

Next time I'll just say "explain yourself"

The Urth list — 10 messages, 6 voices, 29 Jul 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3386>

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 30 Jul 2002, 03:36

Blattid wrote:

Second, I do not mean (nor did I mean to imply) that Ascian
Correct Thought is _exclusively_ a parable of the Maoist
Cult of Personality.

But you =do= mean to exclude all things Orwell from the mix, right? I mean, that is what I heard before, that is what I hear now. That is what I continue to find so puzzling.

The approach to thought control taken by the Ingsoc Party (more specifically, one supposes, Ministrue) in NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR is fundamentally different (in my opinion) from that taken by the Group of Seventeen in tBotNS; the former seeks to redesign grammar and vocabulary so that thoughtcrime is literally unthinkable, but to leave enough flexibility that more or less anything can be thought.

Hmmm. I don't know.

The approach of Ascian "Correct Thought" is somewhat different. It does not seek to change the _form_ of the language, but to limit -- by what mechanism we are not told -- the actual things the people are allowed to say (and so, presumably, to think). Like Newspeak, the basic idea of imprisoning minds this way is (Skinnerian or Whorf-Sapirean) nonsense, and Loyal to the Group of Seventeen's story of the just man shows how Correct Thought can be manipulated to think the "incorrect" (or "unthinkable") -- on this much, at least, we are agreed?

Hmmm. Well maybe. I mean, part of the problem in this approach (comparing Approved Texts, most of which comes from "The Just Man," with Newspeak of NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR) is that we do not have an Ascian boundary and its penetration as we have in Oceania ("down with Big Brother!"). Winston Smith is a rebel; Loyal to the Group of Seventeen is a prisoner of war who does not show any clear signs of switching sides -- we take his speech to be orthodox. What would be the unthinkable elements in "The Just Man"?

My point is that the Ingsoc approach is more subtle and, in a word, structural, allowing an essentially infinite array of thinkables while fencing off certain areas as unthinkable -- a bounded infinity of utterances, if you will. The Ascian approach is radically different; it uses brute iterative force to say "Here are the thinkable thoughts; there are no others."

I'm not sure I follow. One difference I can see, as I try to understand what you are saying (yet this is actually not what you are saying), is a difference of unit scale: Newspeak is built on the word level, whereas the units of Approved Texts are . . . well, what, exactly? Paragraphs, sentences, and perhaps sentence fragments (like "loyal to the Group of Seventeen"; "no one is to receive more than 100 blows").

These units are used differently, it seems. Paragraphs would seem to have the most rigidity to them and so presumably offer less room for nuance (as they drag more of their original context along with them). Sentences, otoh, are removed from textual context and thus presumably could be used to say the opposite of the original meaning.

Thus, if Foila isn't actually lying (i.e., giving a false interpretation of the source text), a fellow can use Approved Texts with a cut and paste approach and tell an original story . . . hmmm, or =is= it original? Maybe the entire text of "The Just Man" is unabridged, verbatim Authorized Text

-- is that what everyone assumes? If so, that completely demolishes my "human spirit works around the obstacle" line of reasoning . . . the tale becomes a propaganda told by a cunning robot.

(My thinking before was something more like, oh, tell the story of "Romeo and Juliet" using only complete sentences from "MacBeth.")

I take this to be an extrapolation-to-the-final-stage of the Maoist _type_ of "political correctness."

OTOH, to the best of my knowledge, even at the height of the personality cult the Chinese did not make a practice of speaking exclusively in quotes from the little red book. So the historical context of the little red book does not contain the aspect of Approved Texts/Correct Thought.

I cannot speak of the Chinese, except from the somewhat random reports I recall of people being sent to camps for "re-education in Chairman Mao thought" during the Cultural Revolution. (The thought of the Cultural Revolution inspired the Subject: line of this posting, of course.) I can give anecdotal evidence of folks I knew in Berkeley in the mid-'70s, who had a Chairman Mao quote for every occasion and who judged all opinions (even, it seemed at times, all utterances) against Chairman Mao Thought. These people took Mao's quotations as the set of axioms from which all politically "correct thought" must flow.

It seems to me to be a relatively small step, a relatively small _satirical_ and extrapolative step, from there to simply closing off the minds of the followers to all other thoughts completely. And so I believe that to say that "the historical context of the little red book does not contain the aspect of Approved Texts/Correct Thought" is orthogonal to the point I am making.

