



The Corruption of Language



JOHN LOCKE said "Language is the great bond that holds society together." Language is the common conduit whereby knowledge is conveyed from one man and one generation to another. It accomplishes this crucial task by enabling us to record our own thoughts and to communicate with others.

Today we are witnessing a corruption of our language, effectively destroying the bond that holds society together. There are several reasons for this, but all of them have a common goal—"to darken truth and unsettle people's rights," as Locke put it.

To appreciate the crucial and indispensable task that language performs, one needs only to understand

what language is and how it functions; that is, language is primarily a tool of cognition. It provides us with a system of classifying and organizing knowledge. It enables us to acquire knowledge on an unlimited scale and to keep order in our minds, which means, enables us to think. The principal consequence of language is communication.

Thus it is by the retention of concepts, i.e., language, that man retains knowledge. And to the extent he files his knowledge efficiently, the easier it is to recall it, add to it, change it, discard it, and communicate it to others. Locke, who thoroughly appreciated this, encouraged mankind to think clearly and concisely, so that all should know what their rights are, that progress could take place, and mankind live in peace.

Why do some people choose to cor-

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rupt words? Perhaps to persuade others of a certain point of view or to win an argument at any cost, regardless of where the truth lies. Some do it simply to sell a product or to make a profit. But we are concerned here with those of evil intentions who wish to "unsettle people's rights." They will employ any means to gain their end, such as obscurantism, obfuscation, deception, and falsification.

Other techniques of corrupting language, according to Locke, are to abuse words by either applying old words to new and unusual significations, introducing new and ambiguous terms without defining either, or else putting words together to confound their ordinary meaning.

The Dollar Devalued

To illustrate the technique of applying new and unusual meanings to old words, here is how the standard of value—the Dollar—was corrupted. Prior to 1933, the Dollar was a "standard unit of value," of twenty-five and four-fifth grains of ninety percent fine gold. Since then the United States government has phased out the gold standard and substituted its own absolute control over the value of the currency (with the resulting depreciation of the dollar, i.e., inflation).

As a result of the corruption of this crucial standard, other values have been likewise corrupted:

productiveness, self-reliance, honesty, independence, and integrity. For the promise of security, many Americans have sold their birthright of freedom.

This is clearly deceptive for while government promises to pay for security—free education, health insurance, social security, and the like—it is corrupting the very medium it uses as payment, namely the currency. Eventually there will be no education, no health insurance, no employment, no real currency, no security, and no freedom.

Another method of undermining a free country, to "darken truth and unsettle people's rights," is to corrupt the citizens' sense of justice. Frederic Bastiat's *The Law* explains how governments use laws and justice interchangeably, because most people view law and justice as one and the same thing. Thus it is only necessary for a law to decree something and it appears just and proper. Examples of using laws to sanction injustices are compulsory education, progressive taxation, conscription, welfare programs, and legal tender. Once the distinction between justice and injustice has been obscured the citizen has been placed in the tenuous position of choosing between justice and disrespect for such laws and those who passed them.

Justice, however, is a state where men live honestly, hurt no one, and

give to every one his due; it is not an excuse to rob Peter to pay Paul. An unjust society not only darkens truth, it leads to an unhappy and discontent society. The corruption of words is an insidious process which spreads like a cancer, corrupting and destroying everything around it.

At Whose Expense?

The word "freedom" has also been perverted. It once meant to be free from political oppression. Now it means freedom from wants and needs—from hunger, unemployment, sickness, illiteracy, old-age worries, and the like. The question to ask here is, at whose expense? Then it becomes obvious that these new freedoms are at someone's expense, and are not really freedoms, but irresponsible promises by government.

