

# Freud's impact on 1984



In his treatise *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud makes an interesting statement about advanced society. He argues that "the price of progress in civilization is paid in forfeiting happiness through the heightening of the sense of guilt," to defend his argument that guilt is becoming an issue in modern cultures (*Civilization* 35). In George Orwell's novel *1984*, the party uses Freudian concepts involving guilt, repressed instincts, and physical pain in order to control its members.

One of the very first Freudian concepts that we see in *1984* involves guilt. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud briefly discusses the three parts of the mind - the ego, id, and superego. According to Freud, the id represents a person's natural instincts and desires, for example, the desire to have sex or be a more independent being. However, Freud argues that the id is an unconscious part of the mind, so that many people are not aware of these urges that they naturally have. On the other hand, the superego is partially conscious, and is what controls guilt. The superego a person has depends on the society he or she lives in, because society and culture determine what someone might think is right or wrong, making it easy to see what the superego is - a conscience. The ego is somewhere in the middle. It determines the choices you make each day by finding a compromise between the instincts of the id and the guilt of the superego. For all societies, Freud argues that there are going to be disagreements between the id and the superego that the ego can't handle, causing unhappiness for some people.

However, Orwell takes this setup a step further, creating a society where there is a strong disagreement between the superego and the id. The party

in 1984 creates a strong superego in its members, starting from a very young age. It encourages children to abstain from sex, many even deciding to join groups like the Junior Anti-Sex League: " In an indirect way it was rubbed into every party member from childhood onwards. There were even organizations such as the Junior Anti-Sex League, which advocated complete celibacy for both sexes" (1984 65). This society also encourages children to repress their id desires to love and protect their families, by rewarding them for turning over family members to the police for acts like thoughtcrime, and making them feel guilty for not doing so. However, guilt on its own can only go so far. If someone decides that the party's morals are wrong, that person could break the rules and not have enough guilt to have any reason to stop. Because of this risk, the party adds another level of control to the superego - the telescreens. The telescreens were installed almost everywhere, even in people's houses. These devices gave the party a way to keep an eye on its members and make sure nobody was giving into rebellious instincts and desires. If someone were caught, that person would be punished, depending on the severity of the crime, with torture or sometimes death:

" It was terribly dangerous to let your thoughts wander when you were. . . within range of a telescreen. The smallest thing could give you away. A nervous tic, an unconscious look of anxiety, a habit of muttering to yourself - anything that carried with it the suggestion of abnormality, of having something to hide" (1984 62).

If that wasn't extreme enough, the party made sure people couldn't get away with anything at all by creating a special type of crime - thoughtcrime. According to Winston, " Thoughtcrime does not entail death: thoughtcrime IS <https://assignbuster.com/freuds-impact-on-1984/>

death" (1984 28). Thoughtcrime was punished in the same way as a normal crime, through either torture or death. With thoughtcrime, the party made sure that people would not only refrain from committing crimes, but also that they would refrain from even thinking about them at all. This tactic was incredibly important for the goal of complete control. When Winston points out to O'Brien that the party is unable to control things like matter, gravity, climate, and disease, O'Brien responds that the party "[controls] matter because [it controls] the mind. Reality is inside the skull" (1984 264-265).

Although the party already had quite a bit of control over its members with telescreens and thoughtcrime, it also understood that it couldn't repress people's desires entirely - since that would lead to a revolt in no time. As Freud said, " even in so-called normal people the power of controlling the id cannot be increased beyond certain limits. If one asks more of them, one produces revolt or neurosis in individuals or makes them unhappy" (Civilization 39). Instead, the party decided to use those instincts and desires to its advantage. The " two minutes hate" was a short event that the party organized each day: the party members would all gather in one room and have a chance to let out their aggression towards a variety of images on a screen representing enemies of Oceania. At the end of the two minutes, a picture of Big Brother, the leader of the party, would show up on the screen, calming everyone down. Because of this process, party members would learn to subconsciously connect the party and Big Brother to feelings of safety and love, while connecting any enemies to feelings of anxiety and anger.

Because of such manipulative pacification, people are less likely to think about turning on the party, since they'd rather feel safe and secure. Another

time that this idea of compliance was put into action was when Winston was being tortured near the end of the novel. He " had the feeling that O'Brien was his protector, that the pain was something that came from outside, from some other source, and that it was O'Brien who would save him from it" (1984 250); what he is doing to himself is exactly the same as what the party was doing to its members in creating aura of loyalty and dependency.

Orwell used physical pain a few times throughout the novel as one of the party's methods of control. For example, when he was first taken to his cell, Winston was imagining the pain that he might feel later: " He felt the smash of truncheons on his elbows and iron-shod boots on his shins; he saw himself groveling on the floor, screaming for mercy through broken teeth" (1984 228). Despite how much he thought he loved Julia, and how much he wanted to hate the party, the pain was so bad that he was willing to do anything to get out of it. Freud mentioned this a little bit in his essay, discussing the pleasure-principle. This principle says that the id will do anything to get a person out of pain or a painful situation, and instead go look for pleasure. The party used this factor to its advantage, giving the id an escape from pain in the form of betrayal of Julia and loyalty to the party, which Winston took in response to being exposed to his greatest fear - the rats.

Throughout 1984, Orwell used many of Freud's concepts regarding civilization, like the superego and the id, repressed aggression and sexual desire, and physical pain, in order to show how the party gained so much control over most of its members. This group of overpowered individuals, sadly, included Winston himself at the end.