

Work in the Big Brother Society: The Phenomenon of Work as Control and Reproduction of Social Mobility in the Big Brother Society - Dystopian Correspondences between Literature and Reality

Aris Asproulis

Greece

***Corresponding Author:** Aris Asproulis, Greece.

Abstract: The article examines the function of work in the dystopian regime of Oceania, as presented in George Orwell's novel "1984". Work is analyzed as a mechanism of social control and maintenance of power, through the class stratification of society (Inner Party, Outer Party, Proletarians). The alienation of workers, the manipulation of historical memory and the constant mobilization of propaganda are highlighted. Particular emphasis is given to the ideological instrumentalization of war, which serves the recycling of production without improving living standards, thus preventing the awakening of the lower class. Work is presented not as a means of creation, but as a tool of subjugation, routine and psychological repression, while references to theories by Marx, Weber and Durkheim enrich the analysis.

Keywords: Big Brother, George Orwell, 1984, Work and control, Social mobility, Doublethink, Orwellism, Dystopia, Political propaganda, Social class, Proletariat, Cold war, Surveillance State, Ideology and power Political allegory.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Import

By the unhelpful term "Big Brother society," we mean the state described by author George Orwell in his book "Nineteen Eighty-Four."

George Orwell was born in Montihari, Bengal, in 1903 and died in 1950 in London. His real name was Eric Arthur Blair, while his pseudonym was inspired by the Orwell River in eastern England from his first book, "A Man in Paris and London", in 1933.¹ The change of his name expressed and coincided with a reversal in his lifestyle, his transformation from a pillar of the British imperial establishment system, to a rebel of letters and politics². With studies at Eton College³ and a career as a civil servant in Burma, he soon found himself on the other side, passionately serving human freedom, actively participating in the Spanish Civil War⁴.

Typical examples of the dynamic ideological mutation were his resignation from the Imperial Police on New Year's Day 1928, as well as his refusal to continue as head of the BBC⁵ in 1943, taking up the position of literary editor of the left-wing socialist newspaper Tribune.⁶

After many works – such as: "Such, Such Were the Joys" (1911), "Burmese Days" (1922), "To Kill an Elephant" (1922), "A Hanging" (1922), "The Clergyman's Daughter" (1935), "Let the Shield Fly"

¹Authentic Title : "Down and out in Paris and in London"

²*Papyrus Larous Britannica* , volume 47, Papyrus Publications, Athens 1993, p. 127

³From 1917 to 1921, where he studied on a scholarship at Eton College, he had Aldous Huxley as his spiritual mentor. [Source:(2)]

⁴*Philosophical-Sociological Dictionary*, Kapopoulos Publications, p. 115

⁵During his service at the BBC, he saw one of the first high-tech cameras. This event inspired the technological part of "1984"

⁶This newspaper was associated with the labour leader Aneurin Bevan.

(1936), "The Road to Twigg's Pier" (1937), "Honor in Catalonia" (1938), "Out for Fresh Air" (1939), "Classical Essays on Dickens" (1941), and "The Lion and the Unicorn" (1941) – Orwell reached the zenith of his writing ability with the political fairy tale "Animal Farm" (1944), inspired by history of the Russian Revolution and Stalin's betrayal. Although the book is considered one of the masterpieces of political literature and was the first to make him rich, his fame was overshadowed by his next and final work, entitled "Nineteen Eighty-Four" (1948)⁷. A work that is considered one of the most important in twentieth-century literature, a leading utopia and anti-utopia, which predicted the era of "Big Brother"⁸.

Orwell suffered from tuberculosis and wrote the final pages of his book intermittently between periods of hospitalization. He died in a London hospital in 1950, having requested in his will that no ceremony be held in his honor, beyond his funeral, and that no biography of him ever be written⁹.

"NINETEEN HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-FOUR"¹⁰

The writing of the book "1984" is the culmination of George Orwell's long-standing reflection.

2. CONTENT

The book is set in a fictional future, in a world dominated by three warring totalitarian police states: Eurasia 9, Oceania 10, and East Asia¹¹.

