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Introduction to "Faulty Phrases"

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Jake Bates, Editor

Regardless of setting and no matter the circumstances, language is at the root of human interaction. A perplexing phenomenon picked up by toddlers at an almost inconceivably rapid rate, language has been used since the first days of recorded history—because recording history without it would be near impossible. Every voluntary exchange amongst men, and every emerging educational discipline has required effective and efficient communication. From thoughts expressed only in our heads to legal contracts manifesting a mutual agreement, language is necessary. Not only in literature, but also in the natural and social sciences, language plays an indispensable role in communicating and sharing discoveries and truths.

Yet language is so often used, not to convey and celebrate meaning, but to convolute already mangled ideas. It is used seemingly purposely to bring only disarray where the potential for ever-increasing knowledge exists. "Experts" intentionally use language as a way to appear intelligent while saying nothing of meaning. Syntax is discarded for unnecessary sesquipedalian[1] words. This distortion of language has become so pervasive that we often tell ourselves that philosophers could not have meant what they wrote and our friends could not have meant what they said.

This recurring installment of *The Intellectual Standard* is dedicated to an objective linguistic analysis of frequently uttered, yet entirely nonsensical, sayings. By examining logical flaws in the content of what is said daily, we can use language toward a constructive and meaningful end, as it should be used. As Ayn Rand wrote, "You must not take a catch phrase—or any abstract statement—as if it were approximate. Take it literally. Don't translate it, don't glamorize it, don't make the mistake of thinking, as many people do: 'Oh, nobody could possibly mean this!' and then proceed to endow it with some white-washed meaning of your own. Take it straight, for what it *does* say and mean."[2] This aim is precisely what this segment of *The Intellectual Standard* hopes to achieve. In doing so, we hope to illuminate and finally reject many of our language's faulty phrases.

1   That is, words containing many syllables.
2   From Ayn Rand's essay "Philisophical Detection" in *Philosophy: Who Needs It*, pp. 21.