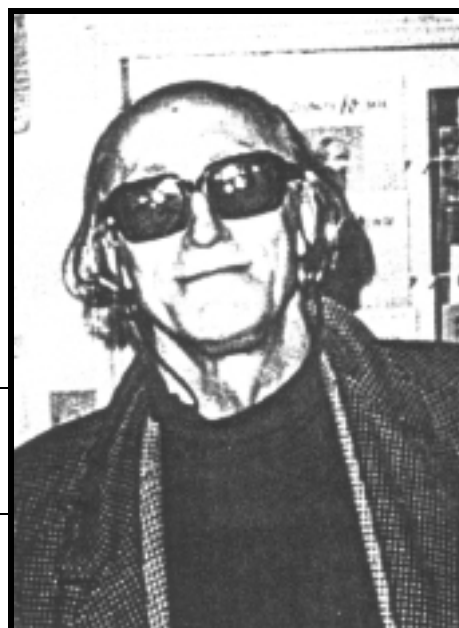


SOME REFLECTIONS ON NEURO-LINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING

 Libertarian Alliance

GEORGE HAY



As I write, the British Prime Minister is preparing to visit Istanbul to support a bid by one of her country's builders for the contract for a third bridge across the Bosphorus. If she succeeds, the flow of vehicle traffic will of course be increased, and the pall of smog which makes the city an environmental disaster area will grow larger yet. The actual traffic needs seem to call for an underground railway, but that would have to be subsidised by the state, whereas commerce and state alike would prefer to pass the costs along to the multinationals, profiting on the way from the lucrative road, tunnel and bridge contracts. One could list many such lunacies, even if one only went back as far as the Aswan Dam. However, our object here is not to pillory either state or commerce, but simply to illustrate the wrongness we have referred to as 'cultural schizophrenia', and to raise the possibility of a cure.

We believe that such a cure is available. Perhaps the reader will be sceptical, but we feel that no serious student of international affairs will question at least the need, and thus our next step here is to set out our diagnosis of the disease. Since schizophrenia, by definition, implies the compartmentalisation of problems, it will be necessary to circle around the whole area, as it were, and linking subjects generally regarded as widely separated, before homing in on our projected solution. If this involves a strain on the goodwill of some readers, let us remind you that we did not promise that the cure would be easily acceptable to all - only that it did exist.

"CULTURAL RELATIVISM": THREE OBSERVATIONS

(1) Cultural relativism has now been a matter of firmly received opinion in the west, for at least three decades. This has been due to two very different factors: the apparently unchallenged progress of quantum theory, and the explosion in mass-media communications

and cheap global transport. The effects of the former are intellectually explicit: British newspapers are currently giving generous review space to a new play by Tom Stoppard, which very explicitly indeed describes the world of international espionage in quantum theory terms. We all know from experience that when an 'intellectual' or 'difficult' thesis reaches the popular stage, its approval is sealed. As to mass-media and cheap travel, the effect here is largely subliminal: few of those who go around the planet on package tours to Peking or other, formerly 'remote' places, could describe with any exactitude the effect this has on their psychology or day-to-day decisions, but the effect is there nonetheless, and it is exactly the same effect as that which stems from a superficial study of quantum theory, and which boils down to an unshakeable belief that "everything is relative" with its corollary, "nothing is absolute". We ourselves, of course, do not dispute the workability of quantum theory, in either research or application in the various fields of physics, and only a fool could say that mass-media or mass travel facilities "ought not to exist". Who are we to thwart the aspirations of so many? Examine a photo of any pop-concert in any country in the world, and you might have a hard job to decide where it was taken. As between - say - Moscow and Liverpool it would be very difficult to distinguish in terms of clothing or background (or of course, the music, could you hear it): elsewhere, of course, skin colour or facial characteristics might be a giveaway.