The hero of the book, the Englishman Winston Smith, is a junior party official in one of these states, Oceania. His desire for truth and dignity leads him to a secret rebellion against the government. He is arrested by the "Thought Police"¹², imprisoned and tortured. Smith's "reformation" was intended to eliminate any trace of intellectual resistance, until he completely submits to and loves the leader of the Party, "Big Brother"¹³.

3. PARTIAL DETAILS

In the state of Oceania described by Orwell, everything is structured on the principle of policing and propaganda, which awakens nationalism and diminishes memory.

The language is modified, it is called "ANGR"¹⁴ and uses only the initials of the words, with the aim of eliminating their meanings. There are the Ministries of Truth, Peace, Love, Abundance. Oceania is always in a state of war – the enemy only differentiates, depending on the

interest of the party, but the citizens do not perceive the change, because their memory is controlled -, everyone works daily and uninterruptedly, while of course everywhere, inside and outside the house, there are cameras that monitor everything and images of "Big Brother", the leader of the party, an imposing figure of an unknown person to everyone¹⁵.

Many see "1984" as a kind of political or moral allegory, a treatise on the nature of power and its possible forms of corruption¹⁶. With the above thesis in mind, this study will attempt to describe and analyze The Work, as presented in this particular "prophetic"¹⁷ utopia.

⁷ *Papyrus Larous Britannica*, volume 47, Papyrus Publications, Athens 1993, p. 128

⁸ George Orwell, *1984*, Cactus Publications

⁹ It includes the entire Northern part of the European and Asian continents, from Portugal to the Bering Strait.

¹⁰ It includes America, the Atlantic islands including the British Isles, Australia and the southern part of Africa.

¹¹ It includes China, the islands of Japan, Manchuria, Mongolia and Tibet. [Source: George Orwell, *1984*, Cactus Editions, p. 184]

¹² Police responsible for arresting people who thought differently from the party.

¹³ *Papyrus Larous Britannica*, volume 47, Papyrus Publications, Athens 1993, p. 128

¹⁴ The language ENGLISH is the initials of the language of ENGLISH SOCIALISM in "1984".

¹⁵ George Orwell, *1984*, Cactus Publications, p. 14

¹⁶ Krisnan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-utopia, in modern times*, BLACKWELL PUBLICATIONS, OXFORD 1987, p. 290

¹⁷ The prophetic quality of "1974" is one of the aspects that Krisnan cites. Kumar. [Source: (18)]

4. WORK IN THE BIG BROTHER SOCIETY

4.1. Prologue

In Oceania in "1984" we have three classes, under Big Brother:

A) The Inner Party, whose members number six million, a little less than two percent of the population of Oceania¹⁸

B) Below the Inner Party comes the Outer Party which, although the Inner Party is considered the 'brain' of the State, can very easily be described as the 'hands' of the State

C) Finally, below the Outer Party, come the amorphous masses called proletarians. They number two hundred and fifty-five million, about eighty-five percent of the population of Oceania.¹⁹

Membership in these three classes is not hereditary. Admission to one or the other section of the Party is by examination at the age of sixteen. Nor is there any racial distinction or superiority of one race over another. In the highest offices of the Party one finds Jews, Negroes, and even native Indians. This is because all those who govern are not bound by blood ties, but by adherence to a common creed, Big Brother 20.

4.2. Work in the Inner Party

With the end of capitalism, shortly after the middle of the twentieth century, according to the Orwellian utopia, the new aristocracy was created. This 'group' consisted of bureaucrats, scientists, technicians, union organizers, public relations specialists, sociologists, teachers, journalists, and professional politicians. These people came from the salaried middle class and the upper echelons of the working class, and were shaped and unified by the sterile world of monopoly industry and centralized government. Compared with the ruling classes of the old days, they were less avaricious, less vulnerable to the temptations of luxury, more thirsty for power, and, above all, they were much more methodical and much more determined to crush all resistance.

