



Effortless English

just: fair, good, correct and fair
by means of: because of
well-disposed: people with good thoughts (with good hearts)
agents: actors, doers
injustice: unfairness, wrongness, badness, evil
undue: too much, not necessary
a file of: a line of
soldiers: fighters, army people
colonel, captain, privates: ranks (levels) of people in the army
admirable: should be admired; worthy, good
against their wills: not by choice; against what they want to do
common sense: what most think is correct and right
conscience: feeling of what is right and wrong; moral feeling
damnable: horrible, terrible, wrong
inclined: what someone usually does or thinks (usually peaceful)
forts: an army building, a base
unscrupulous: without morals; without goodness
the mass of men: most men
the State: the country, the nation
standing army: permanent army
exercise: use (noun)
the judgement: ability to make decisions
the moral sense: ability to decide what is right and wrong
manufactured: made, created
command: demand, require
straw: hay
lump: small round piece
considered: thought to be
abominable: horrible, terrible
obedience: doing what someone else tells you to do
the media: newspaper, TV, etc...
moan: make a sad sound
blame: criticize
shift: move; change
solely: only
carrying out their orders: doing what they say to do
abandoned: left; got rid of
dutifully obeying: doing what other people say-- because of duty

Disobedience

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“Law never made men more **just**; and, **by means of** their respect for it, even the **well-disposed** are daily made the **agents of injustice**. A common and natural result of an **undue** respect for law is, that you may see a **file of soldiers, colonel, captain, privates** and all, marching in **admirable** order over hills to the wars, **against their wills**, indeed, against their **common sense** and **consciences**. They have no doubt that it is a **damnable** business in which they are concerned; they are all peaceably **inclined**. Now, what are they? Men at all? Or small movable **forts**, at the service of some **unscrupulous** man in power?

The mass of men serve **the State** thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies. They are the **standing army**. In most cases there is no free **exercise** whatever of **the judgment** or of **the moral sense**; but they put themselves on a level with wood and earth and stones; and wooden men can perhaps be **manufactured** that will serve the purpose as well. Such people **command** no more respect than men of **straw**, or a **lump** of dirt. They have the same sort of worth only as horses and dogs. Yet such as these are commonly **considered** good citizens.”

-- Henry David Thoreau (Civil Disobedience)

Many of the **abominable** problems in the world are the result of **obedience**. In our personal lives, in **the media**, we cry and **moan** and **blame** "our leaders" for the problems of the world. We **shift** responsibility to them. But are they **solely** responsible? What about the thousands and millions who are actually **carrying out their orders**? These people are the ones actually doing the terrible things that their leaders want done. These people have **abandoned** their conscience and have abandoned their responsibility.

Can such people be considered adult human beings at all; or are they still children, or dogs-- **dutifully obeying** their master-parent?

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soldiers: fighters in an army
trigger: part of a gun that you pull (in order to shoot)
torturing: hurting (someone who is helpless or powerless)
orders: commands
particular: individual
discharged: fired (from the army)
refusing: saying no (to an order/command)
disobey: not do something that you are told to do
unjust: not fair, not good, not moral
follow their conscience: do what you think is right/good/moral
rebels: those who fight against authority/power
resistors: people who resist, people who don't obey
condemned: criticized, blamed, said to be guilty, accused
unpatriotic: not loving your country, not loyal to your country
imprisoned: put in jail, put in prison
vilified: described as a bad person, described as a terrible or evil person
harsh: tough, not kind, not gentle
a radical: someone who fights for big changes; someone who fights the government
celebrated as: praised as
the authorities: the government; those with power
scum: low class people, criminals, bad person/people
to break unjust laws: to disobey bad laws
lifetime: time a person lives; time when a person is alive

Think of the American **soldiers** currently in Iraq. In the end, it is not George Bush who is pulling the **trigger** or dropping the bombs or **torturing** the prisoners. He merely gives the **orders**- orders which no **particular** man or woman must follow. For while they might be **discharged** or put in prison for **refusing** an order, no one will be hurt or killed for doing so.

Isn't Thoreau correct? Aren't our true heroes the ones who **disobey unjust laws**? Aren't the true heroes the ones who **follow their conscience**? Here in America, it is our **rebels** who are our historical heroes- those who refused to support injustice: Martin Luther King, the heroes of the American revolution, John Brown, Malcolm X, Susan B. Anthony, Vietnam War **resistors**....

In the present, such people are always **condemned**. They are attacked, called **unpatriotic**, **imprisoned**, and **vilified**. Yet history is usually kind to such people, and **harsh** to the unjust. In the 1950s, Martin Luther King was vilified as **a radical**. Today, he is **celebrated** as a hero, while **the authorities** he resisted are now viewed as the worst kind of **scum**.

Thoreau, and later Gandhi and Martin Luther King, all believed that individual conscience was more just and powerful than law. All three encouraged people **to break unjust laws**; and to instead have respect for what is good, right, true, and just. Though all three men are now dead, their message is as important today as it was during their **lifetime**.

"Thoreau was a great writer, philosopher, poet, and a most practical man, that is, he taught nothing he was not prepared to practice in himself. He was one of the greatest and most moral men America has produced."

--Mohandas Gandhi

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