(2) The shapers of policy in major international conglomerates are strongly influenced by current changes in theoretical physics and by the speed and extent of media and travel changes, because success in business depends on technological developments, themselves dependant on pure-science research, and of course upon the speed

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www.libertarian.co.uk email: admin@libertarian.co.uk

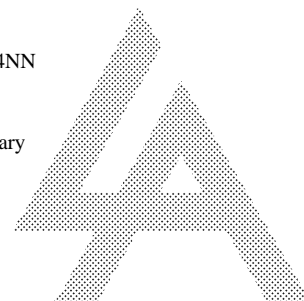
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George Hay is the founder of the Science Fiction Foundation at the North East London Polytechnic and is Secretary of the H. G. Wells Society. He is author of three SF novels himself, and has also edited such anthologies as *Hell Hath Fury*, *The Disappearing Future* and *Stopwatch*, and two volumes of *Pulsar* for Penguin Books.

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Director: Dr Chris R. Tame Editorial Director: Brian Micklethwait Webmaster: Dr Sean Gabb

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and extent of marketing, which in turn relate directly to transport and media changes. There is a certain amount of lag, of course, since no governing body can afford to get too far ahead of its managerial staff, but the economic success of Japan can serve as an example of how far and how fast an entire business-based culture can be moved by the kind of changes to which we refer.

(3) Cultural relativism has least effect on those circles which govern powerful States. Those concerned tend to be resistive equally to travel and to new ideas - and, for those over a certain age, quantum theory is certainly 'new', even though its roots go back to before World War I.

It will be seen that there is a clash between the factors (2) and (3) above, and it is, we believe, this factor which is largely responsible for the cultural schizophrenia we speak of. These are, of course, not the only factors. The influence of Christianity, and in particular of Catholicism, is a powerful antidote to relativism, though it must be said that Anglican-type Christianity, in its passion for being 'one with the people', has tended to out-Herod Herod in its rush to the cliff-tops of relativism. When it comes to the crunch, however, formal religions lack the power, and probably the will, to controvert State decisions in these matters, as can be seen in the Phillipines, China, South Africa and the various dictatorships afflicting Africa and South America. There are of course many cases where the balance is precarious, as in Poland today, and, possibly in the near future, in South Africa and the USSR with its Eastern bloc possessions. At all events, we are confronted on all sides with real-world conditions of appalling cruelty, and with economic and environmental chaos stemming from the clash between public acceptance of relativism and private reliance upon absolute standards. To make our meaning absolutely clear, let us state that by 'private' we refer here to, e.g., heads of State, chiefs of armed forces, state law lords, heads of security forces, and Ministers heading up state bureaucracies, health services etc.

AGAINST RELATIVISM

Thus far, it might seem that the writer of this article sides with the relativistic cause, if such it can be called. Certainly, in a world of exploding populations and permanent economic crises, technological progress, individual welfare and political stability would seem to depend upon its continued acceptance. However, there are some flies in this ointment, and the flies are getting bigger.

To begin with, total relativism is a methodological nonsense. The next time you hear someone say, "Well, it's all relative, isn't it?" ask him, "Relative to *what*?" You will receive either a confused answer or an evasion of the question. The fact is that, as philosophers and theologians have agreed over millenia, the resolution of any relativistic dispute depends upon the common acceptance of some prime post unposted - a non-moving point around which all other points can be aligned. It is just as well for air-travellers that airline Traffic Controllers have absolute and not relative ideas on the locations of Gatwick Airport, say, and Mutual Assured Destruction would be less of a threat if Nato and its opponents did not have every confidence in their ability to land a warhead at an exact place at an exact time. The general public and the theoretical physicists can say what they like: those who command, in war or commerce (which latter is nowadays generally seen as a form of warfare anyway), believe that their command depends upon absolute precision, and act upon that belief. You will recall our grouping of such persons under our category (3).

