

# **The Last Man: George Orwell's 1984 in Light of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Will to Power***

By Luke Thompson

## **Chapter One: The Mirror**

A person who happened to be studying Nietzschean ethics at the same time as he was reading George Orwell's 1984 might happen to notice that both make use of the label "the Last Man."

In Thus Spoke Zarathustra's introduction (part 5), Nietzsche writes, "Let me speak to them of what is most contemptible: but that is the last man" (Nietzsche 129). Nietzsche's last man is a pitiful last attempt of humankind to translate his fears and emotions into objectives. " 'We have invented happiness,' say the last men, and they blink" (Nietzsche 129). The last men blink in stupidity as they believe they are the cause of abstractions and objects.

In the final chapters of Orwell's 1984, the antagonist, O'Brien, speaks to the protagonist, Winston, after weeks of starvation and torture as Winston shamefully examines himself in the mirror. "Do you see that thing facing you? That is the last man" (Orwell 224). We know that is not some trivial topic, for Orwell's original title for 1984 was The Last Man in Europe (Orwell and his publishers decided to change the name before publication.)

A similar vein most certainly runs through both last men, even though they both initially have no connections: they both sit in the same context, in that they are both speaking of last men before a change in what it means to be human. Nietzsche's last man is the final attempt of man before the overman defines the future. Orwell's last man waits for that silent silver bullet to kill the man of the past within and release

the humankind of the future. Both last men are or will be destroyed in the wake of something new, something fearsome and powerful.

After making this initial connection, one can begin to draw similar ties between the two novels; most significantly, two things arise: both look into the future, and both revolve around the topic of power. The connections are subtle and general, but they are prominent in light of the last man and essential for the context of that last man.

Both 1984 and Thus Spoke Zarathustra are involved with the future. Nietzsche's protagonist, Zarathustra, is a prophet foretelling the coming of the overman, the man that will write a new history for civilization, the man that will bring humankind to the next level. 1984 has been labeled dystopic literature, alongside Zamyatin's We and Huxley's Brave New World. This dystopia paints a grim picture of what may come, what horrors the human race will be able to erect in the near future. Both Zarathustra and 1984 are concerned entirely with the future of mankind, though they stand in contrast with their conclusions.

Secondly, both novels revolve around this concept of power. Zarathustra is interested in gaining power to overcome his nature and his presuppositions. Winston Smith desires to escape the power of the collective Inner Party, as well as decipher the past accounts of how that power was gained by it. This central role of power is important and pivotal. It will be explored more fully in the second half of this paper.

When the two novels are laid side by side, one begins to appear to be the mirror of the other, not in the sense in that both are identical, but in that they are both complete opposites, one echoing the achievements of the other and reflecting back a

reverse answer. This mirror takes our three revealed themes of the last man, the future, and the power the future wields, and turns them around. 1984 is that mirror. While Zarathustra delights in the death of those last men, Orwell creates compassion for what is lost. Nietzsche recognizes and looks forward to inventing the future, and Orwell rejects that future. Nietzsche celebrates in the coming of the overman with his insurmountable power, while Orwell weeps at what that will and the collective has done with this destructive power.

This paper will attempt to show that 1984 is this mirror. Nietzsche used Zarathustra as a prophet, and now Orwell uses Winston Smith as one, prophesying the disillusion of that first prophet. Not only does Orwell explore this dark and muddled future, but he creates the necessary elements needed to embrace Nietzschean theory and bridge the gap between theoretical and applicable philosophy. Orwell creates *doublethink* to complete Nietzsche's hold on earth, the final and irrefutable embodiment of *will to power*. Orwell's 1984 displays the totalitarian government foretold in Thus Spoke Zarathustra, sharing the amoral tendencies and contrivances.

## **Chapter Two: The Historical Context**

This connection is not imagined, but alive and breathing in the context of reality. Nietzsche's philosophy becomes one of the main undercurrents of the Nationalist Socialist Party and the Nazi canon. Nietzsche is revered by the party in particular and thus becomes the target for this commentary. Orwell's greatest enemy is the totalitarian government that takes the form of socialism. Nietzsche's philosophy is the backbone for this totalitarianism. 1984 becomes evidence for the

Nietzschean thread's prominence in totalitarianism. Orwell's enemy is the Nietzsche of the Nazis.

The World Wars have created a revolution in both literature and philosophy. By the 1940's, the two movements of existentialism and nihilism infiltrated not only the thoughts and writings of the philosophers and historians, but also poured into the words of current literature. Not only was Nietzsche rediscovered both with support and distrust, but also the leaders of the existentialist movement were unearthed and explored once more, from the early Soren Kierkegaard to the moderns, Sarte and Camus. Literature revealed a growing trend in dystopic writing, a prose that depicted a new portrayal of a hopeless mankind and warned of repercussions in the future.

Nietzsche's philosophy of overcoming the past traditions became central in these revolutions. Prof. Eric Voegelin wrote in the *Journal of Politics* in 1944,

“Nietzsche has the distinction of being the only philosopher who has ever been considered the major cause of a world war... A philosopher who is sensitive to symptoms of decay in the spiritual situation of his age will be able to chart the course of social disintegration for a considerable time ahead.” (Voegelin 177-178)

Whether or not Nietzsche would advocate what Zarathustra soon represented, Nietzsche became an inseparable feature of this period of catastrophe and war, because that was what his writings were concerned about. As noted earlier, Thus Spoke Zarathustra is a book about revolution and new beginnings. It seemed evident that there was a new world emerging at the turn of the century.

