weighed down by things like 'meaning,' or 'sense.'" For the liberal-left and its special-interest minions, the main purpose of language is to revile opponents, to bury or re-va-va-va the truth and to convey fables and forgeries in its stead — for which, as Al Sharpton has richly demonstrated, [bad grammar](#) ^[24] and [tortured English](#) ^[25] are no impediments.

But the dilemma goes deeper than that, even among those who are capable of writing passable prose or speaking articulately. *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman (solve the debt problem by creating [more debt](#) ^[26]) and Tom Friedman (Israel employs "[Hamas Rules](#)" ^[27] in Gaza and Lebanon) are good illustrations of reality-challenged ideologues blinded by their own preconceptions, plainly several bubbles off level. Islamic apologist Reza Aslan is another case in point, a man who, as Sam Harris [writes](#) ^[28], "cannot possibly believe what he says, because nearly everything he says is a lie or a half-truth calibrated to mislead a liberal audience. If he claims something isn't in the Koran, it probably is." Others like actor Ben Affleck, who appeared on Bill Maher's [Real Time interview panel](#) ^[29] with Harris, simply don't know what they are talking about, trading in ignorant mystifications whereby words signal or attach to personally held concepts, prejudices or assumptions rather than to anything in the real world of political affairs.

In other words, the fundamental grammar of thought itself has been decoupled from the real world, floating off into the realms of fantasy and ideological semiotics — a mental field comprising the four states of myopia, ignorance, bias and deception — where the linkage between idea and fact has been thoroughly supplanted by a false vinculum, that is, by a connection between a signifier and a figment (what I like to call the Sigfig Nexus), an expression and a distortion, agitprop and illusion, a word and a non-thing — to say, as Swift put it in the Fourth Book of [Gulliver's Travels](#) ^[30], "the thing which is not." This species of cognitive transgression goes beyond Aristotle's laws of thought in which "A" cannot equal "not-A." Aristotle was concerned with logic, not duplicity, with non-contradiction, not deception. In the latter case, "A" is not meant only to equal "not-A"; "A" is also meant to equal zero. It says the thing which is not. In today's "progressivist" milieu, the lie has become not merely a promiscuous aspect of discourse; *it has become the essence of discourse*. We see how well it functions in the recent [practice](#) ^[31] of legislative Gruberism.

The term "progressive" or "progressivist" as currently plied assumes that ethical progress is historically determined, in other words, relying on the Marxist model, that it is a kind of dialectical moralism. Klavan illustrates by showing how the "idea of progress is built into another left wing phrase, 'the 21st Century.' In leftese, the 21st century means a magical place of peace and enlightenment. The phrase is found in such leftese sentences as 'Putin can't just conquer Crimea, this is the 21st century,' or 'No religion wants to behead non-believers and enslave women anymore. This is the 21st century.' When this wonderful 21st century will actually occur is anyone's guess. Probably not for hundreds of years. In the meantime, the phrase can be usefully employed instead of taking meaningful action." Progressivism has institutionalized a parallel, disjunctive language that says the opposite of what is the case or asserts the thing which is not, in the interests of ideological [bracketing](#) ^[32]. As David Gelernter laments in [the Weekly Standard](#) ^[33], the "victory of brainless ideology is on the brink of becoming institutionalized" — if it has not already. Gelernter is alluding to the ravages of the "feminist incubator," but his dirge applies to "progressivism" in general.

At the farther end of this sliding scale of linguistic derailment, this campaign against truth, we find what is fast becoming the dirty shirt of ostensibly discursive garb; that is, the response to researched and lucid argument not only with deliberate fabrications but with volleys of obscenity, ranging from invective and insinuation to *ad hominem* attacks and the most sordid of profanities. Such is the language of the left, manipulating the lie in all its forms (omission, misrepresentation, exaggeration) and culminating in verbal assault and battery — all tried and tested means of avoiding rational debate and informed discussion.

Once language has been so thoroughly denatured, poisoning the wells of communication and rendering truth an archaic remnant of political nostalgia, the prospects for the recovery of honor, health and strength in a society fade into [Spenglerian](#) ^[34] darkness. Western intellectuals, academics, journalists, politicians and civic leaders have learned from the West's ideological enemies, having mastered the science of the Big Lie. And in betraying language, they have betrayed the world of thought and the culture of freedom, hawking the tainted wares of a demonic illiteracy.

Note: A separate but related issue has to do with high levels of immigration. The 2013 [American Community Survey](#) ^[35] (ACS) reports that 21% of U.S. residents speak a language other than English at home. [Steven Camarota](#) ^[36], research director at the Center for Immigration Studies, worries that "allowing in over 1 million new legal immigrants a year and to a lesser extent tolerating illegal immigration has important implications for preserving a common language." However, as we have seen, the "common language" has already been blighted and debauched both by those who are partially agnostic and given to scatology as well as those who can write and speak intelligibly but put their facility in the service of chicanery and dissimulation. Many are merely foot soldiers and language goons; others occupy positions of authority and influence. This is the left's poisoned gift to the "common language."

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