Psychological and political control thus rests upon the acceptance of absolutes. Day after day, unfortunate souls are held up at airports waiting to learn whether they will or will not be allowed to remain in the countries they have come to. A few days, weeks or months, and they will be told in the most absolute manner that they can stay, or they can not. Or take the matter of disputes over radioactivity. Have foodstuffs been contaminated? Has an employee received an excessive dosage of radiation? Yes or no? The disputes may be bitter, but in the end there will be an absolute decision, based on the findings of a physicist - and please note that, even in cases where the putative victim disputes the competence,

or even the honesty, of the physicist, it seems never to be the case that there would not be an honest and accurate reading, if it could but be obtained. We do not hear of victims of excessive radioactivity saying, "Well, a little less, a little more - does it really matter?" Death, it would appear, is one of those tactless absolutes. The fact is that absolute thinking, and the control it implies, are inextricably part of the universe we jointly inhabit. This does not mean that the absolutist is always, or even often right, but neither does it mean that he is automatically wrong. Equally, the man who drives you mad by saying "Well, it all depends" is not always mistaken.

NEURO-LINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING

We hope that our case is starting to become clear; the case being that while the absolute and the relative should be balanced, as being not opposite but complementary, this need is something not at all real to the power-brokers on either side of the divide. Furthermore, this conclusion is too general. We have spoken of a cure: what is it? What proofs can we give of its workability? If it be accepted, how can it be widely promoted?

At this stage we feel that at least the nose of the cat should be allowed to emerge from the bag. We are making reference to the individual and group use of the behavioural technology technique ("therapy" would be the wrong word) known as NLP - Neuro-Linguistic Programming.

However, an important *caveat* is needed. We believe that, just as turned out to be the case with Freud's formulations, it will be the long-term benefits (or otherwise, according to your point of view) that will prove important here, not simply the immediate solutions that would seem to offer themselves. We believe, in fact, that far more is involved here than simply a new method of clearing up the insides of peoples' heads, however important that may be, and that a whole new worldview may be in process of emerging. Since those who are closest to a problem often have the greatest difficulty in getting a perspective on it, it may be the case that practitioners of NLP may not themselves perceive this. And if anyone is in it simply for the financial or social rewards, he or she most certainly will not have time or inclination to look at other aspects. Responsible outsiders, we believe, do owe it to themselves and to society to take a look at what is going on.

It is clear that at this stage we have left group dynamics in favour of personal ones. The brutal fact is that, while the objective world most certainly exists, it exists *as we as individuals perceive it*. As Louella Parsons, in her day an all-powerful Hollywood columnist put it: "Pay no attention to them - they don't exist." That might seem an odd statement from one whose livelihood depended on her accurate observation of others' foibles, but in fact she was expressing a great and much-suppressed truth. To repeat, the world is as we see it. Thus, to control the world - we are speaking here politically - it is necessary to persuade others that what you see is what they see - though not necessarily *vice-versa*. Hence the enormous importance today of the media, and particularly of television, which is a hypnotic medium in the literal sense - heavy viewers go through life in a state of light trance, whether viewing the box or not. Our point is the Orwellian one that who controls the media controls the worldview of the individual viewer/listener/reader. And it follows, from the points we have already made, that these controllers are absolutists, not relativists. Of course, they want the audiences to be relativists - hence the interminable phoney debates, panels, etc. Not that such discussions are bad in themselves, of course, but that they cannot be fully assessed unless one remembers that their main function is "information overload" - more crudely put, "always keep them guessing". And since those who control the media centres will never give up absolute control - revolution would simply be a waste of time, the replacement of one dictator or economic boss by another of equally absolutist views - then the only remedy left would be some method of effectively restoring to the individual member of the mass audience the full use and control of his own mind.

NLP does permit this. Starting in the early 1970s with the study by Bandler and Grinder of patterns of excellence in the methods of outstanding individuals in the field of psychotherapy, it has now produced powerful studies of the ways in which people organise their subjective experience, and equally powerful tools for helping the individual reorganise that experience.

