

The dehumanizing
effects of
totalitarianism in 1984
by george orwell:



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The most prominent message of 1984 is that totalitarianism destroys all that is civil and noble in human beings. In the novel, Orwell writes “ Freedom is the freedom to say two plus two equals four. Once that is granted, all else follows.” The converse of this quote is that by disallowing fundamental freedoms that are inherent to humanity Big Brother and his Party are able to produce a dehumanized, mechanical race of people. In other words, dehumanization is both the cause and effect of a totalitarian political system. This essay will take this as its thesis and flesh out arguments and evidence in support.

There are several methods adopted by the party to dehumanize its population. One such is the rigid scheduling of everyday activities for the people. This is most pronounced for members of the Outer Party and Inner Party and less so for the Proletariat. Winston Smith, the protagonist of the story, is a member of the Outer Party. As a result he is subject to strict daily routines which have a dehumanizing effect. For example, the day begins not with a gentle tap that wakes one up from a peaceful sleep. Instead the ubiquitous telescreen lets out a shrieking, piercing alarm that shocks the sleeper out of bed. But this is just the beginning of the torturous routine that cannot be evaded by anyone. After the shocking wake-up call the citizens are subject to a compulsory exercise regimen. Winston suffers from coughing fits each morning, but still he cannot excuse himself from these ‘ physical jerks’ as they are called. To boot, his varicose ulcer condition is also exacerbated by the strain of exercise. By forcing people into these rigorous everyday routines, the Inner Party and the masterminds who inhabit it, induce a sense of helplessness among the population. If one of the hallmarks

of human nature is the 'freedom' to think and act accordingly, the agenda of the Party nullifies this possibility.

The other method of dehumanization that the Party has devised is the abolition of sex and intimacy among couple. Sex is allowed only in conjugal relations, but that too strictly for the purpose of procreation. In fact the establishment of agencies like Anti-Sex League is toward this end. The rationale for the encouragement of celibacy is that by suppressing the sex-instinct, the instincts toward liberty and free thought might also be repressed. By taking control of a fundamental human urge - to seek and offer love - the Party can sufficiently control a whole range of other thoughts and expression. The Thought Police is especially vigilant in detecting, verifying and ultimately punishing those who are found guilty of this grievous 'crime'. The effect of such an attack on sex and intimacy is a society that is deeply dehumanized. In Winston Smith's own case, his marriage to Catherine was short lived. Having been indoctrinated by the Anti-Sex League, Catherine turned out to be frigid woman devoid of any passion. Her perception of marriage was one of duty toward the party. Caught between his wife's dogmatic attitude toward marriage and her acquired frigidity of body and emotion, Winston found his fifteen months of married life a dehumanizing experience.

Another effective method employed by Big Brother and his team of social planners is total control of personal memory. There is no such thing as individual remembrance of fact or event. The only source of reference or knowledge is through the books, journals and historical records published by the Ministry of Information. The coining of the name Ministry of Information is <https://assignbuster.com/the-dehumanizing-effects-of-totalitarianism-in-1984-by-george-orwell/>

meant ironically by Orwell, for what it produces is largely misinformation.

Freedom, in the context of the Ministry of Information, is the freedom to truth. If the ministry decides that two plus two shall be five and not four, such will become the immutable 'truth' in the eerie world of Oceania.

Political propaganda is the only guiding logic behind any piece of information dished out by the ministry. But not all such information can be assimilated by a human being.

In the case of Winston Smith, being a man of above average intelligence and perceptiveness, his mind revolts against accepting party propaganda that stands in contradiction to his personal knowledge. It is in recognition of this natural tendency to rebel that the word 'doublethink' is introduced in Newspeak. Even Winston's everyday job is one of purging, correcting or fabricating old records of *The Times* to suit current political expediencies. In this way, Winston's job is about eliminating the merit or necessity of individual memory. The freedom to possess personal knowledge or memory is made redundant with the constant reinvention of history. Thus if Winston produces an article to the effect of saying two plus two equals five, such will become the undisputed fact. By taking away from people the fundamental right to independent thought, sound logic and personal memory, the Party turns them into mere puppets. They are by the same token deeply dehumanized.

The totalitarian control over personal memory is one symptom of a broader systemic condition in Oceania, namely, the total lack of freedom of press.

This has several implications. For example, beyond the fact of freedom of speech and expression, as well as the claim to a fundamental human right, it <https://assignbuster.com/the-dehumanizing-effects-of-totalitarianism-in-1984-by-george-orwell/>

affects other domains of life. The quality and content of art and literature depends on it. Likewise, the shape of intellectual life and public discourse is borne by freedom of press. Even the seemingly abstract and removed world of scientific inquiry cannot flourish under harsh censorship. And most importantly, freedom of press is often linked to freedom in education. When the education system and the disseminated content are controlled by the state, there are serious repercussions. The young impressionable minds of children are most vulnerable to systematic indoctrination. By careful choice and structuring of syllabi at various levels, Big Brother and his Party have supreme power to produce young adults who would toe the party line. This is equivalent to subjecting children to an assembly line of production. Such a scenario is not only profoundly harmful and dehumanizing for the children of Oceania.

In conclusion, the fundamental freedom to thought, action and seeking truth is abolished in the dystopia of Oceania. Thereby, its wretched citizens of all categorizations do not have the power to say 'two plus two equals four'. The deprivation of such a basic freedom has profound implications in all realms of life. What this nightmarish system produces ultimately are hordes of mindless and subservient masses of people who are not human in the sense we know it. They are decidedly less than human and more akin to captive animals.

Reference:

Orwell, George (1949). *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. A novel. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co.

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