This oligarchy is thus consolidated, imposing "oligarchic collectivism 21", because wealth and privileges are more easily defended when they are held in common. Private property was abolished. Individually, no member of the party owned anything, en masse the party owned everything. The work of this class is only to supervise the Ministries of State, to differentiate the war enemy of Oceania whenever necessary – without this being perceived by the citizens due to "Doublethink" [1b]- and to expand propaganda²².

4.3. Working in the Foreign Party

The entire government apparatus, in which those belonging to the foreign party work, is divided into four Ministries:

A) Ministry of Truth – "YPAL" in the ANCHOS language – is a huge pyramid-shaped building made of white, gleaming concrete, rising three hundred meters into the air from floor to floor. On the huge walls of the building are written, in huge letters, the three main slogans of the party: WAR IS PEACE, FREEDOM IS SLAVERY, IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH.

The Ministry of Truth has three thousand rooms above ground and corresponding underground branches. The responsibilities of the Ministry are mainly news, entertainment, education and fine arts. However, this particular Ministry is at the 'heart' of the system, since it

is essentially the Ministry of Propaganda. Thousands of people from the external party work there daily to correct in old publications - days, months and even years old - anything that needs to be immediately forgotten by the citizens of Oceania, and to return these publications back either to the trash cans, or to the streets, or to houses where they had been found, in order to 'restore' the common collective memory

¹⁸The population of Oceania is three hundred million people.

¹⁹George Orwell's justification for choosing this specific number of classes can be found in the appendix of our study [1^a]

²⁰George Orwell, *1984*, Cactus Publications, p.206

²¹ Collectivism, translation: collectivity

²²George Orwell, *1984*, Cactus Publications, p. 207

correctly. This process is certainly repeated for any other material, besides the publication, that was needed. This section of the Ministry is called the "Archives Department"²³, while the second section that exists is called the "Porn Department", where low-level pornographic material is produced²⁴.

B) Ministry of Peace – “YPIR” in the ANCHOS language – which, like the other ministries, has the same architecture as the Ministry of Truth. The Ministry of Peace deals exclusively with war.

C) Ministry of Love – “YPAG” in the Greek language – which is vigilantly concerned with maintaining order, and is housed in a building without the slightest window.

D) Ministry of Abundance – "YPAF" in ANCHOS language – which is responsible for financial matters.

In all four Ministries, the common elements of the workers of the Foreign Party are the incessant work and the common blue work uniform, a trademark of manual workers in capitalism at the beginning of the twentieth century, which in the society of Big Brother is another element in the uniformity of everything. They had no property and no personal interests. They work only because they believe in prosperity, in Big Brother. They work because they cannot do otherwise²⁵. The Party is based on the constant increase in responsibility they show for their object; a fact on which the development of capitalism was also based, according to Baraway.

4.4. Work for the Proletarians

In "1984" the party teaches that proletarians are by nature inferior beings and that they must be kept in submission like animals, claiming of course that it had freed them from the slavery of the capitalists.

The only thing that matters to the Party is that the proletarians work; all their other activities are of no interest to it. The proletarians are left like a herd in the remote neighborhoods of the Oceanian states, maintaining from generation to generation a vicious circular chain of life. They are born, grow up on the streets, go to work from the age of twelve, have a short period of blooming beauty and sexual desire, get married at twenty, are already middle-class by thirty, and usually die at sixty²⁶. Hard work, taking care of the house and children, petty quarrels with the neighbors, cinema, football, beer and above all gambling, constitute their entire intellectual horizon, but at the same time their fields of work. The entire proletariat essentially constitutes a state within a state of thieves, robbers, prostitutes, drug smugglers, and fugitives of all kinds.

The party makes no effort to indoctrinate them with its ideology. It does not want them to have political consciousness. All it asks of them is a primitive patriotism, which it invokes whenever it needs to get them to accept longer working hours or a pay cut²⁷.