The National Socialist Party of Germany soon assimilated Nietzsche's theories into their own. Whether or not Hitler himself was a disciple of Nietzsche,

during the 1940's the German Nationalist Socialists were considered heavily influenced by Nietzsche's writings.

“In the popular writings of dozens of commentators on the events of the day, [Nietzsche] is named as one of the important factors influencing German policies both internal and external. The works of Nietzsche are one of the principal divisions of the National Socialists' holy writings. The entire canon is not yet made up, but just as it is clear that *Mein Kampf* will probably be its central piece, so it is clear that Nietzsche, along with Gobineau, H. S. Chamberlain, Treitschke, Rosenberg, and other preachers of the creed of race and power, will provide essential parts of the finished doctrine.”  
(Britton 131-132)

Hitler and the Fascist party were the creators and the sustainers of the Nietzsche-Archiv in Weimar. The Fuhrer must be admitted at least a familiarity with Nietzsche and his theories.

Whether or not Nietzsche himself would agree with the use of his writings, they are nevertheless central to the Nazi movement. Nietzsche himself is reported to despise Aryanism, yet his works do carry theories that go hand in hand with a totalitarian movement, as will be explored in this paper.

It was this movement that Orwell was chiefly interested in during the writing of 1984. “Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written directly or indirectly against *totalitarianism* and for *democratic socialism*, as I understand it” (Orwell, *Why I Write* 142). In the conclusion of the essay, he writes,

And looking back through my work, I see that it is invariably where I lacked a *political* purpose that I wrote lifeless books and was betrayed into purple passages, sentences without meaning, decorative adjectives and humbug generally. (Orwell, *Why I Write* 143)

1984 has been one of the most talked about books of the century, one of the most criticized, and one of the most promoted. Orwell would subscribe its success to the rich political value the novel offers. Totalitarianism was embodied in the great threat of the

Nazis, and Orwell, being British and at war at the time with Germany, understood the complications and political nuances involved with the political form. 1984 stands as the novel that has had the most to say about this government and other totalitarian governments of the time.

Orwell's dystopia is filled with terrible and hopeless imagery of totalitarian governments, from the Stalinistic Big Brother to the concentration camp-like executions of the criminals. Eric Fromm wrote in an essay contained in the 1983 reprinting of 1984 that Orwell's dystopia expressed "the mood of powerlessness and hopelessness of modern man just as the early utopias expressed the mood of self-confidence" (Fromm 259). This modern man was the modern man that fought the blitzkrieg of Hitler and watched the battle of St. Petersburg. This modern man, this *Winston Smith* (a combination of Winston Churchill and *Smith*, the most common English name) is the man who is watching what will to power has done. He watches the overman overcoming the traditions of the past by dropping bombs on Britain and exterminating the Jewish nation.

I do not suggest that Orwell wrote his novel with Nietzsche particularly in mind. I have found no evidence in Orwell's essays or letters to support such a proposition. I do not suggest that Nietzsche and Orwell even had the same concept of the last man in mind. But one cannot ignore the parallels noted above. Neither may one ignore the comparisons to follow. Thus Spoke Zarathustra is very much alive in Orwell's novel, if not on the surface, then very much at the heart of what Orwell was examining.

### **Chapter Three: Nietzschean Ethics and Traditional Morality**

Now that a historical context has been established to justify further research into the Nietzschean philosophic theories underlying 1984, the text itself will be analyzed as dystopic literature according to method illustrated on the following page. One must examine the text first in light on the historical context, from the point of view that the literature was written in (step 1). Next, one must examine the actual dystopic literature and observe what is being portrayed (step 2). The goal is to understand what methods are used to get from the first point, the author's historical context, to the actual dystopic prophesy. These methods act as the bridge created by the author (step 3) that he believes will actualize his future.

In summary (bottom illustration), I believe Orwell begins from a setting of Nietzschean philosophy that is beginning to encompass Orwell's "traditional morality" and ends with his novel portraying a totalitarian government and amoral society akin to a Nietzschean future. I believe Nietzschean *will to power* is the method used to reach Orwell's totalitarian future. I believe doublethink is the means to carry out this *will to power* and reach an amoral expectation. I will thus begin my analysis at step 1, Orwell's present setting of Nietzschean ethics and traditional morality.

In the shifting from one system of thought to another, there is a period when both systems exist simultaneously in a society. For a long time the earth was considered to be the center of the universe. In the centuries following Galileo's discoveries, some people in Europe believed the sun was at the center of the universe, while others still believed the earth was at the center. Throughout most of the transformation, the educated classes debated the theory while the middle and lower class continued on as usual (for the most part). Through a

timely process, the majority of the middle and lower classes were swayed to heliocentrism. Such a time lapse takes place when any new great system of thought arises. Both systems must exist for some period at the same time.

In the same way, systems of morality and philosophy shift. During the early and middle 1900s, the existential movement of Nietzsche, Sartre, and Camus began to seriously threaten the traditional moral values of the West. On top of this, the tragedy of millions of lost lives during the two World Wars forced man to question the progress that was supposed to solve the world's problems.

When Nietzsche proclaimed God dead, this proclamation was built on a substantial amount of prior transformations in thought.

