

Denial or confession?

Mandelson is a true prince of the logocracy, whose greatest skill was,
and still is, the emptying of language of fixed meaning

By Theodore Dalrymple

No one, I suppose, would look to Peter Mandelson for truth-telling, but even by his high standards his statement after the latest revelations of his association with the late Mr Epstein is slippery.



Peter Mandelson (Photo by JUSTIN TALLIS / AFP via Getty Images)

He is the master of frictionless language: that is to say, language that does not rub up against any fixed meaning. You cannot say that what he says is true, but equally, you cannot say that it is false.

In his letter resigning from the Labour Party, he wrote:

I have been further linked this weekend to the understandable furore surrounding Jeffrey Epstein and I feel regretful and sorry about this.

About what was he regretful and sorry?

That he had been justly “linked” to Jeffrey Epstein? That he had been unjustly “linked” to Jeffrey Epstein? That he had been “linked” at all to Jeffrey Epstein, whether justly or

unjustly? That he had been accused of something that he had done, or accused of something that he had not done? Was he, indeed, regretful and sorry that he had done something wrong? Impossible to say.

The letter continued:

Allegations which I believe to be false that he made financial payments to me 20 years ago, of which I have no record or recollection, need investigating by me.

Is this denial or confession? It is something between the two: denial if it is taken as confession and confession if taken as denial.

No wonder Mandelson has had such a glittering career, even if it has now the glitter of the fish rotting by moonlight. In our bureaucratised society he was a wizard of *langue de bois*, a true prince of the logocracy, whose greatest skill was, and still is, the emptying of language of fixed meaning.

Do not doubt that this is a skill: just try yourself to talk or write for longer than a sentence or two without conveying a fixed meaning. Such meaning will keep breaking through, however hard you try to prevent it from doing so.

Peter Mandelson wrote that he had devoted his life to the success of the Labour Party.

Si monumentum requiris ...

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