5. EPILOGUE

The two goals of the Oceania Party are to conquer the entire surface of the earth and to eliminate forever any possibility of independent thought. Thus it organizes a society of full employment and work. The maintenance of this balance is achieved through the incessant transmission of propaganda statistical analyses that 'reveal' that the standard of living is constantly rising, with the careful distribution of privileges to each class, maintaining a class consciousness and stability and of course by creating a closed information state that leaves no room for its citizens to have a standard of living comparison with other countries in the world²⁸. However, the essence of work and the economy in 'Orwellianism' lies in war²⁹, an issue that we will analyze in the next chapter.

²³The "Archives Department" also publishes "cheap" printed material with sports, sex, astrology, low-level novels for the proletarians. [Source: (24)]

²⁴The hero of the play, Winston Smith, also works in the Ministry of Truth, which is why Orwell gives us more information than about the other Ministries.

²⁵George Orwell, *1984*, Cactus Publications, pp. 14-50

²⁶They had to die at the latest by the age of sixty, because older age became dangerous for the collective memory that the party preserved in everyone [Source: (27)]

²⁷George Orwell, *1984*, Cactus Publications, pp. 76-77

²⁸George Orwell, *1984*, Cactus Publications, pp. 79-190

²⁹Krisnan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-utopia, in modern times*, BLACKWELL Publications, Oxford 1987, p. 309

5.1. Work and War in "Orgwellism"

In the utopia of "1984," the three major superpowers essentially have no reason to fight, and this for one main reason: with the establishment of the internal economy, in which production and consumption overlap, the struggle for markets no longer exists, while competition for raw materials is no longer a matter of life and death.

The only direct economic purpose of a war concerns labor power: that is, how to conquer more and more states that have an inexhaustible supply of cheap labor³⁰. This war is called by Orwell "Modern War", whose original purpose is to consume industrial products, without raising the general standard of living. The problem was how to continue industrial production without increasing the wealth of the world. In practice, the only way to achieve this was to wage war constantly. War, according to Orwell, is essentially the destruction, not necessarily of human life, but of the products of human labor. War is the only way in which materials can be destroyed, which could otherwise be used to make the masses live more comfortably and consequently think more than is desirable. As a rule, war is always organized in such a way as to devour the surplus that could exist after the primary needs of the population have been met. In modern war, only one thing matters, the state of war. In addition to being hardworking and capable, it is also necessary to be characterized by fanatical patriotism, fear, hatred, cowardice and orgiastic triumphalism, a mentality that is essential in a state of war. Neither the enemy nor the place matters, as long as everyone is on war alert and is possessed by the aforementioned emotions. "Modern War" maintains the special mental atmosphere that a hierarchical society needs. This permanent cold war also brings a permanent peace into the state – this is the deeper meaning of the party slogan: "WAR IS PEACE". "Modern War" is waged by each ruling group against its vassals and its objective is not to conquer territory or defend itself, but to maintain the structure of society intact³¹.

5.2. General Conclusions

George Orwell describes the structure, purposes and methods of a completely policed society. The citizen of Oceania, cut off from the outside world and the past, is like a man in space, without orientation. All he knows to do is work and believe in the Party³².

Inequality is the immutable law of human existence, according to Orwell. Through his utopia, he presents us with a total, "imaginary" system that maintains its stability in psychology, through Doublethink - which is analyzed in our appendix - and in work, through the routine and alienation that specialization brings - a problem that was also developed by Marx, Engels, Weber, Durkheim and many others.

"1984" was published in 1949, at the height of the Cold War that sealed the post-war world. Thus, it was considered a weapon against the all-out Cold War. A work about democracy, fascism, socialism and its extensions in the modern world³³.

6. ANNEX

[1a] Orwell chooses to divide the society of "1984" into three classes because he believes that this number represents all the social structures of history. In the course of historical times and perhaps since the end of the Neolithic Age, according to Orwell, there have been three classes in the world: the Upper, the Middle and the Lower. They have been subdivided in various ways, they have taken countless different names and their numerical ratio as well as their relationships to each other have varied from time to time, but the basic structure of society has never changed. Even after huge uprisings and seemingly irreversible changes, the same structure is always restored exactly as a gyroscope always finds its balance again. The goals of these three groups are completely incompatible. The purpose of the Upper Class is to hold on to its position, that of the Middle Class to take the place of the Upper. The purpose of the Lower Class, when it has any purpose—for the permanent characteristic of the people of the Lower Class is that, being crushed by toil, they are not immediately interested in anything else than their daily life—when they have any purpose, it is to abolish all discrimination and to create a society

