

The Battle for Vocabulary in Political Speech: Historical Perspective on Misnomers, Euphemisms, Aspersions, and Shibboleths

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Abstract

Political speech is wrought with vocabulary which is meant to be difficult to decipher. In the battle for vocabulary, four tools impede our understanding of political speech: misnomers, euphemisms, aspersions, and shibboleths. Misnomers are aliases; euphemisms hide filth; aspersions spread filth; and shibboleths identify and sort out factions. The scope of this essay is to define these terms, identify some crucial vocabulary terms on the political continuum, especially the terms “right” and “left”, and provide some historical perspective. The focus will be on German and Soviet socialist states to the exclusion of other totalitarian regimes because the former have had a greater influence on vocabulary in political speech.

And who knows which is which and who is who

Haven't you heard it's a battle of words?
The poster bearer cried.
Listen son, said the man with the gun
There's room for you inside.

Pink Floyd, “Us and Them”, *Dark Side of the Moon*, 1973

The slogan from George Orwell's 1948 book *1984* that “he who controls the past controls the future: he who controls the present controls the past.” is relevant to the discussion of the battle over vocabulary. Without some historical background of political vocabulary, we are bound to misunderstand it.

The absurdity in *1984* provides insight into political speech with slogans such as WAR IS PEACE, FREEDOM IS SLAVERY, and IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH. In his 1946 essay *The Politics of English*, Orwell writes “Political language -- and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists -- is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.” (Orwell, 1946)

Even Orwell, who in my opinion had great insight into political speech, was not exempt from the battle for vocabulary. Although he was most likely not taking sides, he resorted to the use of

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misnomers central to his point. Both, “Conservatives” and “Anarchists” are misnomers on the political continuum.

Misnomers are discombobulating

I get you, smart guy, I know what you are.
Straight as a corkscrew. Mr. Inside-Outsky.
Like a goddamn bolshevik, picking up your orders
from Yegg Central. You think you're so goddamn
smart.

You joined up with Caspar. You bumped Bernie
Bernbaum. Down is up. Black is white.

The Dane to Tommy in *Miller's Crossing*, Joel and Ethan Coen, 1990

Misnomer from Medieval French *misnomer*, to *misname*, from *mes-*, wrongly + *nommer*, to name, from Latin *nomino*, *nominare*, to name, from *nomen*, a name. Vocabulary in political speech is a dynamic force. A continuous misnomer continuum houses this vocabulary which vies for position, jousted about by political factions in battle to control its position.

Brian Greene in *The Elegant Universe: Superstrings, Hidden Dimensions, and the Quest for the Ultimate Theory*, points out that the term “atom” comes from a Greek word meaning indivisible, or uncuttable. “In the nineteenth century scientists showed that many familiar substances such as oxygen and carbon had a smallest recognizable constituent; following in the tradition laid down by the Greeks, they called them atoms. The name stuck, but history has shown it to be a misnomer, since atoms surely are cuttable.” This type of misnomer, however, does little to degrade our understanding of the atom.

Celibate is another term in which the battle for the term has nearly been won by the misnomer. Its root is from the Latin *caelibtus*, from *caelebs*, *caelib-*, unmarried. Celibate means only “unmarried” without any implication of sexual activity. “Chaste,” not “celibate,” refers to sexual abstinence. Once dictionaries referee in favor of the misnomer, the term becomes just another *bete noire* for conservative wordsmiths.

Misnomers can result from poor grammar. Terms of improper grammatical usage seem to be increasingly common. For example, the term “healthful” refers to something which results in improved health, as in a healthful habit or meal. The meal itself is not healthy; it will not lead a vigorous life. Yet I often use this misnomer for fear of sounding pedantic.

Objects are often hard to name to a classification. Is a duckbill platypus a mammal? A peanut is

not a pea, nor is it a nut. A beernut is not a nut. Considering questions of whether corn is a vegetable or grain, or whether a tomato is a fruit or vegetable are trivial pursuits.

An alias is a misnomer which hides the identity of a person, place, or thing as shown in the following account by Laurie Mylroie citing her book *Study of Revenge: Saddam Hussein's Unfinished War Against America*: “The key evidence revolves around the identity of the bomb's mastermind, Ramzi Yousef. He entered the United States as Ramzi Yousef, Iraqi citizen, but left as Abdul Basit Karim, Pakistani national. In fact, both names are aliases.”

Misnomers vary in degree of importance in our lives, and may have little effect on human action, but misnomers play a central role in the battle for vocabulary in political speech. They may appear as euphemisms or aspersions. They may appear as personifications, which weave and dodge, attack and destroy. They are powerful tools designed to confuse and to change behavior; they can hold the power of destruction or survival. Hence, the study of vocabulary in political speech is worthy of consideration.

Down the Rabbit Hole

Morpheus: I know exactly what you mean. Let me tell you why you're here. You're here because you know something. What you know you can't explain. But you feel it. You've felt it your entire life. That there's something wrong with the world. You don't know what it is but it's there, like a splinter in your mind driving you mad. It is this feeling that has brought you to me. Do you know what I'm talking about?

Neo: The Matrix?

-Morpheus to Neo in *The Matrix*, Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999

The political continuum is the matrix of current political speech; “right” and “left” mark opposite poles of this scale. This paradigm directs political speech and human action. It is the shibboleth which stifles debate and clouds clear thinking. This spectrum is meant to classify concepts on a polar scale as do full and empty, black and white, good and evil, free will and determinism; but “right” and “left” are arbitrary and artificial misnomers in so far as they are representative of discombobulating political concepts. The vocabulary words “right” and “left” would not be poor markers, except that communists presently hold the left position and fascists have been deposited on the right. The terms are not opposite in meaning; the terms are more nearly synonyms than antonyms. To posit National and Soviet Socialists on opposite ends of the polarity assumes a delusion that the two totalitarian dictatorships have distinct and divergent philosophies, practices, and results. There is something wrong with this world. This is a ludicrous shibboleth.