Then it was doubleplusgood of you to give a plusbig answer to it.

I hope the basic point of my note is undarkthink. We was given unOrwell statements, vaguing a position as darkthink to me (and maybe others) as the elephant is to the three spying sightless mans: one touch the leg and say, "Elephant is treeful"; one touch the trunk and say, "Elephant is snakeful"; man three touch the belly and say, "Elephant is houseful." When in fact Total Elephant is untreeful, unsnakeful, and unhouseful.

For myself as unseeing man in this Elephant case, I gived the Orwell position. Spying into the dark, the question "Is a unsurplus of Orwell basic the cause of this darkthink?" No, undarkwise not: $1 = 1$. Orwell quota is established. Plusgood.

Next question, "Is littleredbookthing used in unhistoryful way?" Yes, undarkwise: $2 = 2$. Littleredbookthing position is semibuilted. Plusgood.

It was a surprise, then, that even though $1 = 1$, and $2 = 2$, still the darkthink remain dark, likewise darker than anteanwser.

Undarkwise this line of inquiry is unuseful. Down the memory hole.

=mantis=

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 30 Jul 2002, 16:41 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

Mantis, quoting I, wrote:

Second, I do not mean (nor did I mean to imply) that Ascian Correct Thought is exclusively a parable of the Maoist Cult of Personality.

But you =do= mean to exclude all things Orwell from the mix, right? I mean, that is what I heard before, that is what I hear now. That is what I continue to find so puzzling.

...perhaps. Certainly I think that any Orwellian strain is weaker and more distant than the Maoist. I think SF fans (myself included!) have a tendency to hear resonances of SF texts in other texts, and those not only SF texts, perhaps more strongly than their authors intended -- an attention-focus phenomenon that needs correction at times. Thus, while I don't suppose I can go so far as to deny that an Orwellian echo cho ho o may exist in the Ascian speech pattern, I think it secondary at most.

Consider: If Wolfe's model for "war" was/is his experience in the Korean "conflict," then who were/are his model for "enemy"? The North Koreans, inspired/supported by -- of all entities! -- Mao's China. (And, to be sure, the USSR.) Asian-style Communism, as perceived by an American conservative (hivelike, anti-individual, centralized, etc.), is a clear match for Ascian.

And, perhaps most importantly, the style of the Ascian sayings greatly resembles that of Mao. Here are a few examples:

"Where do correct ideas come from? Do they drop from the skies? No. Are they innate in the mind? No. They come from social practice, and from it alone; they come from three kinds of social practice, the struggle for production, the class struggle and scientific experiment."

"It [materialist dialectics] holds that external causes are the condition of change and internal causes are the basis of change, and that external causes become operative through internal causes. In a suitable temperature an egg changes into a chicken, but no temperature can change a stone into a chicken, because each has a different basis."

"Who are our enemies? Who are our friends? This is a question of the first importance for the revolution. The basic reason why all previous revolutionary struggles in China achieved so little was their failure to unite with real friends in order to attack real enemies. A revolutionary party is the guide of the masses..."

"It is not enough to set tasks, we must also solve the problem of the methods for carrying them out. If our task is to cross a river, we cannot cross it without a bridge or a boat."

"On what basis should our policy rest? It should rest on our own strength, and that means regeneration through one's own efforts."

"War can only be abolished through war, and in order to get rid of the gun it is necessary to take up the gun."

...well, those are only a few samples; if you want to see some more, check out <http://art-bin.com/art/omaotoc.html>.

... Loyal to the
Group of Seventeen's story of the just man shows how Correct
Thought can be manipulated to think the "incorrect" (or
"unthinkable") -- on this much, at least, we are agreed?

Hmmm. Well maybe. ... What would be the unthinkable elements
in "The Just Man"?

Severian himself observes that it seems to criticize the Group of Seventeen for not dealing with the just man's problem promptly -- indeed, they never _do_; it's just the bad guys' fears that they might that provides a happy ending.

My point is that the Ingsoc approach is more subtle and, in a word, structural, allowing an essentially infinite array of thinkables while fencing off certain areas as unthinkable -- a bounded infinity of utterances, if you will. The Ascian approach is radically different; it uses brute iterative force to say "Here are the thinkable thoughts; there are no others."