Related to these newly promulgated freedoms is the ambiguous phrase "economic rights." Thus the new freedoms have become political "rights." But while government promotes nefarious "economic rights," it is actively destroying our true political rights: life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. Because someone must pay for these "economic rights" we are actually enslaving some part of the populace in the name of and benefit for some other part of the populace. But there can be no right to enslave

another. Either the nation is free or it is not. As Albert Jay Nock said in response to Franklin Roosevelt's Four Freedoms: "There is no such thing, four or forty. Freedom has no plural. Freedom either is, or isn't."

A second technique of corrupting the meaning of rights is quite subtle, but highly effective, because it seems to call attention to them. Locke called this "pretending to inform." Nowadays it takes the form of advocating "human rights." We hear this phrase constantly, and yet, what does it mean? Do we hear anything about the right to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness in connection with it? We get the feeling that somehow it is an empty phrase, devoid of any worthy meaning.

As there can be no other rights than to sustain, protect, and enjoy one's life, any slogans advocating other rights are in fact "anti-rights." They necessarily abrogate the very essence of a right and substitute instead privileges or favors, which are bestowed on one group at the expense of another by a higher authority, in this case the government.

Confounding the meaning of words can successfully corrupt them. As for example, the meaning of the word "control" has been distorted by connecting it with an object such as price, wage, gun, or credit. But to control an inanimate object is nonsense. The real issue is "people" control. Under the guise of

"regulating" certain vital segments of the economy, the government has acquired control over individual lives.

Control of People

All knowledgeable people will admit that wage, price, and credit controls can never end currency depreciation. They merely suppress symptoms. They distract the uninformed person from the cause of inflation, which is government's monetary policy, to focus on the effects, which are the continually rising cost of labor, products, and money. The government gives the false impression of taking positive action. But, in fact, it is only interfering with free markets, which are trying to cope with a depreciating currency. In reality, the government has acquired control over people.

One should always be on guard against any political phrase which contains the word "control" in it. For whenever a government decides to control some *thing*, it invariably means to control some *one*.

Regulations are used in the same manner. To regulate a business, to license a practitioner, is to regulate and control a person. The horror becomes obvious when regulations and licenses are applied to the arts, where individuals deal directly with abstractions. The alarm is quickly sounded when authors, composers, news media, artists, and the like are

threatened by any loss of freedom. Although the principle holds true for every businessman, professional, laborer, and trader, the issue has been successfully obfuscated by government calling for some kind of "regulation." But individuals should never be regulated.

When a government promises to insure quality products, honest businessmen, competitiveness, and integrity by utilizing controls and regulations, it only insures higher costs, lower standards, and the waste of resources.

All forms of human rights, economic rights, the Four Freedoms, wage-price-credit-gun-controls, free education, legal tender, welfare programs, regulations, and so on are in reality, different ways of corrupting the things they are supposedly designed to protect. By employing various forms of obfuscation, obscurantism, deception, falsification, and by pretending to inform, the American Republic has been successfully corrupted from within—morally, politically, and financially.

This state of affairs is properly termed socialism, where individual rights have been replaced by government bureaus and bureaucrats who enforce the decreed regulations and controls. This is the definition and essence of tyranny. It makes little difference whether our rulers are domestic or foreign, American or Russian, whether they are called

secretaries, leaders, commissions, presidents, or departments; individual freedom has been confined and limited; government power has been unchained and is unlimited. We are an oppressed people.

Improve the Understanding

Where lies the solution? Or should we ask, with whom does the solution lie? How can we sift through the morass of deceptive meanings and corrupt language to reach the truth?

To begin, individuals must assume their own responsibility for acting as thinking, judging citizens. They must question unclear and ambiguous pronouncements coming from politicians, educators, and news media. Fuzzy thinking must not be allowed into the reasoning process. If the general public is satisfied with half-truths, lies, and distortions, this is what it will receive. So we must raise our standards of acquiring knowledge; then these deceptive practices cannot be used against us.