We can gain some insight into this battle for vocabulary from the journalist William Shirer who wrote in 1933 that “Europe was stirring again, increasingly fragmented between the fascist authoritarianism of the Right in Germany and Italy, and the threat of it in Spain, and of the Left in Russia.” (Shirer, p. 78) This use of “right” and “left” suggests that Shirer considered these terms distinct and on opposite ends of the political continuum, even back in 1933. He made extensive use of these aspersions in writing, e.g. Heinrich Himmler “became involved in right wing activities of Hitler’s Nazi party.” (Shirer, p. 184) It should be pointed out that Shirer supported The New Deal as many Americans did, but did not publicly consider and compare policies of governmental incrementalism by the Americans and Germans. On the contrary, he placed Himmler on the right wing, along with opponents of the New Deal. Once Nazi cross-cultural parallels with various brands of socialism are demonstrated, aspersion cast on the right can be thrown off. This discovery requires some historical analysis.

The German Worker’s Party (GPW) was formed in 1919 by Anton Drexler, Gottfried Feder and Dietrich Eckart in Munich. The German Army was worried that it was a left-wing revolutionary group, and so sent Adolf Hitler, one of its education officers, to spy on the organization. Hitler agreed with the party’s political ideas of German nationalism and anti-Semitism. Though Hitler was there as a spy, he could not restrain himself when a member made a point he disagreed with, and he stood up and made a passionate speech.

Drexler was impressed with Hitler’s abilities as an orator and invited him to join the party. Hitler agreed after being urged on by his commanding officer, Captain Karl Mayr. Hitler was immediately asked to join the executive committee, and was later appointed the party’s propaganda manager. The party was still small, and Hitler disagreed with others how the party should be run. He later took over leadership of the party, and changed the name to National Socialist German Workers Party, or *Nationale Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei* (NSDAP), more commonly known as the Nazi Party.

In 1944 Frederick A. Hayek, in *The Road to Serfdom*, wrote about the phenomenon of ideological delusions of these two forms of totalitarianism at that time. What drives the perpetuation that these are divergent concepts?

“There are few signs yet that we have the intellectual courage to admit to ourselves that we may have been wrong. Few are ready to recognize that the rise of fascism and nazism was not a reaction against the socialist trends of the preceding period but a necessary outcome of those tendencies. This is a truth which most people were unwilling to see even when the similarities of many of the repellent features of the internal regimes in communist Russia and National Socialist Germany were widely recognized. As a result, many who think themselves infinitely superior to the aberrations of nazism, and sincerely hate all its manifestations, work at the same time

for ideals whose realization would lead straight to the abhorred tyranny.” (Hayek, p. 3-4)

Nazism has a unique status as an absolute evil, which is now entrenched in political speech. It has been severed from other brands of socialism and dumped on the right; any effort to dislodge it appears suspect. This insidious association of the Nazis and fascists with the right wing has become the defining battle for vocabulary in political speech. The policies of the NSDAP did not vary from the original platform of the GPW in its course over those few years following 1919. Therefore the concept that the German Worker's Party is extreme left wing and the National Socialist German Worker's Party is extreme right wing is a dangerous hoax.

Big Moustache and Little Moustache

‘I like the Walrus best,’ said Alice: ‘because you see he was a LITTLE sorry for the poor oysters.’

‘He ate more than the Carpenter, though,’ said Tweedledee. ‘You see he held his handkerchief in front, so that the Carpenter couldn't count how many he took: contrariwise.’

‘That was mean!’ Alice said indignantly. ‘Then I like the Carpenter best-if he didn't eat so many as the Walrus.’

‘But he ate as many as he could get,’ said Tweedledum.

This was a puzzler. After a pause, Alice began, ‘Well! They were BOTH very unpleasant characters--’

Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, 1872

The totalitarian regimes of the Fascists and Communists advocated similar economic theories. They were ideological mates. Parallels between Russian and German brands of socialism are evident, but with minor distinctions in form and practice due to differences in historical factors in language, geography, culture, and regime life span.

The Russian language with its Cyrillic alphabet and its multitude of syllables is difficult to assimilate into the English language. We know the names of Eichmann, Himmler, and Ribbentrop, but not of Kaganovich, Voroshilov, or Tukhachevshy. The terms “fascist” and “nazi” are evil sounding and have been engrained in the English language, but not the Russian counterparts. The terms “commie” and “pinko” sound benign and, as such, are euphemistic.

The geographic location of Germany was center stage in the world, while the geographic isolation of the Soviet Union insulated its brutality from exposure. Berlin was a center of culture and technology, with tourists and foreign correspondents. The Soviet gulags and work camps, the districts of famine, and effective censorship required isolation.

Each of the two states used all the resources at its disposal. Stalin could not use gas chambers because he didn't have the technology, and Hitler could not use starvation because he didn't have the isolation. The German socialist state had a short life span compared to that in Russia, whose regime was not allowed to die a timely death, as did voluntary communal societies such as the Pilgrims or kibbutzim. The Soviet socialist state had no less disdain for human life, and bore identical fruit that of the NSDAP.

“When the Soviet policies of mass extermination of all dissenters and of ruthless violence removed the inhibitions against wholesale murder, which still troubled some of the Germans, nothing could any longer stop the advance of Nazism. The Nazis were quick to adopt the Soviet methods. They imported from Russia: the one-party system and the pre-eminence of this party in political life; the paramount position assigned to the secret police; the concentration camps; the administrative execution or imprisonment of all opponents; the extermination of the families of suspects and of exiles; the methods of propaganda; the organization of affiliated parties abroad and their employment for fighting their domestic governments and espionage and sabotage; the use of the diplomatic and consular service for fomenting revolution; and many other things besides. There were nowhere more docile disciples of Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin than the Nazis were.

Hitler was not the founder of Nazism; he was its product. He was, like most of his collaborators, a sadistic gangster...