I'm not sure I follow. One difference I can see, as I try to understand what you are saying (yet this is actually not what you are saying), is a difference of unit scale: Newspeak is built on the word level, whereas the units of Approved Texts are . . . well, what, exactly? Paragraphs, sentences, and perhaps sentence fragments (like "loyal to the Group of Seventeen"; "no one is to receive more than 100 blows").

It's more than unit scale; it's a qualitative difference. Words give you building blocks to make thoughts out of; the pre-formed Approved Texts are intended to be an exhaustive list of the thoughts that one may think. Where a citizen of Oceania might in theory say "B-B doubleplusungood," an Ascian cannot -- again, in theory -- say "It's okay for some people receive more than a hundred blows." Somewhere in there it's said that most Ascians are conditioned to the point where if you say anything that is not an Approved Text, they simply fail to understand you.

Which, once again, I think is nonsense, and totally contrary to the way in which humans actually acquire language ... Wolfe, I seem to recall, pays lip service to this by suggesting that non-Approved Text utterances are regarded by adult Ascians as "the babblings of children." But I would suggest that any system of mind-control that would make someone incapable of comprehending any non-Approved utterance doesn't actually need Approved Texts to enforce itself...

...but that, too, is orthogonal to my point; in the Lupine universe of discourse, that's the method the Group of Seventeen (and, ultimately, the Space/Sea Monsters) use to control the minds of the "populace," and what we're actually arguing about isn't whether it would work in RL, but what its literary and historical antecedents and inspirations might be. 8*)

These units are used differently, it seems. Paragraphs would seem to have the most rigidity to them and so presumably offer less room for nuance (as they drag more of their original context along with them). Sentences, otoh, are removed from textual context and thus presumably could be used to say the

opposite of the original meaning.

Invoking a variant of Godwin's Law: When you say that, you remind me of Douglas Hofstadter.
8*)

(My thinking before was something more like, oh, tell the story of "Romeo and Juliet" using only complete sentences from "MacBeth.")

H'mmm. An interesting challenge. Are name changes allowed?

I hope the basic point of my note is undarkthink. We was given unOrwell statements, vaguing a position as darkthink to me (and maybe others) as the elephant is to the three spying sightless mans:

(Deleted your Newspeakery of the Blind Men and the Elephant. A marvellous conceit!)

For myself as unseeing man in this Elephant case, I gived the Orwell position. Spying into the dark, the question "Is a unsurplus of Orwell basic the cause of this darkthink?" No, undarkwise not: 1 = 1. Orwell quota is established. Plusgood.

And that is precisely what I am questioning: where is the Orwell quota established? The style of Correct Thought is not the style of Newspeak; it is (as I hope my samples above have shown) very much in the style of Chairman Mao Thought, which I hope leaves the littleredbookthing position plusfirmlybuilded.

Andy Robertson — 29 Jul 2002, 18:39 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

----- Original Message -----

From: "Dan'I Danehy-Oakes" <ddanehy at siebel.com>

And that is precisely what I am questioning: where is the Orwell quota established? The style of Correct Thought is not the style of Newspeak; it is (as I hope my samples above have shown) very much in the style of Chairman Mao Thought, which I hope leaves the littleredbookthing position plusfirmlybuilded.

But it is obvious.

The fact that the Ascians can speak **only** in the phrases known as Correct Thought matches the fact that Orwell's inhabitants of Oceania will one day speak ***only*** in Newspeak.

But there is no real-life correspondence to this: the Koreans may have chanted Maoist slogans, but they were not ***forbidden*** to use other words or phrases.

Only in Orwell's 1984 (and arguably in some SF books written since then) does this concept of total linguistic replacement arise.

I agree, however, that the style of the quotes is very close to Maoism

hartshorn

Josh Geller — 30 Jul 2002, 23:20 · follows Andy Robertson

On Mon, 29 Jul 2002, Andy Robertson wrote:

Only in Orwell's 1984 (and arguably in some SF books written since then) does this concept of total linguistic replacement arise.

Really?

When was the last time you used the word 'nigger' in conversation?

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Andy Robertson — 29 Jul 2002, 22:50 · follows Josh Geller

----- Original Message -----

From: "Josh Geller" <dclxvi at dclxvi.best.vwh.net>

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Again, not relevant, though pithy. Some words can be cut out, but it's not the same thing as the massive restructuring Orwell was diagramming

Josh Geller — 30 Jul 2002, 23:41 · follows Andy Robertson

On Mon, 29 Jul 2002, Andy Robertson wrote:

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Hmm. I don't know if I agree.