These are large claims. There are larger. One of Bandler's outstanding points is that long-standing traumas and phobias can be eliminated in minutes. Evidence? Appendix IV of one of the textbooks on the subject (Richard Bandler, ed. by C. C. and S. Andreas, *Using Your Brain - For A Change*, Real People Press, 1958) advertises (among others) the "Fast Phobia/Trauma Cure" videotape, wherein is shown how an intense twenty year phobia of bees is eliminated in six minutes. An eleven month followup interview is included, as well as a followup interview with a Vietnam veteran whose post-traumatic stress syndrome of twelve years' standing was completely changed in one session using these methods. Going over to another subject area, New Learning Pathways, educational consultants using NLP methods "will guarantee a *minimum* of one year's progress in structural and phonetic analysis, word comprehension and passage comprehension as measured by the Woodstock Reading Mastery and Standardised Test and the Ekwall Informal Reading Inventory for long passage comprehension."

It may be helpful to quote Mr. Bandler on the subject of teaching generally. He says:

"... in my contacts with educators, I've noticed that the people who teach a subject may be very good at it, and know a lot about that particular area. However, they usually know very little about *how* they learned it, and even less about how to teach it to someone else. I went to a lecture in beginning chemistry once. The professor walked up in front of 350 people and said, 'Now, I want you to imagine a mirror here and, and in front of the mirror is a DNA helix molecule, rotating backwards.' Some people in the room were going 'Ahhh!'. They became chemists. Some people in the room were going 'Huh?' They did not become chemists. Some people in the room were going 'Urghh!' ... they became therapists ... that professor had no idea that most people can't visualize in the detailed way that he did. That kind of visualisation is a prerequisite for a successful career in chemistry, and it is a skill that can be taught to people who don't yet know how to visualise well. But since that professor presupposed that everyone else could already do what he did, he was wasting his time with most of the people in his classes ... Most studies of the learning process have been 'objective'... (they) usually study people who have the problem: NLP studies the subjective experience of people who have the solution. If you study dyslexia, you'll learn a lot about dyslexia. But if you want to teach kids how to read, it makes sense to study people who can read well." (Ibid)

Bandler and Grinder are certainly not the first people to point out that western education makes practically no attempt to teach students how to use their own brains, but it does seem that they are the first to have sat down and studied what actually happened in real-world conditions of excellence, and then further worked out how these conditions could be easily reproduced. Perhaps it is worth stressing here the truly revolutionary nature of an approach to the mind which even suggests - let alone prove - that its problems and potentials can be handled *easily*. One is told that Bandler and Grinder "were forced to leave teaching at the University of California because we were teaching undergraduates to do things in their lives. That was the complaint against us. They said school was only for teaching people *about* things." Clearly, these were dangerous men to have about ...

INDIVIDUAL AUTONOMY: THE RELEVANCE OF NLP

So much for the subject. Now we can return to its implications, and to our original suggestion that there might be a cure for cultural schizophrenia.

In the past, the study of the mind has been divided between the areas of religion, philosophy and psychology. We suggest that for the most part the controllers of these areas have been absolutists, and indeed, still are. The prevalent idea of the mind is of something dark and mysterious, only to be investigated under the *aegis* of Serious Men. This, of course, has been no accident. Men and women who run their own minds are not easy to control - in fact, they are not controllable at all. How could the Churches, the States, Army Commanders, deal with such? I recall the comment of a British Law Lord at the time when the introduction of car-to-car radio was being mooted. "The thought", he said, "of thousands and thousands of people communicating to each other without any supervision whatsoever is intolerable." That, I think, says it all.

