



‘Man can enlarge the Way. It is not the Way that enlarges man’ .. (柯蔼蓝)
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media. Meanwhile the actual results of such endeavours, may make one uncertain as to what ‘ democracy’ , ‘ humanism’ or ‘ liberation’ as terms actually mean.

[We also have Smart Bombs, the employment of which is not always as benign as the term suggests. When a missile is fired from a gunship to wipe out a particular individual, we call it a ‘ precise (or focused) extermination’ whether or not it injures other innocent people who happen to be on the spot at the time.]

The currently erected wall on the occupied West Bank, is called a ‘ fence’ , a rather modest term for an eight meters cement wall running round and through Palestinian towns and villages. We also have the ‘ Jerusalem wrapper’ , rather a warm and reassuring term for a wall surrounding a city, depending on which side of it you find yourself.

Another way of creating euphemisms is to slightly distort the meaning or even the sound of a word. Subsequently they have not only a sanitizing effect, but are also rather pleasing to hear. In Hebrew we have for instance ‘ otzer’ , ‘ seger’ , ‘ keter’ . They are used to describe three ways of enclosing people in their domiciles. Otzer - curfew, is familiar, but ‘ keter’ - rather a nice word in itself - meaning a crown, is not automatically understandable in its new context. ‘ Seger’ , a distorted conjugation of a similar noun - ‘ sgira’ , meaning closing, hints at its intent, but is not precisely clear. There is even a ‘ seger noshem’ , a ‘ breathing closure’ , implying that some relief is allowed to the enclosed, but the details of this remain unknown. Such confusion of names is certainly no help in understanding the complex realities on the ground. [Or else, is the other side of the coin: A Gu that is not truly a Gu. A Gu indeed! A Gu indeed! as the Master desperately cries].

The wrongly used terms and the newly conjugated names of the word-laundry, depend on the condensation of meaning. The reader/listener has to guess their import by expunging the variety of their resonant but irrelevant nuances. Euphemisms in times of crisis imply the use of a wide vocabulary consisting of extracted or diminished terms. [They leave no space for individual inspiration.]

The recklessness of the word-laundry calls to mind the concern in the Analects with language, and its particular commedation of caution with words through the creative unfolding of meaning. With euphemisms we imply an ability to attribute meanings, but this obviously bears no relation to the individual creative elaboration of poetic words and phrases enhanced in the Analects. While the latter emerge from a cultural/traditional background and (thus) evoke a whole range of thoughts and feelings, distorting euphemisms are separated from such a background and in its place are provided with an arbitrary, usually biased new set of ideas. They reflect the current ideology of their makers. They are oppressive. While poetic words and phrases in their simplicity and familiarity leave us space to roam expansively, understanding things by association, analogy and metaphor,

euphemisms require condensation. They change familiar linguistic patterns and undermine thought by squeezing the mind into the required inflexible frame.

[\[第 1 页\]](#)

[\[第 2 页\]](#)

[\[第 3 页\]](#)

[\[第 4 页\]](#)

[\[第 5 页\]](#)

[\[第 6 页\]](#)

[\[第 7 页\]](#)

[\[第](#)

8 页]

[\[第 9 页\]](#)

[\[关闭窗口\]](#)