

Zamyatin's warning of the non ideal government



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Governments in different countries have been in control whether it be because of the people that select them or because they put themselves there. Each government has its own way of keeping its people in check and making sure that they are obedient. There are governments that have harsh laws to make sure that they are in complete control while others have laws that can be seen as being fair. As a result of this, the citizens in these harshly enforced lawed countries will want to rebel against the government to have them become overthrown and then establish a proper government with proper laws. An example is in Russia as there was a revolution in 1917 as there was corruption and the minorities wanted to escape Russian domination. After this revolution, Zamyatin wrote *We* to show the harshness of in which the Soviet government was ruling the country and how the government essentially took away freedom from their people. While Zamyatin was living in exile, he got the ideas of how the government was actually like as the governments in which the places he was living in had different ideals and were not oppressive like Russia. Zamyatin in *We* shows how the One State keeps its citizens in check through themes of Dystopia, surveillance, obedience and domination in order to maintain its status of being a perfect society.

Literary: Dystopia

Plato, wrote "Allegory of the Cave" in which he wants to depict how a person can have a very different interpretation of reality depending on what that person has been exposed to for most of their lives. The scenario is as follows, there are three prisoners facing the wall so that all they see is shadows that are projected by the fire that is lit inside the cave. All this time,

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they believe the shadows are the reality but then one of the prisoners manages to escape and then is exposed to the light. The light is hurting his eyes and he is now scared of this light because he is not accustomed to this new thing that he is seeing. However it then intensifies as he heads outside the cave and the pain is even more excruciating but this prisoner resiliently goes through the process and then sees what is outside the cave. This then leads to that prisoner to have his perception of reality change and realized there is more than to what he saw in that cave. However he was the only one to have his understanding of reality changed as the other two prisoners think that he is crazy and do not want to leave that cave. Plato says, " And if he were compelled to look at the light itself, would not that pain his eyes, and would he not turn away and flee to those things which he is able to discern and regard them as very deed more clear and exact than the objects pointed out" (Plato 748). Plato is stating how the prisoner who escaped did not want to progress in the way he sees things therefore changing his understanding of reality. However, his eyes, difficulty adjusts to the firelight and then progress out the cave to which then is representative of another state of understanding. Plato is using the metaphor of the light as being the way people understand, so when the prisoner looks towards the sun and see what life is outside the cave, then, the escaped prisoner begins to see the truth and understand that what he was seeing inside is not reality. This idea connects to *We* as the main protagonist D-503 says, " I continue to believe that I shall recover, that I may recover. I slept very well. No dreams or any other symptoms of disease" (Zamyatin 65). D-503 is introduced as being a character that is completely obedient to the One State and is proud and to be living under the control of the One State. Throughout this novel, he

transitions away from an obedient citizen into a human that then begins to differ away from being an obedient citizen. To him this transition is like a sickness that has a negative connotation to it as he goes to the doctor wanting these emotions to go away. D-503 suffers as he begins to grow and become human as he develops emotions and the One State can't take it out of him because D-503 is not sure if he should go through the operation. Also, as his fascination for I-330 grows, so does the conflict between whether he is going to be his old self or if he should become a human being with emotions. For a while he embraces his status as a human being and is no longer an obedient civilian. D-503 is the prisoner that escapes from the cave as both end up having their understanding of reality changed as they find out the truth of what is real. That then leads on to the second point of ignorance as the other prisoners are comfortable with their reality and as a result did not want to leave the cave. That ties to We as the civilians are the prisoners that are comfortable with the way they are living just like D-503 was and accepted the reality that was implemented by the One State. The rest of society seemed to be ignorant as they did not want to rebel as they do not want to get educated on what the truth is of life outside the one state. Essentially the cave is like the One state as the people within it grew up accepting life and not questioning the reality of life outside the walls, therefore remaining as machines obeying the society and are stuck living in that "cave".