GETTING TO AGREEMENT

We are speaking here, of course, of the political implications. More important, in the long run at least, are the implications for philosophy and religion. In our remarks above, it was not intended to be understood that we believed all religions or philosophies to be sinister and/or idiotic, only that with the passage of time they have come to be under the control of persons or groups which certainly merit such descriptions. It was no accident that so many of the Christian mystics got into hot water with the Church. When a man says, as did Meister Eckhardt, "the eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me", then it is time to bring out the thumbscrews and holy water, before worse befall. A similar process has taken place in those areas of medicine dealing with human behaviour, and where it has been assumed that because such behaviour occurs *via* a body, therefore it stems *from* a body, and that therefore it can and should be handled by drugs, electrical shocks or the like. What would happen to the drug business if people started to find their own internal happiness? For that matter, what would happen to the "higher standard of living" lobby if the mass of the people picked up on Freud's message that happiness was in inverse ratio to material prosperity?

We mention these possibilities in passing. Our main concern here is in outlining the steps necessary for crossing the divide between individual schizophrenia and the national and international versions. The first of these is the promotion to the public of the proposal that what may have always been considered differing models of the universe may in fact be more or less identical. Obviously, at first sight the statist and the anarchist - say - or the atheist and the hardline Protestant may have vanishingly little in common, and the Falkland Islanders are resolutely determined to remain such, and not to become Argentinians. However, using the NLP approach, it should not be impossible to get representatives of these groups to pull out for our inspection, so to speak, the subjective models they have of these matters. Now, work done long ago by such bodies as the Institute of General Semantics (work shockingly neglected, may we add) would seem to show that these models *do* have an overarching similarity. For example, the atheist and the Protestant each believe - quite correctly - that they have a strong ethic, and it is this ethic, ironically enough, that actually drives them into dispute, where, properly understood, it should unite them. Equally, the Falkland Islander and the Argentinian differ on the matter of nomenclature, but agree strongly on the value of patriotism.

Exploration of the group dynamics of agreement open doorways to truly magical possibilities. History shows us that the springtime of any culture is bursting with such magic, with a sense of wonder and of unexplored possibilities stretching endlessly forward. One is reminded of W. H. Auden's account of a disgusted Herod's remark that each time he tries to give his attention to his new drainage regulations, there is a noise in the back garden, and when he looks out, there are a couple of filthily-dressed apostles performing miracles. There *were* miracles at such epochs, and the question we have to address here is: why don't we get miracles today? To which the short answer is: the professions don't welcome them. A miracle is something intensely personal and direct, and involving, either before or after the manifestation, some important interior change - *conversion* - in the person concerned. Not easy to get into a curriculum ...

But have you noticed that the definition I just gave had no reference to the supernatural? That it could be applied equally as well to Archimedes' Eureka! experience as to, say, Pascal's Night of Fire. That in fact we really owe it to ourselves and to our culture to ask whether there is any real justification for the divide made since at least the Enlightenment between "religion-as-mystery" and "the study of the mind". It is notable that the immediate disciples of any great religious leaders seem to have no problems working miracles, once they have been shown the way, but that, within one or two generations, the magic ceases, to be replaced, at the best by formulas, at the worst by mumbo-jumbo. Is it not possible that these great founder-fathers (or mothers: look at Christian Science) were simply very rational people who thought their way through to a point where they could perceive the flaw in someone's body or mind as a mathematician perceives the flaw in an equation, and, having perceived it, remove it? And is this not what any psychotherapist would claim to be doing? Is this not what happens when someone really perceives the truth of Korzybski's dictum that "the map is not the territory"? And, finally, if we ourselves are not able to clear up diseases or difficult situations, is it perhaps not because we are lacking in some strange 'faith', but simply because what we have always believed to be the case did not correspond with the facts - through no fault of ours - just as a man cannot converse in a tongue he has not been taught?

Having taken a long way round to get to a very simple truth - if unavoidably - I can now get to my specifics. For decades now scholars have been demanding "a more holistic approach" - and now they can have it. While in no way suggesting that NLP is a panacea (the rights and wrongs of its possible applications is so large a subject as to call for a separate article) I believe that its use demonstrates very simply that the human mind is an easily understood mechanism with an enormous potential, and that, shocking though it may be to say so, the resolution of individual and group problems is a matter quite easily resolved. Thus, to return to the question posed by this article, there *is* a cure for group schizophrenia.

