

George Orwell

Nineteen Eighty-four

Breaking the individual, breaking the opposition.

How do radical systems subdue opposition?

What has come true?



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Introduction

It is certainly no coincidence that this work was offered to me just after the first year fulfilled by Snowden's leaks about NSA spying. (Probably there will be more.¹) He is still revealing not only the extent of violation of privacy and human rights by two of many American/British secret services but also relations with German intelligence. "They are in bed together"² is what Snowden told to *Der Spiegel*.

"Big Brother is watching you" has become a famous and familiar symbol for surveillance. It's a quote from George Orwell's dystopian novel called "Nineteen Eighty-Four", which was completed in 1948³. Indeed, surveillance is one of the primary issues of the totalitarian state described, but there are also other ones such as brainwashing.

I will try to set forth how Orwell describes the way his totalitarian state attempts to subdue both individuals and organized opposition, furthermore, address the question what of that has become reality. My plan to achieve this is to analyse the relationships between the two big world views, the old one and the new one of Ingsoc, and after that, how opposition acts and what is needed for opposition. Deriving the most important concepts of Ingsoc from this preceding analysis will be the next step. Finally, touch with reality will be checked.

George Orwell

George Orwell (*1903), whose "real" name was Eric Arthur Blair, was born in Motihari, India. His father, Richard Blair, worked in India in the Opium Department of the Empire and Orwell lived many years of his childhood separated from him in England.⁴

Since his early years Orwell was devoted to books.⁵ Before Nineteen Eighty-four, he wrote several other books such as "Coming up for Air" or "Animal Farm". Furthermore, he had a bronchial disease. Nineteen Eighty-four was written in the sanatorium only a short time before he died in the year 1950.⁶

About Nineteen Eighty-Four

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four* describes a dystopian world order which is based on "the splitting up of the world into three great super-states"⁷. It takes place in "London, chief city of Airstrip One, itself the third most populous of the provinces of Oceania"⁸. *Airstrip*

1 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/the-nsa-files> – An overview about past revelations, most recent access: 2014-04-13, 17:50

2 <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/whistleblower-snowden-claims-german-intelligence-in-bed-with-nsa-a-909904.html> – most recent access: 2014-04-13, 17:57

3 p. xvii

4 Sheldon, Michael, 1991, London: George Orwell. The Authorized Biography, p. 13, 14, 17

5 Sheldon, Michael, 1991, London: George Orwell. The Authorized Biography, p. 21

6 Sheldon, Michael, 1991, London: George Orwell. The Authorized Biography, p. 81, 479, 48

7 p. 214

8 p. 5

One is the name used instead of England (“it had been called England or Britain”⁹).

Winston Smith, the protagonist of the novel, is a citizen of London. All super-states are similar regimes with similar ideologies necessary to keep their citizens unconscious and loyal¹⁰. In Oceania, this ideology is called *Ingsoc*.

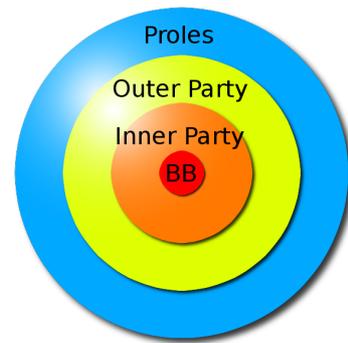


Figure 1: Hierarchy of Ingsoc

Ingsoc is hierarchically structured. Big Brother¹¹ is the infallible leader, followed by the members of the Inner and Outer Party. Finally, the proles are the 85% of uneducated people living in Oceania, who (or should I say “which”?¹²) are having nearly no rights.¹³ On a less abstract level, Ingsoc is oriented on Socialism, although the Party “rejects and vilifies every principle for which the Socialist movement originally stood”¹⁴.

Winston is one of the few persons able to remember segments of time before revolution¹⁵ and sceptical about Ingsoc¹⁶.