For all things have been baptized in the well of eternity and are beyond good and evil; and good and evil themselves are but intervening shadows and damp depressions and drifting clouds. Verily, it is a blessing and not a blasphemy when I teach: 'Over all things stand the heaven Accident, the heaven Innocence, the heaven Chance, the heaven Prankishness.' (Nietzsche 277-278)

Nietzsche's theory is built primarily on a universe of evolution and chance. As the above quote demonstrates, Accident has become the new god. An absolute authority no longer reigns. Rather, man has revealed that humankind is a product of chance, and this chance stands beyond good and evil. Chance obeys no morality.

This is a truly disturbing passage for those who have believed otherwise. All things Christians up to this point in time were hanging onto in the face of technological and scientific progress are torn down. Science has realized that God never has existed and that man in essence is beyond good and evil. Evolutionary theory has proven that we are but accidents in the currents of an eternal universe. Our evolution up until this moment has been

in the hands of chance. Finally, Nietzsche declares that over all things stand the heaven  
Prankishness. Life is a joke.

Orwell wrote that this concerned him greatly. If science has proven that we are products of chance, if right and wrong do not come from an absolute source, there is then no absolute grounding for a system of ethics. “The real problem of our time is to restore the sense of absolute right and wrong when the belief that it used to rest on—that is, the belief in personal immortality—has been destroyed” (Orwell, *Collected Essays* 100.) Orwell wished to return somehow to a foundation of absolute morality. If he wished to “restore the sense of absolute right and wrong” then Orwell must have believed that humankind was beginning to stray from this sense.

The educated people of Orwell’s day knew Nietzsche well, as noted in the prior chapter. Orwell even quoted Thus Spoke Zarathustra from time to time. But many people believed in an absolute system of ethics. If they did not, then Orwell would not have expected much response to a novel that paints the future of an England in which morality was drastically different, an England where war equals peace. Simms writes, “In other words, when the traditional support for moral action in the liberal-Christian era is rendered without motive power, where does one find the philosophical and psychological resources for commitment to liberal values?”

(Simms 293) Nietzschean ethics removes the motive power needed for these traditional values by removing value altogether, and replacing Accident in its stead.

Frank H. Thompson, Jr., writes in his article *Orwell’s Image of the Good Will*,

“The man of good will is the man of old-fashioned virtues, and Orwell believes in these. But in a world that believes in the new the old-fashioned is but a foolish memory. In 1984 there is nothing old-fashioned

because the world is created anew every day: a perpetual Eden turned upside down.” (Thompson 240)

1984 springs from Orwell’s native England. Winston, the chief character in Orwell’s novel, would have been a child when Orwell wrote 1984. Orwell’s own age was a time when existed simultaneously both a general view of “old-fashioned virtues” and this sense of chance reigning supreme and the validity of good and evil being questioned. Robert Pearce, in his article *Truth and Falsehood: George Orwell’s Prep School Woes*, beautifully sums up Orwell’s adherence to his age.

Orwell defended the concept of objective truth and wrote at length of the need for historical accuracy, especially in *Homage to Catalonia* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, roundly condemning those who perverted the truth about the past to serve their own ends. Winston Smith toasts not to the death of Big Brother, or to humanity or to the present, but ‘To the past.’ (Pearce 384)

Nietzsche wrote extensively on Zarathustra’s relationship with those who linger in these traditional values that Orwell was reluctant to see removed. “He who has knowledge walks among men as among animals.” (Z 200) Those who accepted the realization that man no longer needs to abide by any absolute, those who realized that man must embrace a future of overcomings of tradition, paved the road to the Nazi totalitarianism Orwell rebuked. These men become the men in 1984 who look on the rest of mankind as animals.

All of the disputed territories contain valuable minerals... But above all they contain a bottomless reserve of cheap labor. Whichever power controls equatorial Africa, or the countries of the Middle East, or Southern India, or the Indonesian Archipelago, disposes also of the bodies of scores of hundreds of millions of ill-paid and hard-working coolies. The inhabitants of these areas, reduced more or less openly to the status of slaves, pass continually from conqueror to conqueror, and are expended like so much coal or oil... (Orwell 154-155)

The collective of the Inner Party in all ruling countries look at all men as means to producing weapons and resources, treated much like slaves and animals. In the coming of the new race of men, only an elite gains the privilege of being treated as humans. The rest become the herd, the followers and slaves. Zarathustra is beginning to take on life.

Orwell is writing from an age where Nietzsche is no longer read but assimilated into life and practiced. The ethics at the heart of Thus Spoke Zarathustra has become a goal for the National Socialist party, and

Orwell attacks this growing ethic in all of his serious literature. 1984 will reflect Orwell's beliefs in what will happen in this age where traditional morality is beginning to crumble, if not already turned to dust.

#### **Chapter Four: Totalitarianism and Amorality**

Step 1 has been established as Orwell's historical setting where two rival systems of thought exist: Nietzschean philosophy and traditional morality. From here, we move on to Step 2, the context of the actual novel. Here we will find a totalitarian government that is much different than any other totalitarian government in history. This totalitarian government wishes to bring mankind to a next level of humanity by denying fundamental concepts which were found in the traditional morality of the two rival systems from Step 1. This will ultimately lead to an amoral society, one which denies objective truth, objective morality, and a belief in the objective past. The rise to the next level of humanity and surpassing of fundamental concepts is embodied in the Inner Party's slogans of "war equals peace," "freedom equals slavery," and "love equals hate".