The Nazi plan was more comprehensive and therefore more pernicious than that of the Marxians. It aimed at abolishing *laissez-faire* not only in the production of material goods, but no less in the production of men. The Fuhrer was not only the general manager of all industries; he was also the general manger of the breeding-farm intent upon rearing superior men and eliminating inferior stock. A grandiose scheme of eugenics was to be put into effect according to “scientific” principles. (von Mises, pp. 580-81)

Raymond Aron in *Democracy and Totalitarianism* made the distinction between extermination practiced to achieve political ends and extermination as ends unto itself. According to this fallacy Communism comes off as less evil than Nazism, because it has better stated intentions hidden behind a cloak of various historical factors. The Communists apparently killed their victims

based on their actions rather than their identities, but evidence shows that Communists used shibboleths to sort out their victims as the Nazis did. This moral approach to Communism has insulated the shocking dimensions of its carnage. It promised a nonviolent road to socialist utopia while it suppressed private property, profit, and the market.

An often-cited rationalization for the difference in position on the political continuum between these two brands of socialism relates to the intent and method of killing. The Russians and Chinese Communists used starvation as their most lethal weapon. It has been argued that the Communists had good intentions, but were just bad economists, or poor farmers. Starvation is an insidious method of murder, largely because of the opportunity to deny responsibility. The Nazis had no opportunity to deny responsibility for the results of the gas chambers, but starvation can be blamed on other circumstances. First of all, the victims can be blamed if they put up any resistance. In the dekulakization process and famine of 1922, opponents of collectivization refused to hand over their property; many destroyed their foodstuffs rather than turn them over to the state.

The starvation process follows a predictable pattern: good farmers have their private property stolen, wiping out the means of food production, which then grinds to a halt. The theft is often disguised by euphemistic phrases such as equitable land reform, expropriation, or collectivization. The market is restricted, preventing an exodus of people to food or an influx of food from outside. If food relief does come from outside in a totalitarian state, that food becomes the currency which pays for political loyalty further empowering the ruling regime. It is often evident that regimes intend to kill by starvation. It was with great reluctance that the Russian Communists accepted food relief from the Nansen Committee and the American Relief Administration. Mao compounded the starvation process in the Great Leap Forward, the greatest famine in history, by dictating poor farming practices.

Starvation occurs in isolated totalitarian states such as Russia and China in the 20th century, the hermit state of North Korea, and most recently this pattern of starvation has been playing out in the African country Zimbabwe, formerly known as Rhodesia. Once the socialist regime of Robert Mugabe and Zanu-PF set out to seize the private property of the good, white farmers, it became certain that famine would occur, given the isolation of the country. On a local level, blame for the famine will be put on the white farmers and forces of nature. Explanation of the starvation to the outside world will be put on weather conditions and the campaign of lawless seizures of white farms. But there would have been no famine if it were a country with private property rights, free markets, and free people. There will be a battle for food distribution with the totalitarians pushing its use as political payoff. The question at present is whether the socialists can hold on to its power, and to what extent free countries will insist on intervention and control of food distribution. Presumably, it will be to a greater extent than what Fridtjof Nansen insisted upon.

Another often cited rationalization for placing fascists on the right is the contention that NSDAP was not as anti-capitalist as the Communists were. It is true that Hitler had the benefit of learning from the failures of the Bolsheviks. He learned that state run industry comes at a heavy cost, which he couldn't afford at the point of his takeover. He allowed the party to take control of every sphere of government and public policy, but kept them out of the army and industry because he needed high efficiency in those in order to win support from the masses. "Hitler thought that Lenin's greatest economic mistake had been to order party members to take over the running of industry, and kill or expel its capitalist managers." (Johnson, p. 295)

Germany was in a state of high unemployment in the early 1930s coming after the hyperinflation period of the 1920s, as opposed to Russia where Lenin took control in an agrarian society going through a civil war. Hitler's great success in the early years was eliminating unemployment. Over 8 million were out of work when Hitler took over, by 1934 there were only 3 million unemployed, with shortages in certain categories, and by 1936 there was virtually full employment. By 1938, German firms were in great need of workers at a time when other industrial countries still had high unemployment.

Hitler did not have much of an economic policy, but he did have serendipity: he hated tight money and high interest rates, not because he understood economics, but because he associated them with Jews whom he hated. He didn't smash the big Jewish department stores, as he often threatened to do, because his Minister of Economics Hjalmar Schacht persuaded him it would come at a cost of 90,000 jobs. Companies such as I.G. Farben and Krupps had been corrupted by the Nazis, but survived at a cost of slavery to Hitler. "Schacht was by far the cleverest financial minister any country had between the wars. He was a market economist but an empiric who believed in no theory and played every situation by ear." (Johnson, p. 294) Schacht eventually lost his influence and position in the NSDAP.

Hitler's control over industry grew with his power. Many of the similarities in socialist ideology become apparent if the historical background is understood, and misnomers are properly identified. The portrait of an anti-Semitic, pro-capitalistic Germany is far from accurate. Anti-Semitism was rooted in anti-capitalistic socialism long before NSDAP came to power. The crucial underlying factor to consider in anti-Semitism is the portrayal of Jews as capitalists. This is the common thread the NSDAP has with all other totalitarian states.

Anti-Semitism is called "the socialism of fools" [der Sozialismus des blöden Mannes] because the anti-Semites shared the same gripes as the socialists; the anti-Semites simply chose too narrow a target. The socialists happily accepted the spirit of anti-Semitism, provided the target was widened to the entire capitalist class. More recently, the historian Paul Johnson has noted with irony that socialism has served as the "anti-Semitism of the intellectuals."

Racism has pecuniary costs, which participants in a free market are not willing to pay, but which statist are willing to subsidize. Anti-Semitism increased incrementally in the Soviet regime. At the time of the Bolshevik revolution, many of the Bolsheviks leaders (Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Aleksei Rykov, Karl Radek) were Jewish, and the purges and expulsions did not come until later, as in the anticommunist anti-Semitic movement in the late 1940s. The term "purge" is a euphemism for the murder of people in an opposing subset of a political faction.

