

The Lone Raver



by

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This essay was first completed on Friday, March 23, 1990 and was most recently revised on Friday, May 15, 2015.

The document is approximately 3,062 words long.

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caveat lector

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Dedication

I'm using this dedication to answer a question that Poppa asked me many years ago. "Son," he asked, "if it takes a woodpecker a week to peck a pack of shingles out of a board fence, then how long does it take a rooster to lay a doorknob?" After 35 years, I think that I know the answer. Roosters don't lay doorknobs. They lay hens and hens lay eggs, which are shaped like doorknobs. But what was Poppa **really** trying to tell me? "Son," he solemnly intoned, "you'll never understand a woman." He already had me thinking about roosters and there must have been a reason. Maybe he was trying to tell me that women don't get laid if they're chicken.

I wonder what he taught Betty. I once heard him ask her, "How much wood could a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?" Maybe he was trying to tell her something about having studs around her in the home. I wonder what she concluded. And now,

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Meanwhile, Back At the Ranch, Tonto (Disguised As A Cigarette) Was Getting His Butt Stomped

From an early age, I've been puzzled by our language. Way back in the dark ages of the good old days, when I was unraveling the purposes of the various parts of my body, I concluded that thinking happened in my nose. The conclusion was logical, given two considerations. First, I was aware of only those parts of my body that I could see or touch. At that age, no one knows about his brain. Second, I was tricked by the language, with which I was already struggling. I'd heard such things as, "a smart man knows a lot." I missed the distinction between *knows* and *nose*.

I also misunderstood the word *understand*. When my mother commented that she didn't understand something, it made perfectly good sense to me. I could stand under the table quite easily but she obviously couldn't because she was too tall. Today, I wonder why we call it a *building* long after they're through building it. Why don't we call it a *built*? Flies *fly*. Why don't birds *bird*? Or better yet, why aren't all flying things called flies? Why does your nose run and your feet smell? Oranges are orange. Why aren't apples called *reds*? Why do we call the part you sit on your bottom? Your feet are lower down than your bottom, so shouldn't they be the bottom? Why is a *court brief* so long? If hens *roost* and roosters *crow*, then what do crows do? Why is a man on a horse called a *cowboy*, a *horseman*, or even a *cowman*, but never a *horseboy*? Why is it that a female actor is an *actress* but a female adult isn't an *adulteress*? Sometimes. Why are there *schools* of fish, *gaggles* of geese, *herds* of cows, excuse me cattle, *coveys* of quail, *prides* of lions, and *bunches* of everything else, except for *flocks* of birds? And what about *bunches* of grapes and bananas, which aren't the same as those other bunches? Why do female dogs, but male ducks, geese, and chickens get special names designating gender? Our ability to understand things is conditioned by our language. No wonder we're confused.

As an exercise, try to think of something, a concept, an action, a thing, for which you don't have a name. It's difficult. Yet, there are hundreds of concepts, actions, and things that exist besides those for which you have nouns or verbs. Why can't you think of one? Here's one for you. It's a simple concept but one that isn't generally used. In the generic sense, what do you call something to write with? It could be a pen, a pin, a pencil, a chalk, a lipstick, a burnt stick, an unburned stick in the dirt, a keyboard, or anything else that you can write with. Everybody has had one version or another of this conversation:

Speaker 1: Will you loan me a pencil?

Speaker 2: All I have is a pen.

Speaker 1: That's alright. Just something to write with.

Why have we never conceptualized a generic writing implement? Because nobody ever invented a word for it? Probably. Communication and understanding are made possible by vocabulary, but even more important, miscommunication and misunderstanding are made possible by the lack of vocabulary. So, I've coined some words. A

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writewith is anything that you can write with. A *writeon* is anything that you can write on. A *writeonwith* is one of each. Now you'll never again have to ask for a pencil when just anything will do.