The totalitarian government established in *1984* is distinguished from other governments of the past in that it is chiefly concerned with overcoming humankind and rising to the next level of existence. Orwell's original title for the novel was The Last Man in Europe, yet he was not writing that mankind would be destroyed in some nuclear holocaust leaving behind only one human. Rather, the work was describing the protagonist's relationship with the government and the desires of that government. Ingsoc (English Socialism) is interested in total control of mankind. But as soon as one has total control of mankind, Orwell argues one no longer has a human.

“If you are a man, Winston, you are the last man. Your kind is extinct: we are the inheritors... You consider yourself morally superior to us, with our lies and our cruelty?”

“Yes, I consider myself morally superior...”

“You are the last man,” said O'Brien. “You are the guardian of the human spirit. You shall see yourself as you are. Take off your clothes.” (Orwell 222-3)

In what ways is the new breed of humankind greater than the old breed?

O'Brien, the novel's representative of the leaders of the Inner Party, the new breed, believes he has surpassed Winston on a number of levels. An absolute morality, a belief in an absolute past, and foundational absolute truth are all overcome by the collective O'Brien is part of.

Winston's human spirit, the spirit of traditional values, is weighed heavily down by morals. O'Brien's predecessors had made the conclusion that these must be abandoned. This is illustrated in Hate Week, the disgusting display of anger and ferocity shown towards the enemy, the greatest holiday of the year. A mere reversal of morality is not taking place, that one should hate as opposed to loving, because it does not matter who the people hate during Hate Week. Half way through the pinnacle speech of Hate Week, it is announced that Oceania has switched allies. The speech continues with the exception that Hate Week is

targeted towards a foe who had moments earlier been an ally. Hate, like love, is a fable and toy. Any emotional feeling that can be connected to any sense of right or wrong cannot be taken seriously.

This deviation is further described by the slogan “war = peace.” Though Goldberg’s book, a banned writing in the novel that describes the totalitarian situation, explains that the party actually uses war as a means to keep order in their totalitarian government, this is not how the Outer Party and proles view the slogan. The slogan is an example of doublethink, which will be explored later. The slogan also illustrates that any ethical meaning attached to either war or peace is meant to be discarded. War and peace have very little original meaning; one is to be preferred just as much as the other, if one can make distinctions between the two. The past is a second facet that O’Brien explains has been overcome by the new breed. A curious sub-plot that runs throughout the novel is Winston’s discovery that a few key men in a rebellion had been recorded in the newspaper to have been somewhere else when the conspiracy was supposed to have taken place.

“It was a half-page torn out of the *Times* of about ten years earlier—the top half of the page, so that it included the date—and it contained a photograph of the delegates at some party function in New York. Prominent in the middle of the group were Jones, Aaronson, and Rutherford. There was no mistaking them; in any case their names were in the caption at the bottom.

“The point was that at both trials all three men had confessed that on that date they had been on Eurasian soil. They had flown from a secret airfield in Canada to a rendezvous somewhere in Siberia... There was only one possible conclusion: the confessions were lies.” (Orwell 67)

Instead of holding onto this piece of evidence, Winston drops the article in his memory hole, a hole in which all things of the past which were to be rewritten were dropped and obliterated in great furnaces below. During the interrogation, O’Brien produces the same article.

“You believe that you had actually held it in your hands. It was an article like this....”

“It exists!” he [Winston] cried.

“No,” said O’Brien.

He stepped across the room. There was a memory hole in the opposite wall. O’Brien lifted the grating. Unseen, the frail slip of paper was whirling away on the current of warm air...

“Ashes,” he said. “Not even identifiable ashes. Dust. It does not exist. It never existed.”

“But it did exist! It does exist! It exists in memory. I remember it. You remember it.”

“I do not remember it,” said O’Brien. (Orwell 203-204)

This whole dilemma displays another hurdle the new breed of man has overcome: an absolute past. The past has become another tool for the Inner Party to morph and shape to its needs. Ignorance equals strength.

Along with an absolute morality and an absolute past, the crux of the matter, absolute truth, is also denied. Winston denies the laws of gravity. In a long painful process, O’Brien forces Winston to believe he is holding up five fingers instead of four. The ability to mold truth to the party’s liking marks the decisive step from human to superhuman. The collective party, with the abolishment of the individual that must bow down to these absolutes, is a thing of the past for O’Brien and will soon be for Winston. Freedom equals slavery, or as O’Brien formulates it, slavery equals freedom (Orwell 218). Robert Paul Resch, in his article *Utopia, Dystopia and the Middle Class in George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four*, points to the signs of superiority.

In short, the totalitarian revolution is caused by the intelligence and will of innately superior individuals. These individuals are immoral, to be sure, but far from being a disadvantage, a lack of morality seems to be a sign of the superiority of the victorious new middle class. (Resch 162)

Add a lack of objective truth and belief in the past to Resch’s assessment, and one truly is left with an individual far different than the humanity one is normally familiar with.

The totalitarian government of 1984 is interested in surpassing mankind and creating a supermankind, a world where governments are no longer in flux, where those who are in power remain in power by virtue of their control over every facet of reality. Truth is dictated, the past is dictated, and morality is dictated.