Since World War II Jews and Judaism have been liberated in every country and territory where capitalism has been restored to vigorous growth--and this includes Germany. By contrast, wherever anti-capitalism or pre-capitalism has prevailed, the status of Jews and Judaism has either undergone deterioration or is highly precarious. Thus at this very moment the country where developing global capitalism is most advanced, the United States, accords Jews and Judaism a freedom that is known nowhere else in the world and that was never known in the past. It is a freedom that is not matched even in Israel... By contrast, in the Soviet Union, the citadel of anti-capitalism, the Jews are cowed by anti-Semitism, threatened by extinction, and barred from access to their God. (cf. Ellis Rivkin, *The Shaping of Jewish History. - A Radical New Interpretation*)

The anti-Jewish creed was formalized by Wilhelm Marr, the German writer who coined the term "anti-Semitic", and published *The Victory of Judaism over Germanism* in 1879, and ran an anti-Semitic journal and an anti-Semitic society. "The Jews who provoked the most anger were those who embraced cosmopolitan, Enlightenment values, and who achieved economic success."

In the late 1800s in Germany, Adolf Stöcker's Christian Social Party (1878-1885) combined anti-Semitism with left wing, reformist legislation. The party attacked laissez-faire economics and the Jews as part of the same liberal plague. Stöcker's movement synthesized medieval anti-Semitism, based in religion, and modern anti-Semitism, based in racism and socialist economics. He once wrote: "I see in unrestrained capitalism the evil of our epoch and am naturally also an opponent of modern Judaism on account of my socio-political views." Stöcker had revered the Prussian aristocracy since his youth. (Cowen 1997)

NSDAP's Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels' writing appeals to the emotion by associating divergent principles. The use of these associations is a puzzle, which taken in its entirety, makes anyone but the most sensible and alert, drunk with confusion. Germany at this postbellum period was a nation with high unemployment disgraced by its loss, and responsible for reparations. Goebbels used this sentiment to attract Germans to anti-capitalist socialism. "Nationalism has turned into bourgeois patriotism...which is the privilege of a class. It is the real reason for its decline... We are the world's Pariah not because we do not have the courage to resist, rather because our entire national energy is wasted in eternal and unproductive squabbling between

the right and the left. The sin of bourgeois patriotism was ... a system that brings growing economic misery. That is the only reason why international Jewry organizes the battle of the proletarian forces against both powers, the economy and the nation, and defeat them.” (Goebbels, 1932)

Karl Marx continued the anti-Jewish polemics of the socialists. The historical association between Jews, private property, and commerce led to his well-known anti-Semitic diatribes. Marx, who sought to reconstruct society according to his master plan, detested the particularistic nature of Jewish religion and custom. Some of Marx's followers, such as Dühring and Lassalle, used anti-Semitism as a means of introducing anti-capitalist doctrine. They believed that if the public could be convinced to hate Jewish capitalists, the public would eventually come to hate non-Jewish capitalists as well. (Cowen 1997)

The use of the term “bourgeois” is an aspersion on capitalists and specifically targeted Jewish capitalists. In a political cartoon by Goebbels' cartoonist Mjöltnir, the Jude is exposed as a fat capitalist who was disguised as another type of German. “The death penalty for crimes against the people! The gallows for profiteers and usurers!” In an indirect reference to the capitalists Goebbels writes, “There are also white Jews. True, there are scoundrels among us, even though they are Germans, who act in immoral ways against their own racial and blood comrades. But why do we call them white Jews? You use the term to describe something inferior and contemptible. Just as we do. Why do you ask us why we oppose the Jews when you without knowing it are one too?” (Goebbels, 1932).

Fabian Fascism does not frighten horses; it boils frogs

There is a difference in Nazis and Russian Communists in the rate at which they gained power and repressed their people. The Russian Communists came to power in a violent civil war, with great mass murders and starvation from the outset in the years preceding Stalin, whereas the Nazis came to power more incrementally. “Yet the Nazi terror in those early years, I was beginning to see, affected the lives of relatively few Germans. The vast majority did not seem unduly concerned with what happened to a few Communists, Socialists, pacifists, defiant priests and pastors, and to the Jews.” (Shirer, p. 146)

At this early stage of Hitler's rise, most Germans were not victims of the NSDAP repression. Businesses and Christian churches were largely left intact initially, unlike those under Stalin; Stalin demolished dozens of churches in Moscow. Christians under the NSDAP were attacked only incrementally, as were the Jews. To suggest that the NSDAP were pro-business, or pro-Christian because these victims were attacked in later stages would be like suggesting that they were pro-British or pro-Dutch because they were attacked later than the Czechs or Poles.

European countries were attacked in order of their weakness and proximity.

What distinguishes fascism or Nazism from generic socialism in economic theory is how they translate government control into reality. This slow rate of takeover can be called Fabian Fascism in reference to the Roman General Fabius Maximus, who fought Hannibal's army in small debilitating skirmishes, rather than attempting a decisive battle.

For the socialist, it means outright nationalization -- government ownership -- of private business. In a socialist state, the government owns and operates the airlines, railroads, banks, phone companies, and any other business you can think of. Everyone is an employee of the State. Until recently in Fidel Castro's Cuba, even shoeshine boys worked for a government cooperative.

For the fascist, public or government control is just that -- control, not nationalized ownership, via complete bureaucratic regulation of ostensibly private business. As an ardent admirer of Marx, Mussolini created the term, Fascism, for his brand of authoritarian, patriotic Marxism...

But fascism is also an economic theory. Intellectually, fascism is far more dishonest than socialism, which at least has the courage to assert legal ownership of the economy and thus assume legal responsibility for its functioning. Fascism places responsibility for the economy on business, which is rendered Potemkinly private, a Hollywood set facade of private ownership.

The result of both socialism and fascism is the same: the destruction of economic freedom, replace the individual's choice of how to make a peaceful, honest living with State edicts. Fascism accomplishes this, however, more insidiously. Instead of being a straightforward employee of the government, you and I are told our lives and businesses are still private, while any attempt to act as such is proscribed by some regulation -- until we are trapped and immobilized in Washington's web...