Political: Power and Domination

Now the focus shifts from the civilians to the government as the officials are the ones that set up the laws that has the society the way it is. Marxism-

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Lenism by Riegel goes into how Lenin combined politics and religion which is known as Marxism-Lenism. Lenin was essentially the messiah of Soviet Russia and he made sure that his people would obey to keep them in check. Then the ones that disobeyed would be made an example of and the militant group was composed of loyal servants and would make sure the society was kept in check. As Riegel states, "Alternative commitments were treated as heretical challenges to their own monopoly of salvationist vision. They are seen as 'objektive Gegner'8 (objective enemies) who were persecuted and terrorised, deported to concentration camps and annihilated in mass-murder campaigns" (Riegel 99). Lenin would get rid of the people who disobeyed and by this Lenin is making sure that everybody agrees with Lenin so that he can be in power as long as he can. This is similar to WE as the One State Wants to maintain the obedience of its people in order to have it be a utopia and keep it under control. There was a point in the story in which the One State decided to have all if their citizens get the operation to make sure that the people were okay and not develop any mental emotions. As D-503 sees the newspaper that says "You are machinelike" and how everyone should "submit to the Great Operation"(Zamyatin 180). As Lenin would proceed to torture those who disobeyed, the One state would have its own way of having their people in check. That was having a machine that would clear the minds of those that were beginning to develop internal struggles. This is how the one state is able to remain in power as they are able to have control over the people to make sure that there is no rebellion against them. This is how they maintained a utopia for so long as the One state made sure obedience is maintained within their citizens. Also this then ties into Hannah Arendt as she writes in "Total Domination" that the totalitarian government

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rules a country by impleting fear and thorough that maintain their power. Through this fear, the totalitarian government is basically deprving their citizens of their rights and also of their morality. She gives the example of Nazi Germany as in her eyes, they were a totalitarian regime that put fear into people as they had established extermination camps that the People other than the Germans were sent to. However for the totalitarian regime to work, Arendt states that, "...the totalitarian regime depends on the isolation of the fictitious world of the movement of the outside world.."(Arendt 89). The concentration camps were located in isolated places and none were kept near the cities in Germany as the people living in these camps should not see how life is outside of that camp. Also the people living outside those camps are not able to see what is going on within and therefore would not believe that these camps exist and the punishments they go through would be hard to believe. In WE, the One State can be seen as a totalitarian state as they keep the people confined within the " green walls" and seem to be in an isolated location so that they are not exposed to the ideas of the outside world. The One State also establishes fear to those that develop emotions as if they decide to rebel then there is serious consequences which is determined to be execution. The One State is not correct by trying to be a totalitarian state that wants their citizens to be living in fear of having to go through the operation or having to live in a prison like society. Essentially the citizens are prisoners as they are living behind walls and are force to live the way they are told to and although they can see the outside, the citizens are forbidden to leave. This prison like state is not what Zamyatin wants a government to be like, which is why he warns what life is like and could continue to be like if the One State(Soviet Government) remains.

Social: Surveillance

One may view as surveillance by the government is beneficial as it can be a positive that the government is able to check on their citizens. Being able to get intelligence on your own citizens is positive as citizens would be more careful of the actions they decide to do. The government just wants to make sure that their citizens are safe from any type of danger that some people may be planning. The One State is trying to keep the society perfect and making sure that no crimes happen, which is fine because if there is any crimes that happen within the One State, then that could lead to chaos. However the One state has taken a quite extreme approach by having all the buildings being composed of glass with curtains that are permitted to be used during instances like if the person decides to have sex. The citizens in the One state should be able to have privacy within their own house and should not have be constantly spied on a majority of the time. However, I do acknowledge that the government will be able to prevent any type of crime if the guardians within the One State are able to see what they are doing even inside their own house. Therefore, this is how the One state can maintain the utopia and make sure that all their citizens behave normally as obedient citizens which is what some governments would want so that they can be kept in power. Zamyatin within the novel depicts surveillance as being negative as the people will feel that this extreme measure of surveillance is not proper and with them being dissatisfied will then lead to the rebellion. Also some may also say that sousveillance is bad as information on the government can do more harm than good. I would agree partially as there should be some information that can be released to the public but there can

be some information that can remain private. Zamyatin points out the benefit as D-03 is giving information to I-330 about the Integral and the plans the One State has for it and the exact day if its use. This was helpful as it led to when the revolution should occur and that is what Singer then argues in his article.

