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On Words Part One: Words

Words force us to understand the world in the way that we understand it.

On June 12, 2016 a radical Islamic terrorist shot 102 people inside the Pulse nightclub located in Orlando Florida. On June 12, 2016 a home-grown terrorist shot 102 people inside the Pulse nightclub located in Orland Florida. Which of the previous two sentences do you believe best describes what happened on June 12, 2016 inside the Pulse nightclub located in Orlando Florida?

As you mull over your answer, consider what you must do in order to answer. You must identify that the only difference between the two sentences are the words “radical Islamic terrorist” and “home-grown terrorist.” You must determine the difference(s) in meaning between “radical Islamic terrorist” and “home-grown terrorist.” And you must determine which best describes what happened on June 12, 2016 inside of the Pulse nightclub.

In doing these things you are illustrating the role of words: *Words force us to understand the world in the way that we understand it.*

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October 20, 2016
Version • D721FCD4(R01)

The reason you favor one group of words over another is because you believe they represent the world in the way you believe actually represents the world. This is thinking.

Of course we don't have to think. We can dawdle from day to day and never examine the words that give rise to our thoughts. In such a state we are unable to connect cause to effect, generate alternatives, consider trade-offs, weather the effects of probability, eliminate engines of pretense, and confront reality. We are quite literally incapable of controlling our thought and therefore fully under the forces of thought control.

Some of the people who are in this state are in this state for no other reason than they are always in this state. Even if they can be convinced that there is a real difference between "radical Islamic terrorist" and "home-grown terrorist," they can't be made to examine the next bit of twaddle that comes their way. These folks are destined to live the flighty, day to day life of an administrator, journalist, sportscaster, politician, or laxative salesman.

But for most of us the failure to pay attention to words is nothing more than a mistake. The mistake isn't that we fail to find the appropriate expression of a difficult idea. The mistake is we occasionally permit unacceptable words to act as labels for what we believe. After all, keeping an eye on the words we come into contact with is difficult and tiring work. So what if our great-uncle makes reference to home-grown terrorists. We know—although he may not—what he's really talking about. What's the big deal?

The big deal is that words are for telling, not labeling. The difference is important. Telling is a matter of choosing and arranging words in such a way as to produce for our mind, and for the minds of others, a genuine view of the world. Labels on the other hand are anything but genuine. They are proxies that eat

away at our mind and eventually remove our ability to produce a genuine view of the world.

The phrase “home-grown terrorist” can be used as a proxy for “radical Islamic terrorist.” That bit of labeling can be done with words. But a person who does that with his or her mind is like a tree afflicted with a disease that slowly and quietly eats away at the wood. Sooner or later all that will remain is a pile of rubble made entirely of bark.

Words force us to understand the world in the way that we understand it. If we do not, or cannot, pay close attention to words we will be dominated by those who do.

This document available at:

<http://www.mcmanna.com/onwordspartonewords/>

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