Significance of world views

Long-term radical systems build their own world view to prevent people from disagreement. It is characteristic for world views that they include mechanisms of defence. For instance, “our” world view is essentially based on science. Its mechanism of defence against most other world views is logic. People born into this world view usually don't believe contradictory statements at once because they are believing in the axiom of logic.

The same is the case when we focus on Ingsoc. The underlying world view told to the people includes a defence mechanism primarily optimized against the scientific world view that is mostly based on something called *doublethink* (but also other concepts described later) and is used to put logic out of force. It means that one considers two statements which would be considered contradictory through the

9 p. 38

10 p.226: “Actually the three philosophies are barely distinguishable”

11 p. 237-238: “At the apex of the pyramid comes Big Brother. Big Brother is infallible”

12 In fact, proles aren't treated like humans. “As the Party slogan put it: 'Proles and animals are free.'” (p. 83)

13 p. 238: “Below Big Brother comes the Inner Party, [...] below the Inner Party comes the Outer Party, [...] below that come the [...] proles”

14 p. 246

15 One of many examples can be found on page 38: “He did not remember the raid itself, but he did remember his father's hand clutching his own [...]” Additionally, it is often mentioned that Orwell remembers that Oceania changes its diplomatic relationships frequently, which is something almost nobody else can remember. p. 39: “Actually, as Winston well knew, it was only four years since Oceania had been at war with Eastasia [...]”

16 p. 21: “DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER”

application of logic to be both parts of reality. A great illustration of this can be found from page 304 while O'Brien is torturing Winston. *"The earth is the centre of the universe"* is what O'Brien tells Winston. On page 305, he adds:

"For certain purposes, of course, that is not true. [...] we often find it convenient to assume that the earth goes round the sun [...]. But what of it? Do you suppose it is beyond us to produce a dual system of astronomy? The stars can be near or distant, according as we need them. [...] Have you forgotten doublethink?"

From the point of view of Ingsoc, it is completely plausible to believe that the earth is the centre of the universe but to switch to the other theory when it is necessary to receive exact results. The same is the case for the names of the ministries of Ingsoc. *"The Ministry of Peace considers itself with war, the Ministry of Truth with lies, the Ministry of Love with torture and the Ministry of Plenty with starvation."*¹⁷ It is obvious for everyone what is done in these ministries but nevertheless people "know" at the same time that these ministries do what their name is suggesting.

Doublethink prevents people from changing their world view from Ingsoc to a scientific one. Doublethink invalidates the famous "law of non-contradiction", and indeed, it is the opposite of this law, which is an important part of our logic and "rules out [...] circumstances in which a statement is both true and false"¹⁸. It is impossible to change one's world view from one of these to the other one by applying the rules of one's original world view. The only way to change one's world view is to reject these rules.

The quotes mentioned above are part of a long conversation between Winston and O'Brien, in which Winston is trying to disprove the world view. He doesn't manage because O'Brien, whose point of view is that of Ingsoc, is always able to reply something to Winston.

How does opposition act?

To find or recognise effective ways of oppression, it is necessary at first to analyse the way opposition can act and what are the conditions for that. There are lots of ways to do this. I decided to present two different approaches, initially, the *steps of resistance* - which is mostly focused on a single person and psychology -, and

17 Comp. p. 246

18 Comp. http://www.columbia.edu/~av72/papers/LNC_2012.pdf, most recent access: 2014-05-08, 16:51

then, the importance of organisation – which is concerned with group dynamics and sociology.

Steps of resistance

Concerned with the Third Reich, the German scientist Detlev Peukert developed a scheme with 4 steps to resistance¹⁹. In order to keep it short, I only want to state that there is the first spark of mental deviation and after that, deviation develops from non-conformity until active resistance.

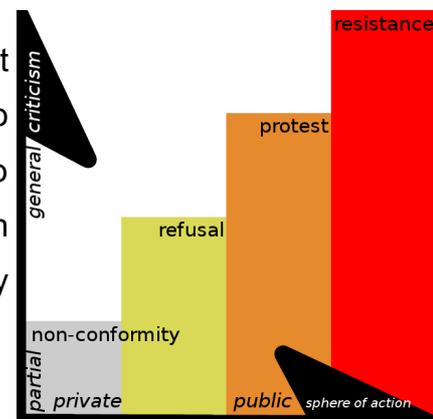


Figure 2: Steps of resistance.