In "The Visible Man," Peter Singer argues both sides of the issue of privacy. He talks about how the government are intercepting thousands of emails, text messages, and phone calls made by people on a daily basis. He then states how not many people know that the government is spying and intercepting what people are doing. Singer then says that if the government are going to be spying then its citizens should be able to get private information from them as well. He talks about how it is an invasion of privacy and how this invasion of privacy on its citizens, then lead to Julian Assange releasing a website of classified documents from the government called WikiLeaks. Then other website that are putting up classified documents began to appear more and more on the internet He then says how websites like Wikileaks has been a good thing in our society as they have provided the people with information that helps them know more on what the government is doing. That has helped other countries that would have them starting revolutions against the government and catch the bad guys and not getting the wrong people. The first point that Singer makes is that it is ok to have the government spy and get intelligence on their citizens. As Singer points out that, " We don't really know how many terrorist plots have been foiled because of all this data-gathering. We have even less idea how many innocent Americans were initially suspected of terrorism, but not arrested

because the enhanced data-gathering permitted under the Patriot Act convinced law-enforcement agents of their innocence" (Singer 33). Terrorists attacks have been a major problem as many attacks have been happening lately and to have the citizens be safe, the government should be able to know what is going on to prevent any dangerous attacks. The government is there as protection for the citizens and having them check on people is how they will be able to make sure the society does not become chaotic. A government does not want to have to deal with a multitude of crimes and having to make sure that people are safe. We highlights this as Zamyatin states, " Our modern-beautiful, transparent, eternal-glass was there only in the pathetic, fragile little window squares" (Zamyatin 27). Essentially in the society the buildings there are made of glass and as described here they are beautiful and transparent so that the guardians can spy on the citizens which reflects the social issue of surveillance. Also they are being described as being fragile as they are probably meant to be like that so if anything illegal is being done than the security guards can break the glass to get in and stop the crime. That ties into why the government spies on its citizens, that's because they want their citizens to be safe. The government wants to make sure that the citizens do not get out of control because they would want to maintain that the citizens are doing what they are being told. The only way to make sure that the one state remains a utopia is by making sure that none of its citizens get out of their control that would then lead to a rebellion. Then the other point that Singer argues for is that citizens should also be able to get intelligence in its own government as well. Singer argues, because it can be beneficial as he states how, " We have seen the usefulness of sousveillance again this year in the Middle East, where the disclosure of <https://assignbuster.com/zamyatins-warning-of-the-non-ideal-government/>

thousands of diplomatic cables by WikiLeaks helped encourage the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, as well as the protest movements that spread to neighboring countries" (Singer 34). It is crucial that people know what is going with the government as if the government is abusive then the people have a credible reason to overthrow it. That then ties into how D-503 is keeping secrets hidden away from the one state which then leads to a rebellion to happen, which is why a government would want to spy on its citizens. Another example is how D-503 is finding out about life outside the one state and that leads to a rebellion. Getting information that the government is hiding is beneficial cause that can have people realize that what is going on in the government is not good and would have a revolution that would overthrow them and then have a government that would be beneficial for them. That ties into Singer as he argued how getting on the government can help open people's eyes to the reality of how the government is ran and from there can decide to move on from that corrupted government. The operation can also be an example as the government wants to make sure none of their citizens develop emotions that would then eventually lead to them not having control of their people. Surveillance is how a government controls their citizens as they don't want the society to be out of control and that is why people who pose a threat or just don't agree with them are put in prison. The U. S does not do it, but there are other countries that would take out leaders of a rebellion against them and that happens in We as I-330 is eventually captured and then killed. We dives into surveillance issues that shows what happens when the government does not know everything that is going on with its citizens and

how it is beneficial to find out what the government is hiding as people can rebel and live a life of freedom.