These three fundamental concepts are challenged by a new form of government whose roots are found entirely Nietzschean philosophy. But not only are they found in this, they are the main focus of *will to power* and self overcoming, the two foundational theories of his metaphysics. Both Nietzschean philosophy and Orwell's totalitarian government are involved in the same unique business, the overcoming of mankind and what had been his fundamental metaphysical truths.

“The will to power is thus introduced as the will to overcome *oneself*. That this is no accident is certain” (Kaufmann 200). Nietzsche's will to power is self-overcoming, as noted before, overcoming to a point of being beyond good and evil. The Inner Party is interested in overcoming their human nature, overcoming their natural instincts of an absolute past, absolute truth, and absolute morality.

The things that are attacked are not the paradigms of society, but the paradigms that exist in each individual. O' Brien is not involved in a massive reeducating of an entire group of people. He is not even preaching to a classroom. In the final chapters of the novel, he is interested in the individual, engaged one-on-one with Winston and the ideals Winston holds.

“Different nations have...different goals and moral codes. All of these have one thing in common: they are creations of the will to power” (Kaufmann 200). Nietzsche's will to power is an overcoming of the moral codes that dominate different nations. At heart, an

absolute morality is rejected by the new god Accident. Morality becomes something that is surpassed through self-overcoming.

“When you are above praise and blame, and your will wants to command all things, like a lover’s will: there is the origin of your virtue.” (Z 188) The Inner Party strives to be above praise and blame. The central figure of worship is Big Brother, a fictitious Lenin or Hitler that demands the love of Oceania. But the Inner Party themselves are not interested in this love. Rather, their will to command reality becomes the origin of their virtue. The Inner Party does not even care about the emotions of one towards another. As displayed in Hate Week, emotions are jokes, at best tools for the party to shape their will.

When the novel begins, Winston believes Julia, a woman who will become his lover, is a member of the Thought Police and imagines himself beating her to death. Yet, he sees her slip in the hall at work and lends her a hand. Reilly writes on this event,

He sees two incompatible things: an enemy bent on destroying him and a fellow creature in agony. Instinctively, as though the pain were his own, he starts forward to help her. It is a high moment in a book not conspicuous for its homage to human nature.... The man dismissing all thought of enmity or vengeance to comfort a stricken fellow human being. 33

Reilly has noticed that an important emotion, that of altruism, one of the greatest enemies to the new philosophy, shines through despite the Inner Party’s attempts. This scene also demonstrates the amazing contempt the Inner Party holds for displays of affection other than those allowed. This mere giving of a hand may be a fatal mistake to tip off the Thought Police, Winston later reflects.

Morality has successfully been destroyed by the collective. A weak form of amorality now exists, one which Nietzsche describes as beyond good and evil. But this cannot be successfully accomplished by Nietzsche without the destruction of the other two fundamentally human concepts. In order to overcome man, moral ethics must be first overcome by transcending objective truth and the past.

“And you too, lover of knowledge, are only a path and footprint of my will; verily, my will to power walks also on the heels of your will to truth” (Nietzsche 226-227). Knowledge and belief in the truth of that knowledge are overcome as well. Will to power encompasses all facets of life, becoming a driving monism that eclipses the world. Will to power is the driving force that pushes man from a state of dependency to a state of independence. Zarathustra’s shadow speaks out in the following passage concerning this truth.

‘Nothing is true, all is permitted’: thus I spoke to myself. Into the coldest waters I plunged, with head and heart. Alas, how often have I stood there afterward, naked as a red crab! Alas, where has all that is good gone from me—and all shame, and all faith in those who are good? Alas, where is that mendacious innocence that I once possessed, the innocence of the good and noble lies? (Z 386)

Truth does not exist for the Inner Party. Truth is rather a tool for manipulation, for the suspension of power, for the past has become lies to the collective, just as the past is a lie to Zarathustra’s shadow. Nietzsche’s overcoming of truth is illustrated by his shadow’s contemplation of what has been lost, that is, the loss of the truth that has been spoken by the good. “The innocence of the good and noble lies” have been lost. All things shall be overcome, including truth as we know it. Truth will (and has for Oceania) become another manipulated facet of reality.

The final step for Nietzsche that has been successfully carried out by Orwell's totalitarian government is the surpassing of the past. This will be covered fully in the following chapter, for Orwell needs to devise a means to carry this out. As we will find out, surpassing your own memories is not an easy task.

The totalitarian government of 1984 displays the desirable characteristics of an overman. The Inner Party effectively demonstrates will to power through the manipulation of the past, truth, and, and morality. This party's sole purpose is a complete revolution of mankind to a new level of survival where meaning is created and accepted daily. This has all been foretold fifty years before Orwell wrote 1984 through Nietzsche's prophet, Zarathustra. The Inner Party successfully administers the tenets of Nietzsche. They are a collective of overmen bent on the overcoming of mankind.

### **Chapter Five: Will to Power and Doublethink**

Step 1 has established the historical setting of Orwell as a time when Nietzschean philosophy is threatening traditional morality. Step 2 has established that the novel displays a totalitarian government and amoral ethic comparable to, if not the same as, the described future in Thus Spoke Zarathustra. The final step examines the methods Orwell has used to connect his live context with the totalitarian future of 1984. As was hinted to in the prior chapter, *will to power* is the method employed to overcome the current state of humanity and transcend to the overman.