Organisation

Single persons are usually not able to overturn an authoritarian government. So it is inevitable to join forces and divide labour. Having a functioning organisation, they can launch much greater campaigns and actions than in a single-handed way. Even though many people are having the same major goal, it can happen that they try to achieve it by doing completely adversarial things. Coordinated, their actions would be more effective.

Prevention and oppression of opposition

Having analysed how opposition works, we are ready to take a closer look at *Nineteen Eighty-four* and the most important concepts of Ingsoc to oppress opposition. Indeed, the book is full of such concepts so that I'm not able to point them all out in this work but only the most important ones.

So, what are the problems of authoritarian systems? They have to prevent their citizens from revolting if the goal is to build a lasting regime. As was described earlier, Ingsoc got its own world view to secure power for the Party and it's impossible to change an other person's world view simply by arguing.

On the one hand, the Party has to keep people from changing their mind and accepting the scientific world view, which is very important and partially solved by defence mechanisms of the world view. Therefore, the overall problems of the party can be classified into:

1. Preventing people from taking on a scientific world view (preventing mental

19 Peukert, Detlev, 1980, Nördlingen: Die Edelweißpiraten. Page 135, 136

deviation)

2. “Disabling” opposition (preventing resistance and organisation)
3. Converting opposition to the world view of Ingsoc.

Preventing people from taking on a scientific world view

This is kind of a balancing act. The Party has to simultaneously keep people in poverty and let them know that they're living in the best of all ages.

The former is inevitable to keep them away from too much wealth causing them to “learn to think for themselves”²⁰. In that case, because Ingsoc's world view lacks a defence mechanism against pure “egoism”, people would be able to change their world view without the use of (rational) arguments.

On the other hand, extreme poverty would also be dangerous. It is quite difficult to tell someone living below subsistence level that he is living much better than previous generations. Additionally, such people tend to choose a scapegoat and are more likely to abandon their beliefs (e.g. doublethink, but also logic).

There are nevertheless quite many concepts mentioned in *Nineteen Eighty-four* which are dealing with this problem worth being presented at this point.

War

War in 1984 is a very interesting phenomenon: One of the three slogans of the Party is

WAR IS PEACE²¹

In 1984, war is totally different from today. The three super-states are in fact impregnable:

*“These three super-states are **permanently** at war, and have been so for the past twenty-five years. [...] It is a warfare [...] between combatants who are unable to destroy one another, have no material cause for fighting and are not divided by any genuine ideological difference.”²²*

This is an opportunity to use war as a pretext of poverty since “war means no more than a continuous shortage of consumption goods” and less goods mean

20 p. 219: “For if leisure and security were enjoyed by all alike, the great mass of human beings who are normally stupefied by poverty would become literate and would learn to think for themselves.”

21 p. 6: “From where Winston stood it was just possible to read [...] the three slogans of the Party: WAR IS PEACE [...]”

22 p. 215

more poverty. The book tells us: “A peace that was truly permanent would be the same as a permanent war. This [...] is the inner meaning of the party slogan: WAR IS PEACE.”²³ But I also suggest another interpretation according to which war is peace related to domestic policy.²⁴

Emotions

“A Party member is expected to have no private emotions and no respite from enthusiasm. He is supposed to live in a continuous frenzy of hatred [...], triumph [...], and self-abasement before the power and wisdom of the Party.”²⁵

Emotions are a common way to bypass defence mechanisms of a world view. It is my strong suspicion that this is what happens when people (still today) change their minds to become a part of right-wing extremism. That is an irrational decision which was triggered by emotions instead of arguments. Also from the point of view of the Party emotions are a major matter. They can help to stabilise but also break world views.