Advocacy of what became known as Fabian Socialism was in vogue in the early part of the 20th Century, particularly among British socialists, such as Sydney and Beatrice Webb and George Bernard Shaw. They argued that socialism could best be achieved by not frightening the horses, that is, not through immediate revolutionary action, but in small, incremental steps. (Wheeler, 1997)

A military history of the period or a history of the churches or business in the Nazi period provides good evidence of this incrementalism. Hitler did not begin by invading France proper, nor did he begin by killing the Jews. In early 1935 the inhabitants of the coal rich Saar district

voted to return to Germany out of the control of France. Hitler welcomed the return with promises to the French that no more demands would be made. When the French and British wanted to call it quits territorially and allow the Nazis arms parity, Hitler then delayed the territory part of the deal until later when he explained he needed lebensraum (living room) for Germany. By simple decree he wiped out the military provisions of the Versailles Treaty. France had great military superiority, and had the right to use it after Hitler broke the peace treaty; but didn't use it to stop them. Hitler professed peace, and usually struck on Saturdays while the English were at their weekend resorts.

The Nazis used this pattern again and again with the Rhineland, Anschluss, and on through Europe. It is often not clear whether a power neglects to stand up to a bully because of cowardice or because they are genuinely deceived. Hitler was no match for the French when he invaded the Rhineland in March of 1936; the French could have crushed him, but they chose not to march. They pleaded to the League of Nations instead. (Shirer, pp. 238-39) It may have been self-deception, which caused Chamberlain to appease Hitler in Berlin; or it may have been the intimidating and hypnotic effect of Hitler. It may have been self-deception that led Franklin Delano Roosevelt to cede East Europe to Stalin at Yalta in return for Stalin's assurance of free elections at the earliest opportunity; (Courtois, p. 20) or it may have just been due to ill health and fatigue. Theodore Roosevelt is reported to have said:

Peace is generally good in itself, but it is never the highest good unless it comes as the handmaid of righteousness; and it becomes a very evil thing if it serves merely as a mask for cowardice and sloth, or as an instrument to further the ends of despotism or anarchy. We despise and abhor the bully, the brawler, the oppressor, whether in private or public life, but we despise no less the coward and the voluptuary.

Persecution of Jews grew incrementally as well. In 1933 in the first year Hitler took office, he excluded them from public office, the civil service, journalism, radio, farming, teaching, the theater, the films. In 1934 he weeded them out of the stock market, the banks, and ownership of businesses. The number of Jews emigrating increased after the passing of the Nuremberg Laws on Citizenship and Race in 1935 after which Jews could no longer be citizens of Germany. Supplemental laws to the Nuremberg Laws were written later outlawing Jews completely. On Easter weekend 1935 Shirer wrote in his diary: "Taking the Easter weekend off. The hotel mainly filled with Jews and we are a little surprised to see so many of them still prospering and apparently unafraid. I think they are unduly optimistic." (Shirer, pp. 159-61)

First they came for the Jews
and I did not speak out -
because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for the communists
and I did not speak out -
because I was not a communist.

Then they came for the trade unionists
and I did not speak out -
because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for me
and there was no one left
to speak out for me.

Martin Niemoller

By their fruits ye shall know them

Geoff Chauncer: I have news. Adamar's here. He's entered.

Sir Ulrich von Lichtenstein: Must have grown bored with whatever war they're fighting.

Geoff Chauncer: No, no, the Black Prince commanded it. He was forced to disband his army. They were reveling the night, pillaging town after town. Robbing and murdering, and ransacking churches. Committing the oldest sins in the newest ways. *A Knight's Tale*, Brian Helgeland, 2001

It is not possible to perfectly equate any two entities or even the same entity over time; differences will always exist. That's just the nature of physics as seen in theories such as the Heisenberg theory of uncertainty, which puts limits on real-time analysis by considering that 'the more precisely the position is determined, the less precisely the momentum is known. In other words, historical events should be kept in proper perspective to other historical events. This should not excuse us from having the intellectual courage to examine and judge historical and current events. In order to understand the battle for vocabulary, we must identify the occupants on the right and left, and attempt to identify the fruit of the tree. To attach a sense of proportion to this issue is an arduous and sensitive task.

The battle for vocabulary associated with right and left is predicated on the assumption that various breeds of socialism are distinct, with the nazi variety deposited on the right. Equating communism and nazism removes the last barrier to legitimating the extreme right, because the Nazis would be forced back on the left sharing quarters with the Communists. That would create a vacuum in the political continuum, which would be filled by the concepts of freedom and totalitarianism: entrance into slavery or exodus from it.

The terror of NSDAP members is seen as an absolute evil because: 1) they operated on center stage in the midst of culture rich Europe; 2) they were defeated and prosecuted at Nuremberg where their crimes were exposed and categorized; and 3) the revelation of the genocide of the Jews outraged humanity's conscience by its irrationality, racism, and bloodthirstiness.

By contrast, Communism operated in remote isolation, and at the peak of its sins was rewarded with a victory at Yalta, which allowed it another half a century to operate in near total secrecy and bury the evidence. In addition, mass starvation is a more insidious method of murder. We know the names of Hess, Goering, and Goebbels, but not Felix Dzerzhinsky, Lavrenti Beria, or Sergo Ordzhonikidz. We know of sites such as Dachau, Belsen and Buchenwald in Germany, and Auschwitz in Poland, but no gulag camps or laogai (Chinese gulags) have been turned into museums to commemorate their inmates.

On September 26, 2002, I noticed a one paragraph story buried in The Japan Times of a discovery of what is believed to be the bodies of some 30,000 men, women, children buried near St. Petersburg, Russia. The discovery turns out to be the result of an effort by a human rights organization, Memorial, looking for evidence of Stalin's purges of the late 1930s. (Washington Post Foreign Service, Tuesday, September 24, 2002; Page A16). To date, I have heard no other mention of the story in the mass media or weblogs, nor met anyone who has heard of this story. It is with effort that the Communist atrocities are glossed over with euphemistic spin, and differentiated from those of the fascists.