³⁰Krisnan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-utopia, in modern times*, BLACKWELL Publications, Oxford 1987, p. 309

³¹George Orwell, *1984*, Cactus Publications, pp. 183-19

³²George Orwell, *1984*, Cactus Publications, p. 196

³³Krisnan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-utopia, in modern times*, BLACKWELL Publications, Oxford 1987, p. 289

in which all men are equal. The Middle Class, in its struggle to seize power, associates the Lower Class with it, making it believe that it is fighting for its freedom and justice. During this struggle, the Middle Class, until it seizes power, always uses terms such as freedom, equality, justice and fraternity. As soon as it has achieved its purpose, the Middle Class throws the Lower back into the position of slavery that this Upper Class was and becomes. Then the struggle of the new Middle Class begins again from the beginning. The changes in history for Orwell are simply the changes of the masters of the Lower Class.

Source: George Orwell, 1984 , Cactus Publications, pp. 199-201

[1b] “Doublethink” is the basic component of Orwell’s theory. In order for a power to control the present, it must also control the past, and control of the past depends mainly on the discipline of memory³⁴. “Doublethink” is the ability to simultaneously have two contradictory beliefs and accept both. Only in this way can one accept all the changes in existing facts that the state-the Party wants to impose. The Party’s main task is to use conscious deception while maintaining the stability of intention that goes hand in hand with true honesty. Thus, with the system of “Doublethink”, it was able to stop the course of history. All oligarchies of the past lose power because they are conscious or unconscious. Only the Party has managed to create a system of thought where both situations coexist. The secret of governance, according to Orwell, is to combine the belief that you are infallible with the ability to learn from past mistakes. After all, the official ideology of the party is full of contradictions, even when there is no reason for them to exist. The Ministry of Truth deals with lies, the Ministry of Peace with war, the Ministry of Love with torture and the Ministry of Plenty with starvation. Finally, while the Party systematically undermines the family, it appeals to the feeling of family loyalty, under the name of "Big Brother". Only by reconciling contradictions can power be held indefinitely. To prevent equality forever - to maintain the position of the Upper Class forever - the mental state that will prevail must be directed madness. That's why the biggest heresy in Big Brother society is common sense.

Source: George Orwell, 1984 , Cactus Publications, pp. 211-215

REFERENCES

- [1] George Orwell, *1984* , Cactus Publications
- [2] George Orwell , *Animal Farm* , Cactus Publications
- [3] Krisnan Kumar , *Utopia and Anti-utopia, in modern times* , BLACKWELL Publications , Oxford 1987, p. 289
- [4] Lewis Mumford , *The History of Utopias* , Nisides Publications, 1998
- [5] Aldous Huxley , *Brave New World* , Nisides Publications, 1950
- [6] Thomas More , *Utopia* , Kalvos Publications, Athens 1984
- [7] Friedrich Engels , *The Development of Socialism from Utopia to Science* , ed., ed.
- [8] Max Weber , *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Gutenberg Publications , Athens 2000
- [9] *Papyrus Larous Britannica* , volume 47, Papyrus Publications, Athens 1993
- [10] *Philosophical-Sociological Dictionary* , Kapopoulos Publications

Citation: Aris Asproulis." *Work in the Big Brother Society: The Phenomenon of Work as Control and Reproduction of Social Mobility in the Big Brother Society - Dystopian Correspondences between Literature and Reality*". *International Journal of Political Science (IJPS)*, vol 11, no 2, 2025, pp. 41-46. doi: <https://doi.org/10.20431/2454-9452.1102005>.

Copyright: © 2025 Authors. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

³⁴The theme of intervention in collective memory is a motif in most utopias: in Thomas More's "Utopia", in Campanella's "The State of the Sun", in Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World", in Bradbury's " Fahrenheit 451".