



## Clanking Chains: Kesler: "Our Fighting Faith"; Sowell's "Verbal Inflation"; Cultural Marxism's "Vocabulary of Ideas": Authoritarianism

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### Our Fighting Faith

Why we roll.

By Charles R. Kesler

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This piece is based on a speech delivered at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C. on September 9, 2002.

One of the most striking aspects of Americans' reaction to 9/11 was the public outpouring of religious sentiment and ceremony. Millions of prayers rose heavenward on that day, and for months afterward the churches and synagogues were packed. The formerly naked public square was suddenly and richly clothed. President Bush led a moving, ecumenical prayer service at the National Cathedral. Face-to-face with evil, even the ACLU blinked. No lawsuits were filed challenging the use of public property for religious purposes or seeking to enjoin firemen and policemen from praying on the job.

Yet this was more a cease-fire than a victory in the battle over the public significance of religion. Already the federal judiciary has roused itself. A Ninth Circuit panel ruled that the phrase "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance creates an unconstitutional establishment of religion in the United States, and accordingly forbade public schoolteachers to lead their students in reciting the Pledge. On a happier note, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that school vouchers are not unconstitutional just because some parents might spend them at schools encouraging pious acts between consenting adults and even between children.

Alongside the religious outpouring, the revival of patriotism was the clearest sign of the political change wrought by 9/11. Though the flag-waving has subsided, most citizens still feel a renewed loyalty and, as the Pledge case shows, public opinion does not look kindly on those who would try to divorce our country's cause from its service to liberty and justice, under God.

Nonetheless, distrust of this kind of patriotism runs deep among American intellectuals, and a cooling trend, blowing from the mountains of the extreme Left, has begun to set in among the foothills and will, in all probability, touch eventually the vast plains of the liberal Center. Let me put the question squarely: Can we pronounce the attacks of September 11 to be evil, or not? Not merely the extreme Left, but many mainstream liberals and even some deluded conservatives squirmed and objected when Ronald Reagan pronounced the Soviet Union an "evil empire." Now the same issue arises in a new context. The intellectual Left faces a dilemma. On the one hand, Osama bin Laden is not exactly a liberal poster child, what with his penchant for oppressing women, persecuting homosexuals, and rejecting Supreme Court doctrine on the separation of church and state. On the other hand, he and his gang are an authentic culture or subculture unto themselves, are anti-bourgeois, and strive to resist American imperialism. Who are we to condemn them? muses the Left.

Behind this moral and intellectual abdication is the doctrine called postmodernism, which is simply relativism dressed up in robes and mortarboard. Postmodernists find everything ironic, including themselves (or so they say), and they delight in deconstructing structures of power even as they build powerful structures for themselves within our universities. They take nothing seriously because they think, seriously, that nothing exists outside the flux of forces and values. In particular, there is no moral or political truth "out there," as Richard Rorty, a prominent postmodernist, likes to say. Hence patriotism is their bete noire. American patriots take themselves and their country seriously because they know that "liberty and justice for all" reflects God's and nature's intention for man. From the perspective of liberal postmodernism, patriots "don't get it"; don't understand that there is no truth, only perspectives. Cleverly, however, most postmodernists claim to want to save patriotism by recreating it on relativist grounds: I pledge allegiance to the flag of my choice, and to the notions for which it stands, under Nietzsche, so long as no animals were harmed in making it and no one was offended by the mistaken notion that this flag is better than any other flag.



September 11 was a deathblow to postmodernism, we are often told. I wish this were true. President Bush has tried repeatedly to show that the attacks prove that there is a real difference between good and evil, and his and Mayor Giuliani's speeches contain powerful moral testimonies. Nevertheless, they make their moral case by pointing to the facts — to the collapsed Towers, the shattered Pentagon, the anguished last calls from doomed husbands, wives, parents, and children. These facts speak for themselves, Bush and Giuliani say in effect. And they do; and the American people understand this. The facts speak, but they do not say enough. War is a coldhearted business, and democracies are better at fighting wars than many critics think because the people understand perfectly well that at some point it comes down to this: either we are going to kill you or you are going to kill us. The red ants and the black ants, in their own way, understand this, too. But this sentiment is no refutation of postmodernism.

In fact, it is highly compatible with the postmodern fascination with the will to power and its urge to strip away all ethical significance from human life. This is not the faith that we are fighting for, and our statesmen have made this clear too, and the people affirm it.