Communism was a system responsible for the deaths approaching 100 million human beings: USSR: 20 million deaths; China: 65 million deaths; Vietnam: 1 million deaths; North Korea: 2 million deaths; Cambodia: 2 million deaths; Eastern Europe: 1 million deaths; Latin America: 150,000 deaths; Africa: 1.7 million deaths; Afghanistan: 1.5 million deaths; The international Communist movement and Communist parties not in power: about 10,000 deaths. (Courtois, p.4) "Churchill said that, in Moscow in August 1942, Stalin told him coolly that 'ten millions' of peasants had been 'dealt with'." (Johnson, p. 271)

"The whole party became an organization of torturers and oppressors. No one was innocent, and all Communists were accomplices in the coercion of society. Thus the party acquired a new species of moral unity, and embarked on a course from which there was no turning back. (cf. Leszek Kolodowski) Exactly the same thing was to happen to the German National Socialists a few years later: it was Stalin who pointed the way to Hitler. Everyone in the party knew what was going on. Bukharin grumbled privately that the 'mass annihilation of completely defenseless men, women and children' was acclimatizing party members to violence and brute obedience, transforming them 'into cogs in some terrible machine'." (Johnson, p.272)

It was somewhat paradoxical that many groups, who supported the Bolsheviks, met with total

failure. Some demanded peace, land, and the freedom to live without laws, without officers, and without landlords, in other words, near anarchy. Some worker groups demanded an eight-hour day, an end to fines and other onerous regulations, social insurance, and wage increases. (Courtois, pp.45-46) The anarchy quickly turned into totalitarianism. Later workers in St. Petersburg went on strike for having to work for starvation wages, and were arrested, shot or re-educated. Bolshevik policies led to mass starvations. In 1921 and 1922 during Lenin's reign, the Volga famine led to the death of around 5 million people. Stalin used starvation as a weapon against those who resisted collectivism, and around 6 million deaths resulted from the Great Famine of 1932-1933.

“Every night the bodies of more than 250 people who have died from hunger or typhus are collected. Many of these bodies have had the liver removed, through a large slit in the abdomen. The police finally picked up some of these mysterious ‘amputators’ who confessed that they were using the meat as a filling for the meat pies that they were selling in the market.” (Courtois, p. 165, cf. Robert Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow*)

In 1931 Pius XI proclaimed that “Communism teaches and seeks two objectives: unrelenting class warfare and the complete eradication of private ownership. Not secretly or by hidden methods does it do this, but publicly, openly, and by employing any means possible, even the most violent. To achieve these objectives there is nothing it is afraid to do, nothing or which it has respect or reverence. When it comes to power, it is ferocious in its cruelty and inhumanity. The horrible slaughter and destruction through which it has laid waste to vast regions of Eastern Europe and Asia give evidence of this.” (Courtois, p.29) The Communists claim that they were conducting these crimes for some ultimate good, in an attempt to avoid condemnation.

“This plausible distinction, however, can easily be turned on its head. In particular, Eastern European dissidents have argued that mass murder in the name of a noble ideal is more perverse than it is in the name of a base one. The Nazis, after all, never pretended to be virtuous. The Communists, by contrast, trumpeted their humanism, hoodwinked millions around the globe for decades, and so got away with murder on the ultimate scale. The Nazis, moreover, killed off their victims without ideological ceremony; the Communists, by contrast, usually compelled their prey to confess their “guilt” in signed depositions thereby acknowledging the Party line’s political “correctness.” Nazism, finally, was a unique case (Mussolini’s Fascism was not really competitive), and it developed no worldwide clientele. By contrast, Communism’s universalism permitted it to metastasize worldwide.” (Courtois, p. xv)

In addition to killing the enemies of their one party systems, both the Communists and Nazis often used a shibboleth test to slaughter victims of certain classes.

A Shibboleth is a sorting device

5 And the Gil'e-adites took the passages of Jordan before the E'phra-imites: and it was so, that when those E'phra-imites which were escaped said, Let me go over, that the men of Gil'e-ad said unto him, Art thou an E'phra-omite? If he said, Nay;

6 then said they unto him, Say now Shib'boleth: and he said Sib'boleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the E'phra-imites forty and two thousand.

- Book of Judges 12:5-6

A shibboleth denotes an ear of corn near a fall of water. Its association with a fall of water signifies plenty, as does an ear of corn. It focuses upon one of the plagues, which befell the Egyptians. Shibboleth in the original sense above from the Book of Judges was a pronunciation test, which functioned as a password to sort out people of different classes. In this case, if the Ephra-imites couldn't pronounce shibboleth properly, they were identified as the enemy and put to death.

The Communists also engaged in a broadly defined definition of genocide-- that of various classes of people. Thus in the name of an ideological belief system were tens of millions of innocent victims systematically butchered, unless it is a crime to be middle-class, of noble birth, a kulak, a Ukrainian, or even a worker or a member of the Communist party. A survey was a common way of determining such classification.

In *The Red Terror of Russia*, published in Berlin in 1924, the Russian historian and socialist Sergei Melgunov cited Martin Latsis, one of the first leaders of the Cheka (the Soviet political police), as giving the following order on 1 November 1918 to his henchmen: "We don't make war against any people in particular. We are exterminating the bourgeoisie as a class. In your investigations don't look for documents and pieces of evidence about what the defendant has done, whether in deed or in speaking or acting against Soviet authority. The first question you should ask him is what class he comes from, what are his roots, his education, his training, and his occupation." (Courtois, p. 8)

Stalin called for an 'all out offensive against the kulak... We must smash the kulaks, eliminate them as a class... We must strike at the kulaks so hard as to prevent them from rising to their feet again... We must break down the resistance of that class in open battle.' On 27 December 1929, at the Feast of St. John the Apostle, he declared war with the slogan 'Liquidate the kulaks as a class!' It was the green light for a policy of extermination, more than three before Hitler came to power, twelve years before the ordering of the 'Final Solution.... soon Kulak meant any peasant whatever who actively opposed collectivization, and entire peasant communities resisted

desperately. (Johnson, pp. 270-71)

The Nazis used various shibboleths, the most obvious was that to identify Jews, but others were in existence: for other racial groups, gypsies, and the handicapped. The Nazis gradually used shibboleths to murder other classes if they found they had sufficient power to do so. Germans who passed shibboleths were encouraged to reproduce, while undesirables were euthanized in the eugenics programs.