But hey, go ahead and believe what you like. What do I care?

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Jason Ingram — 31 Jul 2002, 01:03 · follows Josh Geller

I don't mean to butt in, but I think a third perspective might be helpful . . .

The _concept_ of total linguistic replacement predates Orwell; the positivists were interested in replacing ambiguous terms and locutions with precise, scientific alternatives. Their project had a basis in Jeremy Bentham's argument for the replacement of emotional, biasing terms with (purportedly) neutral, objective alternatives. These projects were not embodied in novels--and were accordingly imagined differently than in Orwell--but they do seem to be "total."

At the same time, other cultures have attempted far less extreme forms of linguistic control; France maintains an institution that authorizes new words for new inventions and generally attempts to preserve an 'official' French. This certainly differs in degree from Newspeak, and almost certainly differs in kind, but perhaps also describes a continuum.

Sepia

Josh and Andy argue:

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 31 Jul 2002, 22:29 · follows Jason Ingram

Andy Robertson quoting Josh Geller quoting...

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Really?

When was the last time you used the word 'nigger' in conversation?

Again, not relevant, though pithy. Some words can be cut out, but it's not the same thing as the massive restructuring Orwell was diagramming

No; but the much larger removal of all such epithets from polite conversation comes a lot closer.

As for granting Orwell primacy in this matter, well, that's pretty silly. There is a longish history of people claiming one way or another that the structure of language determines the structure of thought, or actively trying to restructure thought through some such "massive restructuring" of language; one well-known (at least in SF circles) example, published a good fifteen years before NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR, is Alfred Korzybski's SCIENCE AND SANITY, which promises improved health (both physical and mental; indeed, it denies the distinction in favor of the "more general" concept of psychosomatic health) to persons who restructure their language (though, again "language" is an insufficient term) "scientifically," in lines with "non-Aristotelean principles and tool" such as "non-identification" and "indexing." Many students of Korzybski's "General Semantics" speak and write (or try to) in what they call E', E-Prime, which is English without the verb "to be," which (they claim, or at least some of them do) automatically eliminates identification ... and if that isn't restructuring the language, I'd like to know what is!

More generally, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, the basic statement of linguistic determinism, was first announced in 1929, though it has predecessors going back hundreds of years, of which perhaps the best known would be Wilhelm von Humboldt's weltanschauung hypothesis: but I believe the roots of the idea go back to Plato, if not further.

Andy Robertson — 30 Jul 2002, 22:13 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

----- Original Message -----

From: "Dan'l Danehy-Oakes" <ddanehy at siebel.com>
As for granting Orwell primacy in this matter, well, that's pretty silly.

Oh, pish-tosh.

I'm not "granting Orwell primacy." I'm granting SF primacy.

And you perfectly well know that this null-A Korzybski stuff is only relevant here because of its SF content, the demented but wonderful Van Vogt stuff.

SF rules, and defines reality, OK?

hartshorn

matthew.malthouse — 01 Aug 2002, 10:02 · follows Andy Robertson

On 31/07/2002 23:29:52 Dan'I Danehy-Oakes wrote:
Andy Robertson quoting Josh Geller quoting...

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As for granting Orwell primacy in this matter, well, that's pretty silly. There is a longish history of people claiming one way or another that the structure of language determines the structure of thought, or actively trying to restructure thought through some such "massive restructuring" of language; one well-known (at least in SF circles)

Is it really significant in the context of TBotNS?

Severian is convinced from his listening to Loyal's story that the ploy doesn't work:

Folia's explanation TCotA Ch 5

"...words that are not approved texts are without meaning for them, If they admitted - even to themselves - that such talk meant something, then it would be possible for them to hear disloyal remarks and even to make them. That would be exptremely dangerous. As long as they only understand and quote approved texts, no one can accuse them."

This is a protective mechansim not a succesful manipulation on the language/thought level.

Severian comments later, Ch 11

"Second I learned how difficult it is to eliminate the urge for expression. The people of Ascia were reduced to speaking only with their masters' voice; but they had made of it a new tounge, and I had no doubt, after hearing the Ascian, that by it he could express whatever thought he wished."

Matthew