But why will to power and self-overcoming? What is the goal of both the overman, the man that perfectly embodies this will, and the Inner Party, the collective force of *1984* that rewrites history and has left the last man in the dust? "The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power. Now do you

begin to understand me?" (Orwell 217) Norman Melchert, in his textbook The Great Conversation, writes about Nietzsche, "It is will to power that creates tablets of values—as a means to self-control and mastery, to more power!" (Melchert 570) Power is desired for power's sake, according to O'Brien. Melchert writes that Nietzsche's will to power is in essence a will to overcome oneself to achieve a state of complete power. Both desire power over the past, over morality, and over truth, solely for the sake of power.

Many critics have trouble coping with a system that desires power for power's sake. Philip Rahv, in his famous 1949 review, *The Unfuture of Utopia*, writes that this is unrealistic.

Power is its own end, to be sure, but even the Grand Inquisitors are compelled, now as always, to believe in the fiction that their power is a means to some other end, gratifying noble and supernal. Though O'Brien's realism is wholly convincing in social and political terms, its motivation in the psychological economy of the novel remains unclear. (Rahv 184)

But this "fiction" is exactly where Nietzsche departs. Nietzsche embraces the notion that power is not a means to existence, but rather is *the* end. When there is no absolute system to create meaning whatsoever, the only thing left is will to power, the ability to create meaning for its own sake.

Indeed, the truth was not hit by him who shot at it with the word of the 'will to existence': that will does not exist. For, what does not exist cannot will; but what is in existence, how could that still want existence? Only where there is life there is also will: not will to life but—thus I teach you—will to power. (Nietzsche 227)

This is Nietzsche's first utterance of will to power, and immediately it is described as not the will of another end, but an end to itself. One may think that a philosophy such as this cannot logically exist, but Irving Howe comments, in *1984: Enigmas of Power*, that certain communistic groups have successfully put this theory to practice. "The grim possibility is that they now have a realistic view of themselves as creatures holding power

simply for the sake of power, and that they find this quite sufficient.”  
(Howe 103-4)

I do not wish to argue whether will to power for power's sake is a viable option.

What does seem clear is that Orwell believes this to be the case, and with Nietzschean ethics lining the fascist regimes Orwell was concerned about, there is evidence *will to power* is lurking in the shadows in one form or another.

Obedience is not enough. Unless he is suffering, how can you be sure that he is obeying your will and not his own? Power is in inflicting pain and humiliation. Power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing. (1984)

Freedom from pain cannot be the goal of the collective, for pain is a means. Peace and prosperity cannot be a goal, for these are sacrificed. Individual autonomy cannot be desired, for autonomy is destroyed by an ultimate force. The collective wishes only one thing: to remain in power.

Nietzsche writes similarly, “A table of virtues hangs over every people. Behold, it is the table of its overcomings; behold, it is the voice of its will to power.” All tables of virtues are torn down in the path of will to power. The world is finally united, but alas, is united as slaves to one cause: power.

So far one may associate Nietzsche's overman with the Inner Party, and will to power as the philosophy that drives the collective. When Orwell began *1984*, the philosophy of will to power was being spread throughout Europe through the Nazi regime and existential philosophy. Orwell's novel describes the conquering of the world by this philosophy. What is left is the method that carries mankind from an absolute morality to a sense of amoral obedience. Orwell devised doublethink as that method that makes possible this transformation. Resch writes further,

Doublethink is an oxymoron, but it is perfectly consistent with the extreme voluntarism characteristic of Oceania. Doublethink is the highest expression of will to power, the attribute that marks party members as superior beings, and therefore its existence and exercise is consistent with the premises and the self-interest of the Inner Party. (Resch 166)

Doublethink was created to handle the three overcomings noted before. Doublethink delivers Ingsoc from the perils of the past, allowing for the daily rewriting of history, just as when O'Brien removes evidence and belief of the executed conspirators. When doublethink is forced on an individual, morality can be shaped at will, illustrated during the celebration of Hate Week. When doublethink is instilled by pain, humiliation, and torture, absolute truth is driven away, just as Winston believes that two plus two equals five. Doublethink is the vessel that carries the individual from his island of absolutes to the continents of relativity.

For a more concrete understanding of what exactly doublethink is, nothing will explain better than the text itself.

The key word here is *blackwhite*. Like so many Newspeak words, this word has two mutually contradictory meanings. Applied to an opponent, it means the habit of impudently claiming that black is white, in contradiction of the plain facts. Applied to a Party member, it means a loyal willingness to say that black is white when Party discipline demands this. But it means also the ability to *believe* that black is white, and more, to *know* that black is white, and to forget that one has ever believed the contrary. This demands a continuous alteration of the past, made possible by a system of thought which really embraces all the rest, and which is known in Newspeak as *doublethink*. (Orwell 175)

This alteration of truth is devastating when put into practice, as was illustrated in the previous chapter. But why would the rewriting of the past be necessary? Nietzsche identifies the past as the chief evil that must be reckoned with.