It's a fact that there are many words missing from our language. A woman who's never been laid is called a virgin.¹ A woman who's had a baby is called a mother. So, what noun designates a woman who's been laid but never had a baby? How about a woman who's pregnant? There isn't a noun to describe her. Such gaps influence not

Life is a tragedy to those who feel.
—(With thanks to Horace Walpole) only communication, but thought. It might be a subtle thing and often unrecognized because people don't usually miss what they've never had. Yet, the consequences can be profound. Consider, for example, pairs of antonyms. One pair is *bad* and *good*. We all understand those words. From the time that we were children, we've been yelled at for being bad and praised for being good.² We've had lots of experience with both words and it's easy to think of ourselves, or of others, as bad or as good. Consider, however, the verb *to sin*, meaning to disobey God. There isn't an antonym for the verb *to sin*. That is, if to sin is bad then what is it called to be good? If someone disobeys God, then he sins. If he obeys God, then he doesn't have a verb to describe his action and thus, in a very real sense, no action has occurred. Someone who commits a sin is a sinner. Someone who commits a (--?--) is nameless.

When a Christian evaluates his actions, the influence of his vocabulary is unavoidable. He might easily decide that he's a sinner. But his alternatives for its opposite consist only of clumsy phrases such as virtuous man, doer of good deeds, long-sufferer, and so forth. It isn't surprising that Christians all consider themselves to be sinners. They lack the vocabulary to do otherwise.

In the twisted way that Christians have of looking at things, suffering is associated with virtue and sin is associated with pleasure. I suppose that the closest Christian antonym for sin is *suffer*. Maybe that explains why Christians are so hung-up on suffering. They have to make everything as painful as possible so that they can be Christ-like. Maybe somebody should tell them that it isn't working.

Life is a comedy to those who think.
—(Thanks again, Horace)

1 After a certain age, she's called chicken.

2 ...if we were lucky.

On a Bicycle Built for Two

The correspondence of reality and vocabulary can be illustrated by example. In the bicycle business, with which I'm familiar, there has recently been introduced on de-railleur type bicycles something called an indexed shifter. With an indexed shifter, there are little detents that click whenever you shift the gears. Previously, you simply slid the shifter and "felt" for the gears. Before indexed shifting, there were only shifters. When the new ones appeared, they got a new name, *indexed*, but then the old ones didn't have a name anymore. They could no longer be called shifters because that word now applies to two different kinds. By default, the old ones became *non-indexed* shifters. A lack of distinguishing vocabulary goes hand-in-hand with a lack of categories described by the vocabulary.

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Neither Do I Condemn Thee: Go, and Sin No More (He Said)

Presently, the only category of Christian actions described by Christian vocabulary is sins. Things that are not sins are not named in the vocabulary. Since there aren't any other names, there aren't any other categories. Suffering isn't really a category of actions. It's the Christian condition that results from trying to avoid everything. All things are sins and all men are sinners. Clearly, a missing word has influenced Christian thinking. You don't believe me? Remember how hard it was to think of a concept for which you didn't have a name? Remember how much easier it was after I coined the word *writewith*? The Nazarene told the woman not to sin anymore but whether he told her what to do instead remains unreported in English. If he did tell her what to do instead, then we don't have a word for it. Maybe she suffered a lot. Self-esteem among Christians could be substantially improved by the invention of an antonym of the word *sin*.

I propose the word *amen*. To amen is to obey God. Amening is the process of obeying God. One who obeys God is an amener. By golly, it even rhymes with sin (close enough), so that it'll be easy to write lots of hymns about them both!

There was a young man in Marin
Who always did nothing butt sin.
One day he got saved,
And the Christians all raved,
'Cause now all he does is amen!

The world's first religious limerick, by gum! Not only that, every prayer and hymn already ends with amen! Hallelujah, Amen!³

The introduction of the word *amen* makes it a whole new ball game because it creates a whole new category of Christian actions, amens. Since you've read this, you're stuck. You can't avoid it now because you have the vocabulary. From now on, you'll have to assign actions to one category or the other. You can't just call everything a sin anymore. You'll have to determine what is which. Is what you did a sin (forbidden action) or an amen (required action)? However, the BIG bonus is the discovery that some actions don't fit EITHER category. Thus, another category of actions, neutral ones, will arise. It will be possible for Christians to engage in activities that need not be either sins or amens. Lets call them rads. A man who commits a rad is a radder, which is what I'd radder be.

