

So Can = Thereby Are Able To

“A fool sees not the same tree a wise man sees.”

-William Blake

I have a fascination with the idea of subjective text, since I’ve recently been working on several related projects. By a subjective text I don’t mean one that is interpreted differently by different readers—that is true of all texts. I mean a text that varies depending on who is reading it. A classic example would be the textbooks offered in many schools, where the teacher is given an expanded version of the same book, and the students are given a reduced version.

Given this curiosity, I’m a little in love with the document that follows. It’s from Tim Jackins, the current majordomo of re-evaluation counseling (RC). RC, for anyone who’s unaware, was an early heresy of Dianetics, before Dianetics itself evolved into Scientology. It’s the brainchild of Carl Harvey Jackins, Tim Jackins’ late father. RC has attracted as much controversy as its fifty-year history accommodates. Nevertheless, it remains a fascinating example of a largely decentralized therapy (albeit one with a clear *de jure* hierarchy). I’m not a practitioner; in fact I’m solidly skeptical of the movement, but what I’m interested here is the text.

Jackins wrote this short essay on the Middle East in 2006. He prepared two versions, one for RC practitioners and one for laypeople. I’ve combined them. Passages that only appear in the RC text are marked in red, passages that only appear in the nRC text are marked in blue. I’ve collapsed a few minor phrasing differences for clarity, but otherwise both texts are complete here:

*The current situation in the Middle East is one **driven by distresses** formed over many years by the oppression of its peoples, including colonization and manipulation by countries far from the Middle East. The unthinking attempts to solve a problem by hurting the other side with enough death and damage that they will accept one's position cannot work, **but these distress patterns** are now playing themselves out, yet again.*

*Fresh thinking is needed to find solutions to the real problems that exist, not the repetition of old, failed and unworkable policies on all sides, not terrorism nor mass retaliation nor oppression. Such actions simply lead to a reinforcement of the distresses involved, make it ever more difficult to find a real, **just, and workable** solution, and must be abandoned.*

Any real solutions cannot be enforced by one side on another, nor by outside forces manipulating the peoples of the Middle East, or those will not ever be real solutions, just another set of enforced inequities that will foster more violence, death, and destruction in the future.

All peoples involved in the present conflict are good humans who have been oppressed and hurt, and none should be blamed for the distressed actions of their governments or other groups operating in their territories. The fears we all feel at the situation should not be used to justify our giving in to any pull to act oppressively at any people.

*The actions in the Middle East are understandable, given the history of the peoples involved **and our understanding of the effect of undischarged distresses**. But if past injustices are accepted as sufficient reasons to manipulate, oppress and kill others, then there can be no end to war, oppression, or terrorism. Injustices must simply end and just solutions must be sought.*

A just solution, including a lasting peace and a secure and prosperous country for each people as a first step into the future, can only come through fresh thinking by the peoples' representatives, each committed to finding a good life for all peoples, not for one at the expense of another, nor one involving the impoverishment of most for the wealth of a few. Many aspects of those future lives require the ceding of things long held as important by one

people or another and bound up with great emotional attachment based on *undischarged hurts / old battles and injustices*. The more of us who *recognize and face our distresses in this area / this necessary step and so can / thereby are able to hold out a good, rational, and just future as a direction against the the reactive pull of old hurts / allure of settling old scores*, the more quickly the situation can move forward.

It may be that in the openly putting forward our choice of this future over the pull to settle old scores and to try to fill frozen longings, and by listening to others' struggle in doing the same, we can play an important role in moving the world forward. / The sooner governments and groups, other than the people directly involved, stop trying to manipulate the peoples living in the midst of this conflict, whether for reasons of political power, religion, or oil, the sooner these peoples will attain a good future for themselves.

In three cases, Jackins has simply excised RC's "distress" jargon from the nRC version, *without offering any text in substitution*. It's an interesting move. Perhaps the implication is that non-RC readers are too unsophisticated to handle this vocabulary. Alternatively, Jackins may feel compelled to use the house buzzwords when he is writing to an in-house audience, but realize that they are not really necessary for the meaning of the sentence. This would be very much what Rosen suggested in *Psychobabble*: that popular psychology has developed not only a new lexicon, but an embarrassment about not using that lexicon whenever possible.

More interesting, along these lines, is the addition of "just and workable" for the nRC audience. Here the implication seems strong that the RC audience is viewed as being more sophisticated. They do not need to be hand-held in connecting realism with justice and workability. In the same vein, the non-RC audience gets "recognize and face" while the RC audience gets a mere "face;" recognition is assumed.

It is the direct substitutions, though, that call our attention. Most of them have to do with cleaning up RC-specific jargon ("hurts," "discharge," and "distress") and each time, it begs the question of whether or not this jargon is useful. I think almost anyone who is not attached to the specific terms would say that "emotional attachment based on old battles and injustices" is a better and more descriptive phrase than the awkward "emotional attachment based on undischarged hurts."

But the great telling-point is the last paragraph, which varies completely depending on the audience. For the non-RC audience, it reads as a geopolitical thesis. It speaks of oil, religion, and politics, and justifies a non-interventionist strategy in Utilitarian or social-welfare terms. For the RC audience, it reiterates the (rather vague) psychosocial thesis of the previous paragraph, and justifies itself in teleological terms. Even the agents are not the same. The RC audience text speaks of "our" choice, the pronoun implicitly referring to RC adherents, since no one else is meant to read it. The non-RC text refers to "governments and groups," which could mean anyone and everyone.

What are we to make of all this? I have a certain knee-jerk response against subjective texts in other formats. On wikipedia, for example, one of my pet peeves is the occasional pressure to create "spoiler" warnings that users can elect to have hidden or displayed. I feel certain that, if we enact such a policy, some users will then want the option to hide the "spoiling" texts themselves, and then some users will want the option to hide texts that are too sexy, or too boring, or too left-wing, or mention Lee Iacocca, or whatever. And I think wikipedia would lose much of its value as a common reference point if it became a subjective text.

And yet, as much as Jackins' bifurcated essay gives me an Orwellian chill, I can't condemn the basic idea. I *like* the basic idea. I would be very happy if I could tell my browser to display news articles in anarchist jargon, displaying all the links to relevant empirical studies. And someone else, no doubt, would be equally happy to read their news articles in neo-conservative jargon, displaying all the relevant biblical passages. I don't see why both of us shouldn't have our wish fulfilled.