This has undoubtedly been realised by the Party, thus frequently members of the Inner and Outer Party come together to “**Two Minutes Hate**” to get angry and fearful²⁶ because of persons and the army of the enemy who are shown at a screen whilst playing manipulating music and sounds²⁷. Certainly, the “principal figure”²⁸ is Emmanuel Goldstein, probably the leader of opposition, or, to say it politically correct, “the Enemy of the People”²⁹. He is used as the perfect personification of the evil³⁰.

Though already mentioned above, **war** helps control emotions distracting people and let them focus on enemies outside the Party. War and Two Minutes Hate achieve the same because in both cases people are polarized against an enemy different from the Party.

Finally, **family** has completely been exploited. For this section, the important point is that feelings such as love or loyalty, which used to be inter-personal feelings, are

23 p. 229

24 This interpretation was also observed here: <http://everything2.com/title/War+is+peace%252C+Freedom+is+slavery%252C+Ignorance+is+strength>, last access: 2014-04-16, 22:59

25 p. 241

26 p. 14: “The [...] woman gave a squeak and mingled fear and disgust.”

27 p.14: “The next moment a hideous, grinding screech, as of some monstrous machine running without oil, burst from the big telescreen.”

28 p. 14: “The programmes [...] but there was none in which Goldstein was not the principal figure.”

29 p. 14: “As usual, the face of Emmanuel Goldstein, the Enemy of the People, had flashed on to the screen.”

30 p. 14: “All subsequent crimes against the Party, all treacheries, acts of sabotage, heresies, deviations, sprang directly out of his teaching.”

targeted on the Party. The following quote illustrates this perfectly: “[*The Party systematically undermines the solidarity of the family, and it calls its leader by a name which is a direct appeal to the sentiment of family loyalty [Big Brother].*”³¹

Thus, the exploitation of family achieves two big goals at once. Firstly, the dangerous emotional links between family members are destroyed. This is pretty obvious when loyalty to family members and loyalty to the Party are conflicting with each other.³² Secondly, these strong feelings are then targeted on the Party and help secure its power.

Crimestop, blackwhite, alteration of the Past, doublethink

These keywords describe the mentioned defence mechanism of Ingsoc. “*An elaborate mental training [...] round the Newspeak words crimestop, blackwhite and doublethink, makes him unwilling and unable to think too deeply on any subject whatever.*”³³

The relations of these mechanisms are fully described in the book at page 241. “Crimestop means the faculty of stopping short, as though by instinct, at the threshold of any dangerous thought.”³⁴ But this is only possible if there is “flexibility in the treatment of facts. The key-word here is blackwhite.” Its meaning is considered in a negative sense “applied to an opponent” and a positive one “applied to a Party member”.

Crimestop is the ability “to believe that black is white, and more, to know [... it], and to forget that one has ever believed the contrary” so that the Party could always make one change one's opinion or believe something illogical³⁵. So people have to be able to control their memory and their opinions and “this demands a continuous alteration of the past”, that is controlled by the Ministry of Truth.

This seems very strange and illogical to us, but doublethink, which was described above, ensures immunity against logical arguments so that these four mechanisms, when united, avoid endangering the Party through the application of reason.

31 p. 246

32 p. 29: “It was almost normal for people over thirty to be frightened of their own children. And with good reason, for hardly a week passed in which the Times did not carry a paragraph describing how some eavesdropping little sneak – ‘child hero’ was the phrase generally used – had overheard some compromising remark and denounced his parents to the Thought Police.”

33 p. 241

34 p. 241, this is also the source of further quotes and statements of this paragraph.

35 p. 209: During a demonstration against the enemy Eurasia, the speaker announces that Oceania is at war with Eastasia. Promptly: (p.211) “Oceania was at war with Eastasia: Oceania has always been at war with Eastasia.”

Disabling opposition

Despite these considerable attempts to avoid the formation of opposition, it is a fact that opposition cannot be avoided completely. The best proof in the book is the existence of the protagonist Winston Smith, who indeed is a subversive member of the Outer Party. But if opposition can be kept small, it should be possible to disable it. Remember the section "How does opposition act?". A way of disabling opposition is to interfere with the steps of resistance or the establishment of organised opposition. This, of course, also includes the avoidance of a growing opposition.