This might come as a revelation to many Christians. To a devout Christian, adultery might still be a sin and tithing might still be an amen. But that same Christian might now be able to go skinny-dipping (alone, of course!) with no thought of either penalty or reward. He might do it just for the pleasure of the experience. If it isn't forbidden at least by implication, then it can't be a sin. If it isn't required at least by implication, then it can't be an amen. The existence of a whole category of neutral actions might go a long way toward removing some of the needless and arbitrary fear and guilt from Christian belief. I'm not aware that God ever said, "Thou shalt not experience pleasure!"

3 I trust the wild-eyed raving feminists will forgive me for not proposing *apersons*. Who'd want to be called an *apersonser*. Besides that, it might get confused with a *parson*.

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Now Where Was I? Oh Yeah.

My example with antonyms wasn't an accident. Antonyms are important. George Orwell gave them special consideration in Ingsoc's Newspeak Dictionary.⁴ Professed therein was the idea that antonyms are unnecessary, that each word implies its opposite, that (for example) all possible opposites of *good* can be named by *ungood*.

Hidden by the apparent simplicity of that belief is a great fallacy. Opposites do not define one another. The meaning of a thing isn't contained within its opposite. *Ungood* cannot take the place, simultaneously, of *evil*, *wicked*, *unsound*, *unwholesome*, *baneful*, *deleterious*, *pernicious*, *noisome*, *noxious*, and *sinful*. Meaning can be obscured or lost by a glib or careless use of negative forms of words to form alleged opposites. And it doesn't work anyway. *Even* and *odd* are opposites, but *uneven* doesn't mean the same thing as *odd*.⁵ The goal of Newspeak was to reduce people's ability to think. Its method was to reduce their vocabulary.

One who can define kindness only as the absence of cruelty has surely not begun to understand the nature of either. —from <i>Angel's Egg</i> , in the collection <i>Good Neighbors and Other Strangers</i> by Edgar Pangborn

4 1984, Chapter One, Section V, by George Orwell.

5 Thanks for the example, Donald.

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If You Call A Tail A Leg, Then How Many Legs Does A Sheep Have?

Indeed, we don't need fewer words. We need more of them. That's obvious from the way that people keep inventing new ones. It happens all the time. Radar. Quasar. Quark. Clone. Shareware. Vaporware. New words represent new thoughts. I've invented a few words myself. Here are some of them. Butl, from Blight Upon The Land, means new houses, new apartments, new shopping malls, new office buildings, new freeways, etc., when there are already far too many of them. Shitware is either hardware or software that doesn't work correctly. A knockee is a pregnant woman. Most of the women who've heard that one don't like it but none of them have suggested anything better so they're stuck with it until they do. I thought about layer for a woman who's been laid but we already use that word for a certain category of chickens and a woman who's a layer certainly isn't chicken so I guess we really need a better word. Let me know if you have any suggestions. LiteraShare is the way that I publish these essays. A sago is a Sweetie of the Appropriate Gender and Orientation. That is, a heterosexual woman can be a sago to a heterosexual man, a heterosexual man can be a sago to a heterosexual woman, a homosexual man can be a sago to another homosexual man, and a homosexual woman can be a sago to another homosexual woman. The word can really simplify conversations between folks with different sexual preferences. And finally there's jugger, a lovely word that I didn't invent although I wish that I had. I certainly appreciate the observations of the unknown man who did. A jugger is a woman running for exercise.

Yup, it's a strange language.⁶ A terminal disease will end your life, yet you begin a bus or plane trip at a terminal. So, how do we tell the beginning from the end? Not only that, what is the end? Is the end where it stops, or is the end what it accomplished? Do the means justify the end, or does the end have meaning? Those questions might have several meanings, depending on the meaning of *end* and *mean*. Although I'm not a man of means, you can see that I mean well. Sometimes, the meaning of a thing is impossible to decipher:

There was a young man named Hall
Who fell in a spring in the fall.
Would have been a sad thing,
Had he died in the spring,
But he didn't. He died in the fall.

Where did he end? And when?

Lewis Carroll said,

"Begin at the beginning ... and go on till you come to the end: then stop."
—*Alice's Adventures in wonderland*

But what was he **really** trying to tell us? This essay is over, but this is not the end. Or is it?

(Four. Calling a tail a leg doesn't make it a leg.)

⁶ Sez Webster, *yup* is a variation of *yep*, which means yes. Jeez!

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[*Ravin' Evermore*](#)

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