'It was'—that is the name of the will's gnashing of teeth and most secret melancholy. Powerless against what has been done, he is an angry spectator of all that is past. The will cannot will backwards; and that he

cannot break time and time's covetousness, that is the will's loneliest melancholy. (Nietzsche 251)

If there is one thing the overman cannot overcome, it cannot overcome the past. Nietzsche's original attempt to solve the problem was the doctrine of Eternal Recurrence, where one wished the past to happen over and over again without change. In this way, the overman conquers the inability to be created without meaning, while at the same time defeating the inability to cope with the past. But Eternal Recurrence is easier said than done. This was a major flaw in Nietzschean philosophy, this inability to handle time in order to create real meaning.

Orwell has Ingsoc solve the problem a much more simple way: simply control all of time. Ingsoc cleverly discards this problem through doublethink. In the example from the prior section, O'Brien has the ability to do away with the past with ease, simply by destroying the evidence. Once the evidence is destroyed, one must only force oneself to believe that it never existed, for the past then only resides in the memory.

Doublethink is equally effective with absolute truths.

"We control matter because we control the mind. Reality is inside the skull... There is nothing we cannot do. Invisibility, levitation—anything... You must get rid of those nineteenth century ideas about the laws of nature. We make the laws of nature."

"For millions of years the earth was uninhabited."

"Nonsense. The earth is as old as we are, no older. How could it be older? Nothing exists except through humanconsciousness." (Orwell 218)

By forcing individuals to believe all things are existent only in the mind, doublethink can change reality. Not only the laws of nature, but the laws of morality. O'Brien sees nothing wrong in the torturing of Winston. He sees it merely as a means to an end, to improving the condition of the collective, to perfecting Ingsoc's power. Winston himself is

guilty of the perversions of truth. His occupation is rewriting history; he makes use of the memory hole daily. He even takes pride in his work, competing against his co-workers to create greater fabrications. War and peace are perverted, just as it was in Nietzsche's writings. The two kings in *Zarathustra* declare "We must hear *him* who teaches: 'You shall love peace as a means to new wars, and the short peace more than the long!'" (Z 359) War never ends in Oceania, and thus the inhabitants believe they are in a utopia. War is desired, by both the Inner Party to keep power, and by the Outer Party and proles intrinsically.

Orwell recognized the method for enforcing this doublethink alike to Nietzsche's steps of overcoming. Nietzsche writes, "Alas, all this delusion and all these mistakes still dwell in our body: they have there become body and will." (Z 188-9) Body and must both be broken. O'Brien does not merely force Winston to think a different way, he physically tortures Winston. By overcoming the body, the spirit within the vessel may be overcome. By destroying the body, the human will, that entity which separates the last man from the overman O'Brien has become, may be utterly helpless.

O'Brien smiled slightly. "You are a flaw in the pattern, Winston. You are a stain that must be wiped out. Did I not tell you just now that we are different from the persecutors of the past? We are not content with negative obedience, nor even with the most abject submission. When finally you surrender to us, it must be of your own free will." (Orwell 210)

When the body and mind are both finally broken, when the will not only gives in but wants to give in due to the destruction of any absolute that screams this is wrong, the collective will conquer the human. One no longer has a human without spirit and will.

"Things will happen to you from which you could not recover, if you lived a thousand years. Never again will you be capable of ordinary human feeling. Everything will be dead inside of you. Never again

will you be capable of love, of 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.” (Orwell 211)

In a short paragraph, Orwell sums up all the characteristics that define humankind and declares that they will all be destroyed in the wake of the collective. All these things are destroyed with the loss of the past, truth, and morality. The overman overcomes his humanity.

Doublethink is holding two contrary views at once. The only way to deny that the past exists is to know that it exists. The only way to create the laws of nature is to both assume that the laws are fixed, and that they are changeable. Doublethink is Orwell’s invention that guarantees totalitarian power in a way never before feasible. Doublethink is also Nietzsche’s missing link, the bridge over the absolute past, the bridge that finally guarantees the overman an overcoming of all absolute truth. Reilly comments,

In the perverse world of Oceania the Ministry of Truth is a manufactory of lies. For Winston the assault on truth is Big Brother’s worst abomination, and it pains him that Julia can regard it so lightly. Julia, belonging to a younger generation more habituated to the enormities of Ingsoc, cannot understand why Winston should worry so over the mutability of the past and the alteration of the records. For Winston (as for his creator) the two greatest evils of our time, especially evil because they are novel, are the growth of power worship and the attack on the concept of objective truth. In our atrocity-drenched century, it is not wars or slavery, death camps or genocide, frightful though they may be, that unnerve Orwell so much as the universal mendacity and doublethink of the time. From the millions of corpses littering the age, Orwell singles out truth as the gravest casualty, the disappearance of the concept of objective truth as even more horrific than the Himalaya of bones. (Reilly 35)

An objective morality, a belief in the past, and a belief in objective facts all would fall under the category of truth for traditional morality. Doublethink has destroyed truth in every

form. Nietzsche believed that these truths were all lies in the currents of evolution, chance, and accident. These lies must be forgotten, and man must move on. Doublethink is the necessary tool in practical philosophy to carry out such an endeavor.

### **Chapter Six: The Christian Conclusion**

It seems that our original instincts were correct in that there most certainly is something to be said of Nietzsche in Orwell's 1984. Nietzsche fits in the historical context that drove the writings of Orwell. Orwell wrote from a historical setting that lived and breathed both traditional and Nietzschean philosophy. The novel's totalitarian government and amoral society fits Nietzsche's philosophy like a glove. Further, Orwell creates the method doublethink in order to leap the hurdles Nietzsche himself could not in the application of *will to power*.