Surveillance and denunciation

The most popular and significant concept of Ingsoc against opposition and at the same time the main reason for the actuality of Nineteen Eighty-four is certainly a mixture of surveillance and denunciation. They make possible quick recognition of opposition as well as a higher hurdle for uttering or exchanging any unorthodox opinion, including the near impossibility of building an organised opposition.

How to realise this? In *Nineteen Eighty-four*, every room can be observed through a so-called telescreen that can be imagined as a television combined with CCTV.

*"The telescreen received and transmitted simultaneously. Any sound [...] would be picked up by it; moreover, [...] he could be seen as well as heard. There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment. [...] You had to live – [...] from a habit that became instinct – in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard"*³⁶

A still unmentioned part of the steps of resistance is that any formation of stronger disagreement is almost impossible without uttering it. In the book, Winston buys a diary and uses it to express his thoughts (which is forbidden)³⁷. The result is that his memories / his mind clarify themselves³⁸. The same is with surveillance. Any uttering of disagreement to the Party could mean one's death and so there is that "habit that became instinct". But it is difficult to suppress the utterance of an inner belief - in the words of Winston:

*"If you want to keep a secret you must hide it from yourself."*³⁹

36 p. 5

37 p. 9: "The thing that he was about to do was to open a diary. [...] if detected it was reasonably that certain that it would be punished by death"

38 p. 11: "But the curious thing was that while he was doing so a totally different memory had clarified itself"

39 p. 322

Let's take another look at the family to see an example of the related topic of denunciation. Children are educated even to denunciate their own parents (note 27). This is a very strong extension of normal professional surveillance because no state can afford as many spies as there are children and other amateur spies.

“The Brotherhood”

Winston and his friend Julia are trapped by O'Brien, who pretended to be part of opposition, part of the famous “Brotherhood”.⁴⁰ This is very clever because people who are having the desire of organised opposition will fall into the trap just like Winston and Julia, probably before finding any real organisation (which can hardly exist at all). How can you meet other oppositionals whilst mistrusting everybody? I think, this might be impossible.

Converting opposition to the world view of Ingsoc

One day, Winston and Julia are captured by the Party and arrested in the “Ministry of Love”. Later, Winston is told by O'Brien the following:

*“Did I not tell you just now that we are different from the persecutors of the past? We are not content with negative obedience, nor even with the most abject submission. When finally you surrender to us, it must be of your own free will.”*⁴¹

These “persecutors of the past” degraded their enemies before killing them, but this would create martyrs, idols of opposition. So in Ingsoc every oppositional is converted to Ingsoc before being killed.⁴² Later, O'Brien says, “There are three stages in your re-integration”⁴³. Further: “There is learning, there is understanding, and there is acceptance.” I will describe them shortly.

Learning

O'Brien breaks Winston's resistance against the ideology of Ingsoc by torturing him. After that, Winston will understand how to live with doublethink and the other mechanisms.⁴⁴

Understanding

“You understand well enough how the Party maintains itself in power. Now tell me

40 This is obvious from page 194 and especially in O'Brien's utterance “To our leader: To Emmanuel Goldstein” at page 198.

41 p. 292

42 This is, in fact, not the only reason, but the other one is not important here.

43 p. 299

44 p. 286: “How many fingers, please?” - “Four! Five! Four! Anything you like. Only stop [...] the pain!”

why we cling to power.”⁴⁵ That is the question this section is about. Winston is told that “alone [...] the human being is always defeated. [...] But [...] if he can merge himself in the Party so that he is the Party, then he is all-powerful and immortal.”⁴⁶ Meanwhile, he is being tortured (p. 301: “O'Brien had pushed the lever of the dial up to thirty-five”).

