

Winston smith and
the protagonist
perspective: a
discussion of
doublethink in dys...



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

George Orwell provides to his readers in *1984* a dystopian look at how totalitarianism can influence the thought, speech, and action of the citizens of the effected state. The underlying theme throughout the text is the effect of Big Brother, from the loss of past language replaced by Newspeak and the absence of any documented history to give current life in Oceania a perspective to the people. The book's protagonist, Winston Smith, is the epitome of the Newspeak word doublethink, where herein a person holds two contradictory views simultaneously. Smith violates many thoughtcrimes, another Newspeak word, as he chronicles his questions about the world in which he lives in his journal.

While he continues to evade the telescreens that watch his every move while he writes and goes about other activities that would be considered criminal by the Thought Police, he also holds a post at the Ministry of Truth, or Minitrue in Newspeak. Here he disposes of any written material of the past and present or manipulates the news to reflect Oceania in the best possible light for the citizens there. In this way, he both destroys writing as he creates his own. This is the essence of his character in the novel.

Additionally, an important tool to further understand doublethink and other aspects of Smith's experiences is Foucault's work on crime, deviance, and the Panopticon. With all of these elements in place, a proper overall analysis of Smith as the prototype for doublethink is possible.

Orwell reveals the simplicity by which individuals can be easily manipulated by a totalitarian state with suspicion of others and ignorance or unavailability of true facts. In this way a society can easily engage the public into turning

in fellow citizens or even family members for thoughtcrimes. These crimes are never crimes at all, but a way to force society into submission.

Public displays of executions and events, such as the Two Minutes Hate, help to create a camaraderie among citizens, as well. Big Brother managed to fuel this with words, propaganda, while Winston Smith devoted his free time to writing the truth for future generations. Michel Foucault in "The Body of the Condemned" extensively engages in writing about public execution as the rule of law centuries ago. Discussed in his work is the evolution of corrections to include how prisoners were eventually spared this type of punishment and instead, manipulated in private by strict routine and rules. Both public executions and a very strict routine were used to keep citizens under control in *1984*.

Additionally, the fact that Smith continues to engage in dangerous activity while knowing that he could be monitored constantly shows his degree of commitment this character has in relating the truth to future generations. Though, he worries about the futility of this undertaking and realizes that the concept of doublethink has caused him confusion in all he does.

For whom, it suddenly occurred to him to wonder, was he writing this diary? For the future, for the unborn. His mind hovered for a moment round the doubtful date on the page, and then fetched up with a bump against the Newspeak word doublethink. For the first time the magnitude of what he had undertaken came home to him. How could you communicate with the future? It was of its nature impossible. Either the future would resemble the

present in which case it would not listen to him, or it would be different from it, and his predicament would be meaningless (Orwell, 10).

Smith, therefore, realizes that what he wants to believe and what is probable are two

conflicting aspects of the same truth. Truth is necessary, but if no one will listen or understand the truth then telling it makes little sense. This is the essence of doublethink and the tool by which Oceania remains under rule. People are either ignorant or afraid of the truth and those strong enough to embrace the ambiguities of doublethink become isolated from others, as there is no trust among citizens.

Winston Smith is lucky enough to find others in his life that feel the same way about the world that he does. But, these deviations from the norm bring a bloody hate from the masses. Emmanuel Goldstein becomes the “ poster-child” of everything the party is against. Goldstein advocates freedom of thought, freedom of speech, and freedom of assembly among other rights.

The Two Minutes Hate is a time reserved just for him for the citizens to boo and scream and throw things at his picture on the telescreen. It is no surprise that the citizens, including Smith, are motivated to be loyal to the party out of fear. Those Smith begins to trust, in turn, betray him and his eventual defeat in being a purveyor of the truth is that he becomes a tortured man, who no longer has any trace of doublethink, but an unquestioning sense that everything Big Brother says is ultimately true. He begins, then, to stop fearing the intrusions of his life, such as the telescreens, and instead begins to relish them.

<https://assignbuster.com/winston-smith-and-the-protagonist-perspective-a-discussion-of-doublethink-in-dystopia-essay-sample/>

Foucault in "Panopticon" describes the effect of this architectural figure of monitoring and alienating a criminal or citizen by causing disequilibria, confusion, and conformity. With this structure, individuals can be subdued on a mass scale with the fear of having some sort of guardian in place. What is required, also, is the notion of being able to be seen at all times, but not being able to see others in some fashion. For criminals and psychiatric patients it is the cells, where they are placed, but for society at large, it is some sort of tower or towering symbol.

This symbol represents the not seeing but/being seen idea to all in a community. For instance, the symbol of a large courthouse or monument at a school may cause fear in the respect that one is powerless over such a large, looming institution. For Winston Smith it was the telescreens and the Thought Police, who always had the ability to spy on the citizens of Oceania. But, this not-knowing when and where one might be seen or heard was enough to cause Winston to be able to engage in doublethink fully. He had to be loyal to the party, but if he believed he could be unseen by them, then he believed he could act as an individual. But, as Foucault expresses this, everyone in this type of architecture is an inmate to the state, regardless of whether or not they are in a cell or other type of restraint.

To induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which
<https://assignbuster.com/winston-smith-and-the-protagonist-perspective-a-discussion-of-doublethink-in-dystopia-essay-sample/>

they are themselves the bearers. To achieve this, it is at one too much and too little that the prisoners should be constantly observed by an inspector: too little for what matters is that he knows himself to be observed; too much, because he has no need in fact of being so (Foucault).

As Winston goes farther on his journey to truth, he realizes that it is not uncommon for others to doubt the “ truth” of the party. What happens to those, who become at some point in opposition to doublethink, is systematic torture, so that this person will be completely loyal to the party with no doubts or ambiguities. He comes to admit after torture, for example, that $2+2= 5$. During his torture, his mind races to discover how this can be possible and completely breaks down to believe it. The novel ends with the enigmatic “ he loved big brother”, being freed of the burden of logic completely. This was the final step for most individuals like him, if they were strong enough to doubt the party, their system of belief and logic would be tortured from them.

In conclusion, lack of the ability to disseminate truthful works in Smith’s job at the Ministry of truth and his action of compiling a journal make him the embodiment of doublethink. Doublethink in its essence is believing two truths and in Smith’s case it was acting upon two truths, what was real and what was propaganda. As many thoughtcriminals, Smith was intelligent and realized the impossibility to know the truth and believe propaganda, but the public executions, strict routine, and fear of the thought police with their aid of telescreens helped to instill a fear of discovering the truth. Foucault touches on all of these forms of subjugation of groups in his works and are

useful in explaining, not only this fictional work, but the existence of doublethink in our own world.

Works Cited

Foucault, Michel. “ The Body of the Condemned” and “ Panopticon” in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison*. New York, NY: Vintage, 1979.

Orwell, George. *1984*. New York, NY: Penguin Books LTD, 1949.