Furthermore, since plain and direct words cannot be "employed to darken truth and unsettle people's rights," as Locke aptly put it, we ought to simplify our lives and the words we use. Long, hard-to-define, ambiguous words, like those coined by bureaucrats and pseudo-intellectuals, are no longer impressive or appropriate. By ambiguous we mean terms like "national

wealth," "national state of the economy," and "general welfare," when there are no such things, only individual wealth and individual welfare. We should not want the wool pulled over our eyes nor our emotions comforted with familiar catch-phrases. We must demand the truth in all matters, for the truth always gives a favorable impression to the mind and spirit of man.

In *The Federalist* No. 37, James Madison said, "The use of words is to express ideas. Perspicuity, therefore, requires not only that the ideas should be distinctly formed, but that they should be expressed by words distinctly and exclusively appropriate to them." When we return to using specific concepts to declare our meanings, then our writing, speaking, and language will once more acquire the force of truth and usefulness it should possess.

The Individual Is Responsible for the Freedom Sought

Actually, to end the corruption of the language, individual rights, and our wonderful life-style of freedom and productivity, needs merely the desire and willpower of the people who are the victims being hurt by this insidious process. As in all acts of irresponsibility, it requires the assumption of the responsibility by the individual, who is sanctioning his own destruction, to continually judge issues presented to him, to

seek the truth, and to settle for nothing less. Dishonest individuals and groups will always try to gain their ends by any means available. So evil can only flourish where the good is ignored and left unattended.

What all of this boils down to is ethics and morality. The corruption of the language is merely a reflection of the corruption of the morals and ethics of the general public. Therefore, just as morality is a personal responsibility, so is the use (or abuse) of language. Keeping lan-

guage pure, meaningful, and accurate is thus the responsibility of every thinker, speaker, writer, listener, and reader, in addition, every reporter, journalist, publisher, newscaster, and editor.

A free people require individual integrity of purpose and justice in all things. That is what it took to win our liberty. That is what is required of us today to reclaim our liberty, and to make sure that language is indeed the bond that holds society together. ☉

Liberty is Limited Government

LIBERTY is limited government. I know that is not the philosophical definition but it is the practical definition. I go along with the theological experts who will say—and I agree—that liberty is merely my right to do what I *ought* to do. I am not at liberty to kill the man next to me. I may have the power but not the liberty to destroy his right. But practically, liberty means limited government. What is the opponent of liberty throughout history? Is it the big corporation, the big union? No. The only institution that has destroyed human liberty irrevocably is big government. The Founding Fathers looked over 6,000 years of human history, and saw the God-given rights of man burned to a crisp at least once in every generation by the fire of government.

... We couldn't get along without government, because we are a benighted race. But at the same time, unless you keep government as you keep fire, under control, checked and balanced, separated, divided, tied down, government will destroy you. That is the rationale of our Constitution. It doesn't make sense otherwise.

CLARENCE MANION, "Right and Wrong—
Not Right and Left"

IDEAS ON



LIBERTY

The Property Basis of Rights



THERE has been an attempt to separate property rights from other rights in this century. It has usually been done by labeling some rights as "human rights" and referring to others as "rights" of property. This distinction has been accompanied by the claim that "human rights" are superior to "property rights." For example, in the late 1950s when the McClellan Committee held Senate hearings on labor union activities, a labor leader put the matter this way: "Well, Senator, my primary concern was the safety and welfare of the people in that area. It simply was against my religion and against my principles and religion at this time to have placed property rights above human rights. . . . I think the

obligation was more to protect the human rights than the property rights at that particular time."¹

The distinction did not go unchallenged. In the 1960s there was even a sort of slogan coined which called it into question. It went something like this: "Property rights *are* human rights." The idea had some appeal. After all, rights are not something ordinarily thought of as belonging to plants or the lower animals. If there is a right to property, it must be first and foremost a *human* right. That was not, of course, quite the distinction the critics of property rights were attempting to make. They referred to property rights as if they were rights belonging to property. Those who challenged this concept maintained, to the contrary, that property rights were really rights of human beings

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