

THROUGH GEORGE ORWELL'S EYES: THE ROAD TO TOTALITARIANISM

1. The Ministry of Truth: Words as Slogans (February 1)

2. Big Brother and the Worship of Power (February 8)

3. Love and the Breaking of the Human Spirit (February 15)

3. Love and the Breaking of the Human Spirit

Quotations from 1984

1. Just after Winston and Julia begin their physical relationship, Winston understands that spontaneous human love and desire create bonds that exist outside political control. Authoritarian systems fear love because it creates loyalties that can escape total control.

Not merely the love of one person but the animal instinct, the simple undifferentiated desire: that was the force that would tear the Party to pieces. (136)

In a way she realized that she herself was doomed, that sooner or later the Thought Police would catch her and kill her, but with another part of her mind she believed that it was somehow possible to construct a secret world in which you could live as you chose. (147)

In the old days, he thought, a man looked at a girl's body and saw that it was desirable, and that was the end of the story. But you could not have pure love or pure lust nowadays. No emotion was pure, because everything was mixed up with fear and hatred. Their embrace had been a battle, the climax a victory. It was a blow struck against the Party. It was a political act. (136f)

2. Authoritarian systems manipulate human longing in order to convert it into devotion to power.

Unlike Winston, [Julia] had grasped the inner meaning of the Party's sexual puritanism. It was not merely that the sex instinct created a world of its own which was outside the Party's control and which therefore had to be destroyed if possible. What was more important was that sexual privation induced hysteria, which was desirable because it could be transformed into war-fever and leader-worship. (144)

3. Authoritarian systems depend on inner emptiness in order to generate artificial loyalty.
‘When you make love you’re using up energy; and afterwards you feel happy and don’t give a damn for anything. They can’t bear you to feel like that. They want you to be bursting with energy all the time. All this marching up and down and cheering and waving flags is simply sex gone sour. If you’re happy inside yourself, why should you get excited about Big Brother and the Three-Year Plans and the Two Minutes Hate and all the rest of their bloody rot?’ (144)
4. The Party destroys trust at the most intimate level of human life. It breaks natural loyalties in order to make itself the sole object of loyalty.

They had played a similar trick with the instinct of parenthood. The family could not actually be abolished, and, indeed, people were encouraged to be fond of their children, in almost the old-fashioned way. The children, on the other hand, were systematically turned against their parents and taught to spy on them and report their deviations. The family had become in effect an extension of the Thought Police. It was a device by means of which everyone could be surrounded night and day by informers who knew him intimately. (145)

5. In Goldstein’s book Winston discovers how Big Brother functions as a personal figure who can receive emotional devotion more effectively than an abstract system. Authoritarian power sustains itself by becoming an object not just of obedience, but of worship.

Big Brother is the guise in which the Party chooses to exhibit itself to the world. His function is to act as a focusing point for love, fear, and reverence, emotions which are more easily felt towards an individual than towards an organization. (226)

He loved Big Brother. (323)

6. O’Brien describes the Party’s ultimate vision of complete psychological and emotional control. Every competing source of loyalty, joy, or meaning must be eliminated. Totalitarianism aims at becoming the sole object of human devotion, replacing all natural and transcendent loyalties.

Everything will be dead inside you. Never again will you be capable of love, or friendship, or joy of living, or laughter, or curiosity, or courage, or integrity. You will be hollow. We shall squeeze you empty, and then we shall fill you with ourselves.’ (278)

There will be no loyalty, except loyalty towards the Party. There will be no love, except the love of Big Brother. There will be no laughter, except the laugh of triumph over a defeated enemy. There will be no art, no literature, no science. When we are omnipotent we shall have no more need of science. There will be no distinction between beauty and ugliness. There will be no curiosity, no enjoyment of the process of life. All competing pleasures will be destroyed. But always—do not forget this, Winston—always there will be the

intoxication of power, constantly increasing and constantly growing subtler.
(290)

Commentary

7. “A person’s mind and sexuality [are] something threatening for the Party for two reasons.
 - 7.1. First: these are areas of privacy. It is not just that you can keep your thoughts and desires to yourself, which is bad enough. The very fact that the individual mind exists, forming its own thoughts and desires independently, is an affront to the Party.
 - 7.2. Second: the individual mind and the individual sexuality make possible for alternative communalities that are not the Party: these are sites of possible intimacy.”¹
8. Authoritarian systems seek to monopolize loyalty because it is the deepest bond that holds human communities together.
 - 8.1. The health of a free society depends on the existence of loyalties that do not originate in the state and cannot be controlled by it.
 - 8.2. These loyalties arise in what sociologists call “third spaces”: places where people gather not as citizens under authority, nor as private individuals alone, but as members of a community bound together by shared practices, interests, causes, and mutual commitment.
9. Cf. Derek Thompson, “The True Cost of the Churchgoing Bust. Many Americans seem to have found no alternative method to build a sense of community”, *The Atlantic* April 3, 2024

“The relationship with organized religion provided many things at once:

- not only a connection to the divine,
- but also a historical narrative of identity,
- a set of rituals to organize the week and year,
- and a community of families.”

“Nonreligious Americans are less civically engaged. [...] Religiously unaffiliated Americans are less likely to volunteer, less likely to feel satisfied with their community and social life, and more likely to say they feel lonely. [...] Our civic retreat [is] a story about place. [...] Americans today have fewer shared spaces where connections are formed. “[...] Many people, having lost the scaffolding of organized religion, seem to have found no alternative method to build a sense of community.

“Religious rituals [...]

a. _____

¹ Ingeborg Lofgren, “Nineteen Eighty-Four, totalitarian lived skepticism, and unlearning how to love”, *Policy Futures in Education* 2022, Vol. 20(3) 352

- put us in our body, [...] many of them requiring some kind of movement that marks the activity as devotional. Christians kneel, Muslims prostrate, and Jews daven.
- Religious ritual also fixes us in time, forcing us to set aside an hour or day for prayer, reflection, or separation from daily habit. (It's no surprise that people describe a scheduled break from their digital devices as a "Sabbath.")
- Finally, religious ritual often requires that we make contact with the sacred in the presence of other people, whether in a church, mosque, synagogue, or over a dinner-table prayer."

10. Cf. Angus Ritchie, *Inclusive Populism*:

"It is not *constitution* that makes a democracy, but *habits* and *practices* of

- Empathy, relationality,
- Deliberation, negotiation
- Confrontation, argument
- And ultimately *compromise*.

Secularizing liberalism ignores **the crucial mediating institutions** which sustain a democratic culture between elections. [...] Encourages groups to perceive each other as competitors" (11)

11. The Eucharist in this sense is a 'third space':

- 11.1. It gathers people who differ in class, profession, temperament, and political opinion into a single act of shared participation.
- 11.2. They do not gather because they agree on everything, but because they share something a common orientation toward a reality beyond themselves.
- 11.3. This creates bonds of trust and mutual recognition that are not mediated by the state.