Economist Thomas Sowell points out that shibboleths in political speech are a shorthand way to identify where you stand on an issue. They transform questions about facts, causation and evidence into questions about personal identity and moral worth. Current terms such as diversity, choice, campaign finance reform, and gun control allow the participant to feel a smug superiority without having to examine the facts of the issue. Media use shibboleths or templates to cherry pick stories: white on black crime fits into their shibboleth to establish the moral superiority of the journalist. The Matthew Shepard story passed the shibboleth, while the Jesse Dirkhising story did not, and so betrayed a heavy ideological bias.

The American political correctness or speech codes are shibboleths, which limit meaningful debate. There was little discussion of whether bad immigration policy, or allowing pilots to be armed could have saved thousands of lives in the 9/11 attack. Nor was there serious discussion of either whether bad screening was to blame, or whether federalizing the screening process would provide better or worse service.

Sowell states "Shibboleths are dangerous, not only because they mobilize political support for policies that most of the supporters have not thought through, but also because these badges of identity make it harder to reverse those policies when they turn out to be disastrous. When admitting a mistake means renouncing one's identity as one of "us" and lining up with a demonized "them," do not expect as many people to do it as if all that was involved was the question whether policy A produces better results than policy B." (Sowell, 2001)

Aspersions splatter filth

Agent Smith: I'd like to share a revelation during my time here. It came to me when I tried to classify your species. I realized that you're not actually mammals. Every mammal on this planet instinctively develops a natural equilibrium with the surrounding environment but you humans do not. You move to an area and you multiply and multiply until every natural resource is consumed. The only way you can survive is to spread to another area. There is another organism on this planet that follows the same pattern. Do you know what it is? A virus. Human beings are a disease, a cancer of this planet. You are a plague, and we are the cure.

Agent Smith to Morpheus in *The Matrix*, Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999

Aspersions are sprinklings or scatterings of base insinuations, demonizations, or slanders cast upon individuals or large groups of victims. It may be a seed of indirect doubt with faulty assumptions, or direct slander with bad intent. Slanderous aspersions are misnomers often cast after shibboleths, in order to avoid detection of the truth. Nazi aspersion is more evident because of the cloak of secrecy present in the communist regimes. Aspersions and euphemisms are often simultaneously cast. Filth is a slightly euphemistic catchall term, which refers to the disgusting, and offensively shocking.

The use of mass media is the delivery system to define vocabulary. The Nazi Party magazine in 1940 ran a review of the film "Der ewige Jude" or "The Eternal Jew." (Unser Wille und Weg, 10, pp. 54-55). The review stated that

"Just like rats, the Jews 2000 years ago moved from the Middle East to Egypt, at that time a flourishing land. Even then they had all the criminal traits they display today, even then they were the enemies of hard-working, creative peoples. In large hordes they migrated from there to the "Promised Land," flooded the entire Mediterranean region, broke into Spain, France and Southern Germany, then followed the German colonists as they moved into the countries of the East. Along they way they remained eternal parasites, haggling and cheating, Poland above all became the enormous reservoir from which Jewry sent its agents to every leading nation of Europe and the world.

The film was "a broad treatment of the life and effects of this parasitic race using genuine material taken from real life" and cast aspersions on Jews as parasites, rats, and butchers, while euphemistically casting themselves (NSDAP) as defenders of animals against torture:

The most revolting scenes show Jewish slaughtering methods. These customs, which cast a particularly vivid spotlight on the so-called Jewish religion, are so terrible that it is hard to watch the film as the grinning Jewish butchers carry out their work. It is illuminating to see how stubbornly Jewry holds to its method of slaughter and with which casuistry it defends it against the horror of the civilized world. Rarely will people feel more horror than which watching the desperate and horrible death struggle of the slaughtered animals. Long before the seizure of power, the NSDAP fought against Jewish slaughter. National Socialist representatives in parliament repeatedly introduced legislation to abolish this form of animal torture through a ban on Jewish slaughter. Such proposals were always rejected, since the entire Jewish and Jewish-influenced press ran long articles against them and the so-called German parties refused to support National Socialism in its battle against this evil.

Euphemistic Misnomers cover up filth

Euphemisms are often misnomers claimed or abducted to disguise or cloak identity of ugly facts. Euphemistic substitutions such as passed away for died, deceased for dead man, or casket for coffin are not misleading, and as such are not misnomers per se, but are used to change the tone and focus. This tool is indispensable in political speech.

The term “communism” is a euphemistic misnomer. It was not without reason that the Bolsheviks or Russian Social Democrats decided in November 1917 to call themselves “communists.” Its practice was distinct from its doctrine, which cited Aristotle, who introduced his concept of the ideal city in *The Republic* where people would not be corrupted by money and power. They erected monuments in the Kremlin of Tommaso Campanella and Sir Thomas More, author of *Utopia*.

One question that people always ask at home is never asked in Russia: “What happened to communism in Russia?” Everybody yawns when a visitor brings it up, because the answer is so obvious to every Russian. The answer is that “there never was communism in Russia; there were only Communists.”

Less direct forms of euphemisms make insinuations in cloudy and suggestive speech. “Speak English!” said the Eaglet to the Dodo in *Alice in Wonderland*, *A Caucus-Race and a Long Tale*. “I don't know the meaning of half those long words, and, what's more, I don't believe you do either.” In the 1946 essay “Politics and the English Language” Orwell asks us to:

Consider for instance some comfortable English professor defending Russian totalitarianism. He cannot say outright, “I believe in killing off your opponents when you can get good results by doing so.” Probably, therefore, he will say something like this:

While freely conceding that the Soviet regime exhibits certain features which the humanitarian may be inclined to deplore, we must, I think, agree that a certain curtailment of the right to political opposition is an unavoidable concomitant of transitional periods, and that the rigors which the Russian people have been called upon to undergo have been amply justified in the sphere of concrete achievement.