Still, the reasons, the arguments that anchor America's democratic-republican faith are neither explored nor exploited as they should be. One searches, not quite in vain but certainly in exasperation, for statements that could be said to be genuinely Lincolnian or Jeffersonian; statements that would be useful not only in refuting relativism and its twin, fanaticism, but in elaborating the truths of free government. On this front the churches have failed us even more than our political class. There are no postmodernist grounds for condemning the terrorists' attacks on September 11. Nor are there any grounds for celebrating them, except perhaps self-hate: admiration for the daring actions of cruel men who would despise these academic gamesmen. Most American liberals are not postmodernist, at least not yet; but neither do they offer any good arguments against it. Few conservatives do, either, which is a sign of the larger problem. The patriotic American consensus may hold, but make no mistake, it is under pressure. The longer and more indecisively the war drags on, the greater the pressure will become.

It's curious that the public has so far not united around a watchword regarding 9/11, a slogan meant to engage our memory and our conscience. Is this a backhanded tribute to liberal postmodernism's growing influence? In its view, the past has nothing to teach us because it is all interpretation; the postmodern slogan, so characteristic of the Clinton administration, is "let's move on." Past generations of Americans refused to do this, refused to betray those who had sacrificed on their behalf. Think of our ancestors' great battle cries: Remember Pearl Harbor. Remember the Lusitania. Remember the Maine. Remember the Alamo.

Yet no one vows, "Remember 9/11." We may quietly say or wish it, but it is not a sacred oath constantly on our lips, our billboards, or our televisions. Without such a promise, however, we are prone to forget why and where we are rolling. Victory loses its luster, and its urgency, when rescinded from the reasons we are at war. How then should we commemorate September 11? Not as victims — though we must never forget the brave and the innocent who were slaughtered — but as proud citizens, intent on vindicating our fallen comrades. The phrase 9/11 caught on in part because it coincided with 9-1-1, the well-known emergency telephone number, employed on that horrible day a year ago. But 9-1-1 is a call for help. 9/11 must be a call to arms. Let it become our battle cry: Remember 9/11.

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<http://www.nationalreview.com/comment/comment-kesler091002.asp>

- 17- Reich's use of the word "violence" in these contexts is an example of what Dr. Thomas Sowell refers to as Verbal Inflation in:

**Sowell, Thomas. *The Vision of the Anointed: Self-Congratulation as a Basis for Social Policy*. (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 215, 217:**

There is a general tendency toward verbal inflation among the anointed. Thus, the ordinary vicissitudes of life become "traumas." Any situation which (the anointed) wish to change becomes a "crisis." Regardless of whether it is any worse than usual or is already getting better on its own.



One of the fashionable inflationary words of our times is “violence”—used to describe whatever social circumstances or political policies one disagrees with, however peaceful such circumstances or policies may be in the ordinary usage of words. Thus any “power that oppresses” is violence, according to some, which opens up boundless vistas, based only on what one chooses to call oppression.

Jesse Jackson refers to “economic violence,” Ralph Nader refers to “violence” done to the environment by corporations and government, and Jonathan Kozol refers to “savage inequalities” in public school financing. Similarly, Professor Kenneth B. Clark responded to public concerns about muggings by referring to “pervasive social muggings” such as “the crimes of deteriorating neighborhoods, job discrimination and criminally inferior education.” Thus Professor Clark could speak of “mugged communities,” “mugged neighborhoods,” and “mugged schools which spawn urban ‘muggers.’”

For some, figurative “violence” serves as an explicit justification of real violence or “counterviolence” as it is called. For others, the justification is only implicit. Still others are just practicing the politics of verbal inflation.

- 18- Verbal Inflation joins a myriad of tactics utilized by practitioners of the Frankfurt philosophy in their assault against client nation America and the four divine institutions.
- 19- The deconstruction of Western culture, the discrediting of American history, the demeaning of traditional values, and the demonizing of Christian theology are the manifestations of Critical Theory. It thus becomes important for us to take a close look at this psychological weapon concocted at the Frankfurt School.
- 20- As we do we need to define a number of terms used by proponents of cultural Marxism. We will do so from a book that examines their vocabulary of ideas:

**Kohl, Herbert. “Introduction.” In *From Archetype to Zeitgeist: Powerful Ideas for Powerful Thinking*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1992), xi-xiv:**

**Introduction: Why a Guide to the Language of Ideas?** I began thinking about writing this guide to the language of ideas because high school and college students I taught did not have a vocabulary adequate to express their ideas. They stumbled over describing a style, criticizing a political position, discussing a social problem, or analyzing their own values. It was clear to me that the problem was not intelligence so much as lack of vocabulary and inexperience with using language well. At first I tried having my students use dictionaries, but that didn’t work. Dictionary definitions were too brief and didn’t provide enough information on how words work in context to help them speak and write well. I began writing short essays on words and sharing them with my students.

There is a major problem even well-educated people confront in mastering the language of ideas, a problem that has led to the creation of this book: The language of ideas is not learned informally through casual conversation. Somehow it is expected that the complex and sophisticated language of ideas will be absorbed through reading, listening, and perhaps some mystical forms of osmosis.