The circle is complete, so we now return to that notion of the last man and assess their meanings. Nietzsche's last man and Orwell's last man are not the same individual. But both meant us, the audience of these works of literature, to be those last individuals. Nietzsche wanted us to see ourselves in the context of the overman, and that when we should recognize him, we are to turn to him for guidance and for a new future. Orwell wanted us to see ourselves as the last hope for a world that was slowly falling into the deep waters of totalitarian socialism and amorality.

But when we examine the two texts in light of each other, we must realize that we are both last men. The overmen have walked among us already and demanded our obedience; but Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, and Hussein are not the last, nor are they the only form overmen come in.

We have no historical experience with a conspicuous-consumption dictatorship based upon an economy of plenty and absolute psychological conditioning—although this may well come to be the more serious danger in countries like the United States. (Kessler 570)

The threat is real, but not only for the coming of a totalitarian government. Orwell's doublethink makes us aware of the guises *will to power* appear in. This will to power is embodied in the overman that attempts to create an oasis in every desert of meaning he finds (and there are many deserts growing in the twentieth century.)

But our reply might be: man is not like this, the simple pleasure of cruelty is not enough for him; the intellectual—for only intellectuals with, behind them, a long deprivation of power, can articulate a concept like that—demands a multiplicity of pleasures; you talk of the intoxication of power growing subtler, but it seems to me you refer to something growing simpler; this brutal simplification surely entails a diminution of the intellectual subtlety that alone can sustain Ingsoc. Pleasures cannot, in the nature of things, remain static; have you not heard of diminishing returns? It is a very static pleasure you are talking about. You speak of the abolition of the orgasm, but you seem to forget that pleasure in cruelty is sexual pleasure. If you kill the distinction between the beautiful and the ugly, you will have no gauge for assessing the intensity of the pleasure of cruelty. But to all our objections O'Brien would reply: I speak of a new kind of human entity. (Burgess, Bloom 42-43)

Ask yourselves, "How alien is this new human entity?" How rare is the man that perverts the truth in order for power in some form or another, whether it be money or prestige? How rare is the man that educates our children that what is true is false, and that what is false is true? How rare is the man that destroys the emotions, such as love, and produces a lifeless shadow of the real emotion, such as senseless sex? How rare is the man that says all men are created equal and then sells you clothing from factories that destroy those humans? Doublethink was not invented by Orwell; he merely looked around and saw how the future overmen were treating others. But this notion should not be alien to the Christian. How familiar is telling

yourself one thing is true while knowing in your heart and mind that it is wrong?

Doublethink is applied every day by the Christian in the fight against temptation. But this use of doublethink is not designated only to the sphere of the Christian in his fight against temptation, but it is a concrete fight in the context of the real, the context Orwell wrote from and about.

Orwell was engaged in his own doublethink. He believed in traditional morality but he ignored every support structure for that philosophy.

In other words, when the traditional support for moral action in the liberal-Christian era is rendered without motive power, where does one find the philosophical and psychological resources for commitment to liberal values? (Simms 293)

It seems Orwell backs himself into a corner. Orwell was a devout atheist, and 1984 is sometimes interpreted as an attack on Roman Catholic Dogmatism. If this is so, it seems that Orwell forgot the “fiction” Rahv believes is needed for an honest assessment. Winston loses at the end. Though some critics say the Newspeak epilogue is evidence that Ingsoc did not win, one cannot deny that Winston, our champion of absolutes, fails.

Why did Winston fail? Because he was too weak? In a sense, yes, but not because he was intellectually or physically weaker. Winston was an atheist and evolutionist, so he had nowhere to turn to when his absolutes were being questioned (Orwell 222). When  $2+2=4$  is examined in light of evolution, Accident, and a reality that exists only in our minds,  $2+2=4$  cannot remain an absolute certainty. “Unlike Swift who, in spite of far deeper misanthropy, did have a moral center from which he spread his contempt, Orwell in 1984 had none, at least in the novel” (Shklar 10) Orwell’s argument in the end falls victims to a Nietzschean

philosophy that destroys any sense of ethical or absolute value. There is no object for Orwell's faith in truth.

Without an absolute authority to turn to, man is left to tear down these "fictions" of the past and to find some way to overcome these difficulties. Man must strive forward and become master of a new world, doing away with this lesser humankind altogether. It seems both Zarathustra *and* Orwell were prophets.

But the Christian has an object of faith to turn to. The Christian has a living source for absolute truth to hold onto. Christ says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6.) We must remember that Nietzsche is very much alive in the forces we will meet. We cannot fail to hold onto our living and ascended truth, as Orwell did, or in the end we too may give into the twentieth century's doublethink and love Big Brother.

We are both Nietzsche's and Orwell's last men and we are also neither. We are both in that the overman beckons us in a world of insurmountable odds. But we are neither, for we will not fall in the face of the overman, nor are we alone in this world of insurmountable odds. We know the true ending of the novel, but we also now know the truth of Nietzsche portrayed in Orwell's 1984, the truth of the destroyer of the good and just.

O my brothers, have you really understood this word? And what I once said about the 'last man'? Who represents the greatest danger for all of man's future? Is it not the good and the just? *Break, break the good and the just!* O my brothers, have you really understood this word?" (Nietzsche 325)

The long-hoped-for bullet was entering his brain. (Orwell 245)

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