The inflated style itself is a kind of euphemism. A mass of Latin words falls upon the facts like soft snow, blurring the outline and covering up all the details. The great enemy of clear language is insincerity.

Metaphors often serve as euphemisms when adjectives prove insufficient. In this period of history, political speech took on many forms: speeches and conversations, pamphlets, print media, and film. “The Ministry of Propaganda supervised the production and distribution of more than 1100 narrative feature films during the twelve years of Hitler's empire. Goebbels envied the seductive power of Hollywood productions”. In many of the films during this period, the Nazis were able to define the hero and villain to suit their needs. Goebbels imitated the optimistic spirit of Hollywood films such as Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night* to cover its horrors. As Erwin Leiser suggested thirty years ago, the language the old king uses to justify the execution of his son's best friend in *The Old and the Young King* is remarkably similar to the language Hitler used to justify the Night of the Long Knives. Prussian *raison d'etat* provides a distinguished pedigree for Hitler's brutal purge of Ernst Röhm and the Sturmabteilung (SA) brownshirts. (Thompson, 1996)

Movies have power to control vocabulary, not by defining, but by associating terms. A regime would rather be associated with the term ‘white knight’ than ‘butcher’. Fritz Hippler of the NSDAP Propaganda Ministry (cf. Metzter, "The Film as a Means of Political Advertising") detailed the importance of film, and argued that film is the most powerful delivery system of propaganda because

“If one compares the directness and intensity of the effect that the various means of propaganda have on the great masses, film is without question the most powerful. The written and spoken word depend entirely on the content or on the emotional appeal of the speaker, but film uses pictures, pictures that for almost a decade have been accompanied by sound. We know that the impact of a message is greater if it is less abstract, more visual.” (Hippler, 1937)

Philosopher Ayn Rand was asked by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in 1947 to give testimony on the evidence of Soviet propaganda in Hollywood. Propaganda naturally has elements of both euphemisms and aspersions. She stated “The principle of free speech requires ... that we do not *pass laws* forbidding [Communists] to speak. But the principle of free speech ... *does not* imply that we owe them jobs and support to advocate our own destruction at our own expense.” Rand coined the term “objectivism,” which is associated with limited government, and was a dedicated proponent of this libertarianism. Even so, Rand approved of the role of the government investigating the use of this speech by the Communists, which she argued was a criminal organization.

She testified about a movie called *Song of Russia*. The movie was run at a time when Americans were allied with the Soviets to defeat Hitler, so it was euphemistic in order to strengthen the alliance. It portrayed the Soviets in better economic and social conditions than really existed. There were scenes with radios, when in fact they had been confiscated in Russia; scenes of family feasts when in fact people had starvation diets; scenes of a quaint Polish border when in

fact it was a graveyard after Germany and Russia carved the country up; there was a scene when a character then compared the fight to the fight for American freedom.

Rand told the committee it was “blasphemy, because the men at Lexington were not fighting just a foreign invader. They were fighting for freedom and what I mean -- and I intend to be exact -- is they were fighting for political freedom and individual freedom. They were fighting for the rights of man. To compare them to somebody, anybody fighting for a slave state, I think is dreadful. Then, later the girl also says -- I believe this was she or one of the other characters -- that “the culture we have been building here will never die.” What culture? The culture of concentration camps.” (<http://www.objectivism.addr.com/texts/huac.html>)

This type of comparative speech uses aspersions and euphemisms simultaneously. Rand points out the absurdity of equating force used for good and force used for bad. This method of equation is used by pacifists in the ongoing battle for vocabulary. History provides very clear evidence of the failure of these comparisons, but history is easily ignored.

Once again shibboleths are the tool used to ignore lessons from history. McCarthyism is a common shibboleth used by the left to discourage discussion of this period in history. The Hollywood Ten were briefly jailed for contempt, and blackballed after the hearings, but not by the committee, which had no power to fire them. It was a decision made by the studios. Yet the left uses this shibboleth to equate Joe McCarthy with Joe Stalin. McCarthy was an American politician with relatively little power, certainly nothing on the scale of a Joseph Stalin. The HUAC hearings were held by the House of Representatives, but Joseph McCarthy wasn't even in the House and had nothing to do with the hearings. McCarthy was in the senate, not the house.

Rand had planned on testifying on *The Best Years of our Lives*, a movie which equated the American war effort with that of the enemy. In one scene, Al Stephenson's son discusses the use of the atomic weapon without reference to its destruction of evil forces. Later in the movie, a man in a drugstore talks of the futility of the sacrifices that Homer, the returning amputee war vet, has made for his country. The movie was too popular to be criticized by the committee however, and Rand was not given a chance to testify about it.

Euphemisms should have at least some element of truth to them, but political speech is often composed of total fabrication. H.G. Wells, in referring to Stalin, said ‘he had never met a man more candid, fair and honest... no one is afraid of him and everybody trusts him’. (Johnson, p. 276) Euphemisms which contain some truth are more effective. Stalin disguised his atrocities with euphemisms such as ‘competition between grain-collection organizations’, ‘regrettable lapses from Soviet legality’, ‘slipping into the methods of war Communism’, ‘administrative mistakes’ and so on. (Johnson p.268)

Jean-Paul Sartre said in the 1950s how terror of the Communists could be the midwife of humanism. That Communism's criminal past should be ignored or minimized is a variant of "Sartre's celebrated sophism that one should keep silent about Soviet camps "pour ne pas desesperer Billancout" (in order not to throw the auto workers of Billancout into despair). To which his onetime colleague, Albert Camus, long ago replied that the truth is the truth, and denying it mocks the causes both of humanity and of morality. (Courtois, p. xv-xvii)

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