This book is an attempt to be explicit about the language of ideas, to provide definitions of concepts that are needed in order to be articulate both within the humanities and social sciences, both at college and later in life when thinking about important issues such as race, gender, power, pain, and politics.



One inspiration for this guide was a class I taught in 1987 on civics, sociology, and economics. What I discovered was that my students did not have the language to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and opinions to me or to each other. They had not acquired ... ease and fluency discussing ideas. They did not, for example, have a way to discuss differences in style, political orientation, or philosophical belief. They had little sense of comparative political and economic structures, and had not acquired a critical vocabulary that was useful for analyzing what they read. In fact they were not accustomed to analyzing different positions on issues that affected their lives even though they were concerned about them.

During the course of the year we were together, I found it very useful to teach ideas and words directly. I believe the students found it useful and know that by the end of our time together they could speak specifically of what was on their minds rather than just express general approval or disapproval. Terms like *cool* and *far out* began to be replaced with more measured and thoughtful language.

- 21- Many of the definitions in Kohl's "dictionary of ideas" are for terms that have been developed from the worldview of the Frankfurt School and those who subscribe to it. Knowing several will be helpful as we continue our study and as words and terms pop up along the way. One source in particular is mentioned by:

**Buchanan, *The Death of the West*, 81:**

Erich Fromm's *Escape from Freedom* and Wilhelm Reich's *The Mass Psychology of Fascism and The Sexual Revolution* reflect Critical Theory. But the most influential book the Frankfurt School ever published was *The Authoritarian Personality*. In this masterpiece of the Frankfurt School, Karl Marx's economic determinism is replaced with cultural determinism.

- 22- The writing of *The Authoritarian Personality* was a team effort by four men who were associated with the Frankfurt School: Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik \braun' shvik\, Daniel J. Levinson, and R. Nevitt Sanford. The back cover gives this synopsis:

**Adorno, T. W., et al. *The Authoritarian Personality*. Abridged ed., eds. Max Horkheimer and Samuel H. Flowerman. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982), back cover:**

Bringing together the findings of psychoanalysis and social science, this groundbreaking book grew out of an urgent commitment to study the origins of anti-Semitism. First published in 1951, it was greeted as a monumental study blazing new trails in the investigation of prejudice. It undertook the challenging task of determining scientifically what personality traits characterized the phenomenon of authoritarianism and what forces allowed for its development.

In preparing the abridged edition, Daniel Levinson and R. Nevitt Sanford focused on the primary theoretical thrust of the original volume and the empirical studies that underlie it. Ethnocentrism, anti-Semitism, fascism, paranoia, and unquestioning obedience to authority are still the central topics.

- 23- The targets of cultural Marxism are the divine institutions each of which has an authority structure. The genius behind these satanic assaults is that the stated purpose was to discover the causes of anti-Semitism.
- 24- Before excerpts from *The Authoritarian Personality* can be helpful we need to understand some specific words and phrases. The vocabulary of ideas that has emerged from the Frankfurt School contains a host of concepts that are common in the writings and discourse of its present-day practitioners.
- 25- Your understanding of a few of them will enable you to better analyze not only the remainder of our study but also assist you in identifying clanking chains on your own. Kohl's book defines the vocabulary of ideas that will help you in these areas.



- 26- First of all, it was decided by the faculty at the Frankfurt School that the chief culprit behind the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe in general and in Germany in particular was institutional authoritarianism.

**Kohl, *From Archetype to Zeitgeist*, s.v. “authoritarian”:**

An authoritarian group, institution, or society is one that has all of its power concentrated in a single person or small group. In such a group, the people in power are not responsible to anyone outside of the group. Authoritarianism is the opposite of democracy, where every individual is supposed to have an equal voice in governance.

Authoritarian groups can range from Boy and Girl Scout troops, social clubs, and families, to nations and corporations.

Surprisingly, some people submit willingly to authoritarian rule.

When an authoritarian group assumes power over all aspects of public and private life, it is said to be totalitarian.

Fascism is a type of totalitarianism that is characterized by overriding national and racial pride, and extreme intolerance for outsiders. Usually at the head of a fascist state is a single dictator who is in control of a very strong repressive apparatus that is used to coerce cooperation and suppress dissent. Nazi fascism under Adolf Hitler involved extreme German nationalism, which exalted Germany above all other nations in the world, and identified Germans as members of a fictitious superior race of “Aryans.” It went beyond this self-exaltation and set out upon a genocidal policy of eliminating so-called impurities that corrupted the race. This led to the genocidal attempt to kill all Jews.

- 27- In the devil’s world you will find many things that can be used for good or evil. Government is near the top of the list. Our Founders were authoritarians but realized from their experiences under the rule of King George the Third that power centralized in a man without integrity with a complicit Parliament resulted in totalitarian policies toward the colonies.