NLP IN PRACTICE

To dispel any thoughts about the apocalyptic, let me quote here a report from a Training Officer for a large London borough: he recently had occasion to make use of an NLP Trainer in running a comprehensive middle-management development programme. Staff involved included architects, planners, engineers and administrators. Areas addressed were:

General communications skills; using NLP exercises to achieve a high level of rapport skills.

An appreciation of "the map is not the territory" as applied when dealing with difficult or awkward staff, and going on to establish win/win situations.

Team building representations - building rapport with groups and making single presentations.

Responsibility: individuals taking responsibility for themselves and learning what could be done to effect changes in others in this area, so that situations involving blame and antagonism could be eliminated.

Under the 'Impact' section of his report the Trainer wrote:

"... the training increased individuals' sense of being in charge and having a greater range of choice as to the way they responded. The Directorate had recently undergone a huge reorganization which had left many people unhappy and cynical about the future. NLP gave them skills to not only build rapport with other people but also with themselves. People began to realize that much of their experience was common, and the feelings of threat, anxiety etc. were pretty widespread. They also began to realize that they could maybe begin to replace these with other feelings by perhaps perceiving things slightly differently. The work with criteria gave them a way of finding out what was important to other

people in the organization, and how they could either match this or move towards it ... In effect, large numbers of the delegates lost their sense of isolation and hopelessness."

NLP can achieve rather more startling effects than these: the above report was cited exactly because it was comparatively low-key but also very satisfactory in its results. It is not important that one impresses people: it is important to let them know that real help can be delivered and is always available.

The above suggestion would imply using NLP on a group dynamic basis. This might be liable to that old debating bugbear - "but you're only playing with words". Well, in the first place, a person who is not up to playing with words is below the operating level of his own language, and should never be allowed into a serious debate anyway. But this is a counsel of perfection, and we have to deal with the world as it is, being full of powerful people to whom the concept 'play' is one they lost sight of during their childhood. More importantly, this very objection might be taken as an occasion to introduce individual NLP training, since it would seem likely that anyone willing to go along with our argument up to this point would agree the necessity of at least investigating any technique which offers the chance to go beyond merely verbal understanding to a much deeper and fuller level.

Once those concerned have experienced such understanding, we venture to believe they will never wish to return to the *status quo ante*. At that level, no-one will any longer be willing to kill or be killed for the sake of a word, nor to confuse an absolute undertaken in the light of a once-only emergency with a permanent rule for the conduct of living. More likely, they will recall and act upon the words of Dostoevsky, to the effect that beauty, and beauty alone, can save the world.

In closing this paper, I would like to express my appreciation for the advice and information received in the course of its preparation from Mrs. Eileen Watkins-Seymour, of the UK Training Centre for NLP Ltd. Though I would hope she will share the opinions expressed, it must be made quite clear that the responsibility for them is mine and not hers. Further, it should be pointed out to the reader that NLP is still in that comparatively blessed state where 'authority' and 'certification' are not yet set in granite. For the seriously interested enquirer, this state of affairs has inestimable advantages - rather like being able to ask one of the Apostles, "Yes, but seriously, did He eat fish on Fridays?" Equally, however, it imposes upon me the necessity of suggesting that in his reply the Apostle might have made reference to those passages in the Gospels making reference to false prophets. Even the elect can be deceived - indeed, one sometimes fears, *especially* the elect. No matter: this is a case where courage is surely the greater part of discretion.

Useful Addresses:

UK Training Centre for NLP
Eileen Watkins-Seymour
6 Ravenscroft Avenue
London NW1 01 455 3743

Pace Personal Development
Julian Russell
86 South Hill Park
London NW3 2SN 01 794 0960

NLP Training Programme
22 Upper Tooting Park
London SW17 7SR 01 682 0733