



‘Man can enlarge the Way. It is not the Way that enlarges man’ .. (柯蔼蓝)
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When such new words first appear they are to the point and achieve prominence. Repeated over and again in the media they quickly become a familiar part of discourse as if having always existed. They spring as if from nowhere and catch the listener unawares. They are to be instantly and independently understood and at the same time accepted as of fixed meaning - they are pronounced by politicians and reported in the press. ‘How is the world ruled and led to war?’ asks Karl Kraus, early in the 20th century. ‘Diplomats lie to journalists and believe these lies when they see them in print’]. New words can be slightly distorted old words to be newly applied or newly invented, in themselves unfamiliar in their new contexts. But since they are soon officially established, they do not raise immediate queries. Quite the contrary, they set minds into a required frame of thought. The listener/reader is persuaded to interpret them according to prevailing ideological expectations. [But not by means of the rich associations aroused by poetic words.] Even though the new words are part and parcel of a prevailing political climate, they are remote from the individual, from personal verbal experience [from anything fully internalized and trustworthy in Confucian terms]. They are not part of naturally developing standard language; they undermine it.

Such words are Terror and Terrorist - today most frequently used worldwide. Their all-inclusiveness [and hence their vagueness] permits us to use them for one who in a different context might be applauded as a justifiable opponent. The term is extended to anyone opposing any particular promoted policy, ideology or way of doing things by authority, finally without due regard for the measure of violence to be employed. [It can even be applied to entire states.] Naturally such appellations are determined by particular political bias. And yet, as words they are imposed on us all, as truths ignoring such bias. Here lies the danger of words - because they become fixed tools of discourse, we unthinkingly conform to them. [And thus reiterates the Master: ‘In his dealings with the words the gentleman is not invariably for or against anything. He is on the side of what is moral’ .]

Naming and definitions are not issues limited to linguistics or philosophy. They have a great impact on realities. An article in an Israeli newspaper reports a dispute between Army Intelligence and the General Security Agency (Shabak) as to the definition of a Suicide Terrorist. It asks whether the term applies only to someone carrying an explosive belt around the waist, knowingly going to probable death, or whether also it applies to someone who undertakes a shoot-out in the centre of a town, knowing that his chance of survival is very slim. The count of the dead Suicides differs according to the definition, and so will the measure of success of the security forces and their government in their fight against terror.

‘Martyr’, is another word that comes to mind in the context of names which acquire or are given new meanings. In the original meaning a Martyr is one who is grievously persecuted by others and not someone who sacrifices his own life as part of violent action against others.

Some of these 'linguistic innovations', a rather neutral description for words which hide the aggressive intention of their inventors, are euphemisms or sanitized words. In Hebrew, the more discerning minds call them comprehensively: 'The Word Laundry'. They are meant to clean and beautify what they designate, to soften grim and ugly realities.

Euphemisms can be familiar words wrongly applied or existing words given new meanings. 'Defending civilization' and 'bringing democracy and humanism' to countries under tyrannical regimes, or 'liberating' the people living under their oppressive control, are now popular terms with world leaders and the uncritical

[\[第 1 页\]](#) [\[第 2 页\]](#) [\[第 3 页\]](#) [\[第 4 页\]](#) [\[第 5 页\]](#) [\[第 6 页\]](#) [\[第 7 页\]](#) [\[第 8 页\]](#) [\[第 9 页\]](#)

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