Social: Obedience

In Stanley's Milgram "The Perils of Obedience," an experiment is conducted as the test subjects were told to shock the he conducted an experiment that would test the conflict between the obedience to the authority versus one's own conscience. He discovers throughout his experiment that the subjects would prefer to go against their own morals in order to please their authoritative figures as the people would shock the testers without hesitation. As Milgram states, "For many people, obedience is a deeply ingrained behavior tendency, indeed a potent impulse overriding training in ethics, sympathy and moral conduct"(Milgram 62.) The point being made is that people will follow the command of their authority, regardless of the harmful effect that that action will have on other people. People act upon what is being told to them as they get a sense of satisfaction that they will be able to please the person in charge. We then relate to this point as D-503 is having an internal conflict on deciding whether to follow the authority which is the one state or if he should follow I-330 and go against the authority by helping in the revolution. He was a follower of the one state and nothing would change that until he met I-330 and then that is when he began to see another perspective in whether he should still follow it. The new D-503 is the one that helped I-330 but at the end after D-503 blacks out, he awakens as his old self and ends up telling the benefactor of I-330 and the other rebels. At the end D-503 says, "And I hope that we shall conquer. More than that-I am certain we shall conquer. Because reason shall prevail"

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(Zamyatin 232). D-503 through this shows that he is once again loyal to the One State as he declares that the Benefactor shall win. He believes that The One state are the reason for everything that is right, which is what ultimately has them living the beautiful life that the people are in. however that is incorrect as Zamyatin depicted the one state be wrong as it was based of the Russian government that would suppress freedom and prevent any rebellions. So the people that don't have a soul essentially lose their morality and based their decisions on what the one state tells them. D-503 going back to not having any emotions or judgement, then has him not feel anymore emotions towards I-330 and is fine with having her be tortured and then ultimately executed as does not want the revolutionary to prevail.

We was written in an attempt to declare what is wrong with the Russian government at the time as Zamyatin wanted the people there to be free of the oppression of freedom that the Russian State was employing on its own citizens. Another article that would agree with Zamyatin is the "Revolutionary Century: The Russian Revolution, a vast and bloody experiment, began a hundred years ago. Hoover fellow Norman M. Naimark insists there are lessons we still need to take from such "forced utopias" which states, "The horrors of the rule of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia derive from similar "forced utopias" that, in the end, created hell on earth rather than heaven" (Suevcia 11). Russia along with Cambodia were trying to force the country to be a utopia for their citizens. The One state follows this as they are forcing their society to be a perfect utopia. However, some people are not pleased by that as the rebels want to lead a revolution that would get rid of the One State. In one part of the novel, D-503 walks along

the Green Wall separating the city from the wilderness outside. Suddenly he sees the muzzle and yellow eyes of a beast on the other side and this has him proceed to state this, " The paltry creature! What absurdity- that he could possibly be happier than we are!" (Zamyatin 93). D-503 is calling the creature worthless and is clearly disgusted at seeing the animal be happier. Almost as he seems frustrated that creatures outside the society are happy because he believes that the people living within the glass walls should be happy therefore making those living life outside the walls should be miserable. However, that is not the case as the ones living there do not feel happy as they are want to rebel and essentially that utopia in reality is a hell. That is what Zamyatin wrote the book for, to point out how the current government at the time created a living hell for its citizens. That is, then why there was the Russian revolution of 1917 because the people did not like the ongoing corruption of the Soviet government. We goes through the same process on which the One state is not the correct form of government that some people want and would therefore would have to be overthrown.

Zamyatin in the novel *We* wants to show how the Soviet Union was the incorrect form of government as they oppressed the freedom of people. The One State which is what is meant to represent the Soviet government is shown that freedom is not established as the citizens are confined to live within the walls of the society and are required to have no type of soul. Those represent the people who are fine with the way that the Soviet government runs the country while the citizens with a sense of their identity and morality are the ones who know that the One State is not the correct form of government. That is why Zamyatin wrote *We* and why the

perspective of D-503 shows us what life is like being loyal to the one state compared to those that are not. We see at first that those that are loyal do it out of straight obedience and no desire to question the government therefore are living a happy life. Then those that have judgement realize how miserable it is living under the One State and are then convinced that this government should be gone. It is unfortunate that Zamyatin ends on a cliffhanger as the reader would want to know if the One state prevailed or did the revolutionist managed to overthrow them.

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