

GEORGE CARLIN ON EUPHEMISMS AND AMERICAN ENGLISH

(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CNk_kzQCclo)

I don't like euphemistic language, you know, words that shade the truth. And American English is packed with euphemisms, because Americans have a lot of trouble dealing with reality and, in order to shield themselves from reality, they use *soft* language. And somehow it gets worse with every generation. Here's an example: there's a condition in combat that occurs when a soldier is completely stressed out, and is on the verge of nervous collapse. In World War I, it was called 'shell shock'. Simple, honest, direct language. Two syllables, shell shock. It almost sounds like the guns themselves. That was more than eighty years ago. Then a generation passed and in World War II the same combat condition was called 'battle fatigue'. Four syllables now. Takes a little longer to say. Doesn't seem to hurt as much. 'Fatigue' is a nicer word than 'shock'. Shell shock! Battle fatigue. By the early 1950s, the Korean War had come along and the very same condition was being called 'operational exhaustion'. The phrase was up to eight syllables now and any last traces of humanity had been completely squeezed out of it; like something that might happen to your car. Then barely fifteen years later we got into Vietnam and, thanks to the deceptions surrounding that war, it's no surprise that the very same condition was referred to as 'post-traumatic stress disorder'. Still eight syllables, but we've added a hyphen! And the pain is completely buried under jargon. Post-traumatic stress disorder. I'll bet if they'd been calling it 'shell shock', some of those Vietnam veterans might have received the attention they needed. But it didn't happen, and one of the reasons is that *soft* language. The language that takes the life out of life. And somehow it keeps getting worse.

Here are some more examples: at some point in my life toilet paper became bathroom tissue. Sneakers became running shoes. False teeth became dental appliances. Medicine turned into medication. Information became directory assistance. The dump became the landfill. Motels turned into motor lodges. House trailers into mobile homes. Used cars into previously-owned vehicles. Room service became guest-room dining. Riots became civil disorders. A strike was a job action. The zoo turned into a wild life park. The jungle became a rainforest. A swamp became a wet land. Glasses became prescription eyewear. Garages became parking structures. Drug-addiction became substance abuse. Soap operas turned into day-time dramas. A gambling joint became a gaming resort. A prostitute became a sex worker. Fairs became performing arts centers. Wife-beating became domestic violence. And constipation became occasional irregularity.

When I was a little boy, if I got sick, I went to a doctor, who sent me to a hospital to be treated by other doctors. Now I go to a family practitioner, who belongs to a health maintenance organization, which sends me to a wellness center to be treated by healthcare delivery professionals.

Poor people used to live in slums. Now the economically disadvantaged occupy substandard housing in the inner cities. And a lot of them are broke! They don't have negative cash-flow position. They're broke! Because many of them were fired. In other words, management wanted to curtail redundancies in the human resources area, and so many people are no longer viable members of the workforce.

Smug, greedy, well-fed white people have invented a language to conceal their sins. It's as simple as that. The CIA doesn't kill anybody anymore, they neutralize people or they depopulate the area. The government doesn't lie, it engages in disinformation. The Pentagon actually measures nuclear radiation in something called 'sunshine units'. Israeli murderers are called 'commandos'. Arab commandos are called 'terrorists'. Contra killers are known as 'freedom fighters'. Well, if crime fighters fight crime and fire fighters fight fire, what do freedom fighters

fight?

And some of this softened language is just silly and embarrassing. On the airlines, they say they are going to pre-board passengers in need of special assistance. Cripples! Simple, honest, direct language. There is no shame attached to the word 'cripple'. No shame! It's a word used in Bible translations. Jesus healed the cripples. It doesn't take six words to describe that condition. But we don't have cripples anymore. Instead we have *the physically challenged*. Is that a grotesque enough evasion for you? How about 'differently abled'? I've actually heard cripples referred to as 'differently abled'! You can't even call these people handicapped anymore. They'll say, "We're not handicapped. We're handicapable!" These poor suckers have been bullshitted by the system into believing that if you change the name of the condition, somehow you'll change the condition. Well, it doesn't work that way.

I'm sure you've noticed we have no deaf people in this country. Hearing impaired. And no one's blind. Partially sighted or visually impaired. And thank God we no longer have stupid children. Today's kids all have learning disabilities or they're minimally exceptional. How would you like to be told that about your child? Actually it sounds faintly positive. "Your son is minimally exceptional." "Oohh, thank god for that." Again. Best of all, psychologists now call ugly people 'those with severe appearance deficits'. Things are so bad that any day now I expect to hear a rape victim referred to as 'an unwilling sperm recipient'.

Of course it has been obvious for some time that there are no old people in this country anymore. They all died. What we have now are *senior citizens*. How is that for a lifeless typically American twentieth-century phrase? There is no pulse in a senior citizen. But that's a term I've come to accept. That's what all people are going to be called. But the phrase I will continue to resist is when they describe an old person as being "ninety years young". Imagine how sad the fear of aging that is revealed in that phrase to be unable even to use the word 'old', to have to use its antonym. And I understand the fear of aging is natural. It's universal, isn't it? No one wants to get old. No one wants to die, but we do! We die! And we don't like that. So we bullshit ourselves. I started bullshitting myself when I reached my forties. I'd look in the mirror and say, "well, I... I guess I'm getting... older." 'Older' sounds better than 'old' doesn't it? Sounds like it might even last a little longer. Bullshit. I'm getting old! And it's okay. But the baby-boomers can't handle that. And remember the boomers invented most of this soft language, so now they've come up with a new life phase: pre-elderly. They say they are pre-elderly. How sad. How relentlessly sad. But it's alright, folks, because thanks to our fear of death, no one has to die. They can all just pass away or expire like a magazine subscription. If it happens in the hospital, they'll call it a terminal episode. The insurance company will refer to it as 'negative patient-care outcome'. And if it's the result of malpractice, they'll say it was a therapeutic misadventure. To be honest, some of this language makes me want to vomit. Well, perhaps vomit is too strong a word. It makes me want to engage in an involuntary personal protein spill.