Winston is shown the condition he is in and how he is “rotting away”⁴⁷ after torture. O'Brien makes Winston himself guilty for that. “Look at the condition you are in!”⁴⁸ But step two is not enough to convert Winston completely: Afterwards, Winston still has familiar feelings for Julia which help him keeping his old world view⁴⁹.

Acceptance

This last step aims to remove the last emotional bonds from Winston. As O'Brien found out, Winston is fearful of rats and in consequence, he threatens Winston with feeding his head to rats – until Winston wishes that Julia should be the victim of the rats – instead of himself.⁵⁰ According to O'Brien, “courage and cowardice are not involved” (p. 327) because it is the worst situation Winston can imagine. After that Winston doesn't feel anything for Julia any more⁵¹ and “love[s] Big Brother”⁵².

Conclusion

So, what of that has come true? The most obvious example is surveillance, of course. This was already set forth in the introduction.

We are living in a very vivid democracy today, with free speech and a tolerant society but nevertheless it is worth looking at more or less dangerous tendencies. I'd like the reader to remember my alternate interpretation of the slogan “WAR IS PEACE”. There are some relationships to today's counter-terrorism laws. The diffuse fear created by terrorism can easily be abused, for instance, to establish mass surveillance. It is also possible to see this in other countries.

One example are the USA where everybody knows about the existence of the prison camp “Guantanamo” which is said about that torture is still in use. Further,

45 p. 300

46 p. 303

47 p.312

48 p.311

49 p. 321: “ 'Julia! Julia! Julia, my love! Julia!' “ / p. 321/322: “In the mind he had surrendered, but he hoped to keep the inner heart inviolate.”

50 p. 329 “Do it to Julia! Not me!”

51 p. 337, a conversation betw. Julia and Winston: “There did not seem to be anything more to say.”

52 p. 342

Snowden has revealed that “agencies [like NSA, GCHQ, ...] are attempting to control, infiltrate, manipulate, and warp online discourse”⁵³. Though not directly related to the concepts described, it is aimed to achieve the very same goals: manipulation and control of the people.

Some kinds of surveillance can be more subtle, such as “Smart TV’s”, which sometimes include a camera. There are great similarities with Orwell’s “telescreens”. This also applies to the well-known project “Google Glass”.

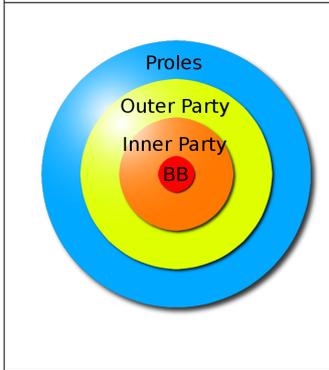
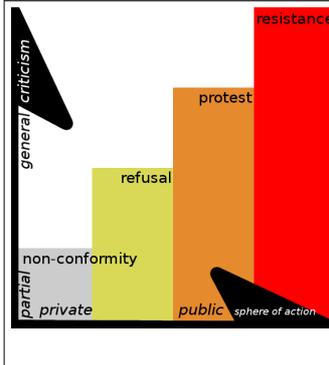
As a conclusion, one can say that we are living in a working democracy without the big dangers described in the book at the moment - but it is very insightful to compare Nineteen Eighty-four with today to discover dangerous developments.

53 Comp. The Intercept (Glenn Greenwald): <https://firstlook.org/theintercept/2014/02/24/jtrig-manipulation/>, last access: 2014-04-19, 17:37

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	<p>This is a small piece of paper I created to cover the web cam of my notebook. Who knows who is watching...? This might be useful for smart TV's or Google Glass, too.</p> <p>(Front page)</p>
	<p>Figure 1: Self-made illustration of the hierarchical structure of Ingsoc.</p> <p>License: Creative Commons CC-BY-SA</p> <p>(Page 4)</p>
	<p>Figure 2: Self-made adaption of the “steps of resistance” scheme of Detlev Peukert in his book “Die Edelweißpiraten” on page 236.</p> <p>License: Creative Commons CC-BY-SA</p> <p>(Page 6)</p>