

1900 TOTALITARIAN SYSTEMS

***1984* BY GEORGE ORWELL**

Totalitarian systems in 1900

- ✓ How many totalitarian systems do you know?
- ✓ What are they?

Nazism in Germany

Fascism in Italy

Stalinism in USSR

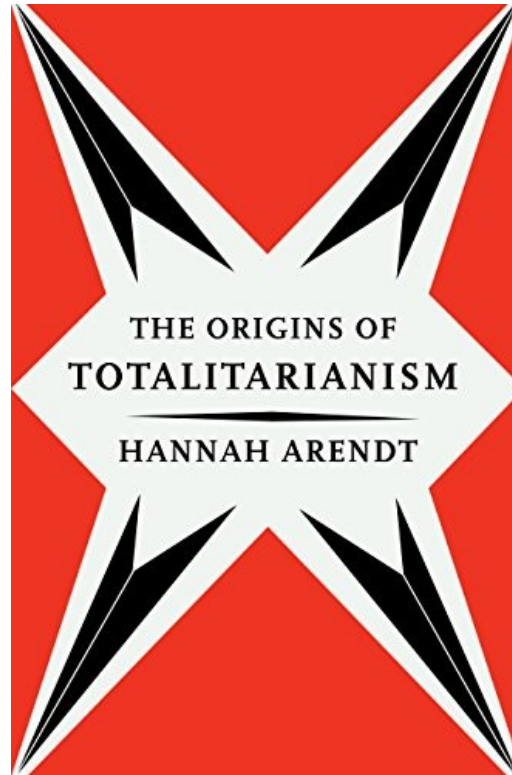
Totalitarian systems in 1900

→ TOTALITARIAN SYSTEMS AND DICTATORSHIPS ARE
DIFFERENT

That of Francisco Franco in Spain is a dictatorship

→ SO WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

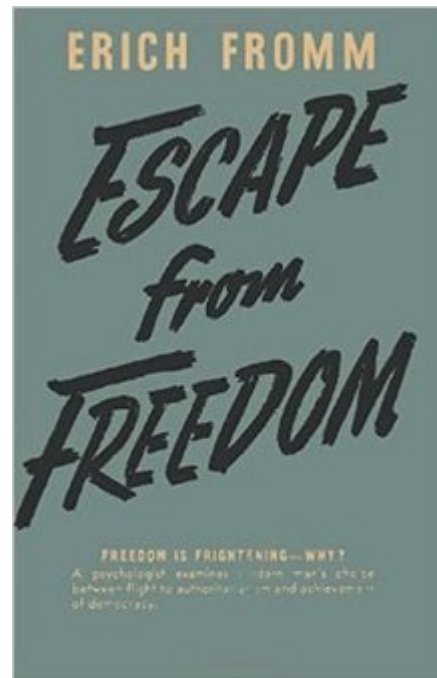
Totalitarian systems in 1900



Hannah Arendt was a German philosopher and writer.

She wrote *The Origins of Totalitarianism* in 1951.

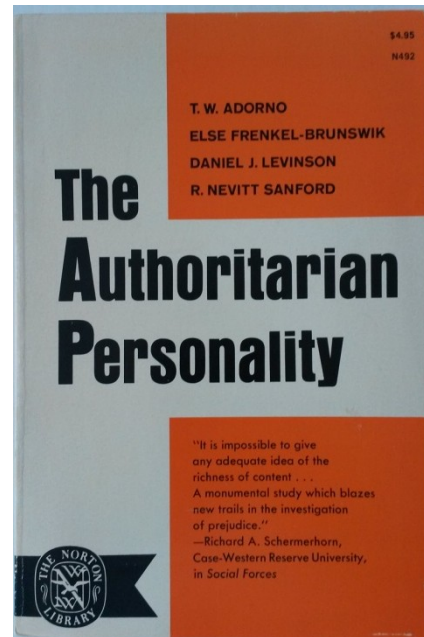
Totalitarian systems in 1900



Erich Fromm was a German philosopher, psychoanalyst and social psychologist.

He wrote *Escape From Freedom* in 1941.

Totalitarian systems in 1900



Theodor Adorno was a German philosopher, and sociologist.

He wrote *The Authoritarian Personality* in 1940.

Totalitarian systems in 1900



Virginia Woolf wrote *Three Guineas* in 1938.

In this essay, she compares fascism and patriarchalism, saying that fascism is an extreme form of patriarchal dictatorship.

“You are feeling in your own persons what your mothers felt when they were shut out, when they were shut up, because they were women. Now you are being shut out, you are being shut up, because you are Jews, because you are democrats, because of race, because of religion.”

It is not only in women’s interest to resist patriarchy, it is in men’s interest too to resist fascism.

Totalitarian systems in 1900

TOTALITARIAN SYSTEMS CAN BE DEFINED BY THESE FIVE ELEMENTS:

1. VIOLENT REPRESSION OF OPPOSITION
2. MASS SOCIETY
3. PROPAGANDA
4. COMMON INTERNAL ENEMY
5. ELIMINATION OF OTHER STRONG POWERS

WHICH ARE NOT ALWAYS PRESENT IN A DICTATORSHIP

Totalitarian systems in 1900

2. MASS SOCIETY

Modern society = mass society

The modern mass society was characterised by

- the lack of community bonds
 - the individual personalities were atomised, alienated, isolated
 - the reciprocal indifference and ignorance
-
- ✓ Weak personal and individual identities were very common
 - ✓ They needed strong group identities
 - ✓ Totalitarian regimes embodied these values

Totalitarian systems in 1900

2. PROPAGANDA

- Control of the masses
 - Repression of individual's critical thinking
 - Development of herd mentality
 - Blindly following the regime's guidelines
 - Creation of **consensus**
-
- ✓ Leaders of totalitarian systems couldn't force the masses to support them
 - ✓ Leaders needed to convince them, so that the masses believed that supporting the ideology of the regime was their own choice (while actually they didn't have any choice at all)

Totalitarian systems in 1900

“Intellectual, spiritual, and artistic initiative is as dangerous to totalitarianism as the gangster initiative of the mob, and both are more dangerous than mere political opposition. The consistent persecution of every higher form of intellectual activity by the new mass leaders springs from more than their natural resentment against everything they cannot understand. **Total domination does not allow for free initiative in any field of life, for any activity that is not entirely predictable.** Totalitarianism in power invariably replaces all first-rate talents, regardless of their sympathies, with those crackpots and fools whose lack of intelligence and creativity is still the best guarantee of their loyalty.”

The Origins of Totalitarianism, H. Arendt

Totalitarian systems in 1900

3. COMMON INTERNAL ENEMY

The masses identified in those totalitarian values

The group (mass) identity won over the individual identity

This allowed the idea of “we” opposed to “them”, the “others”

Others were the enemy, who wanted to destroy you as representative of the mass, the group

→ Identification of a common enemy inside the country to keep the majority united

→ Imperialism and a sense of belonging to a nation as one entity

Jews in Nazi Germany

Kulaks in Stalinist USSR

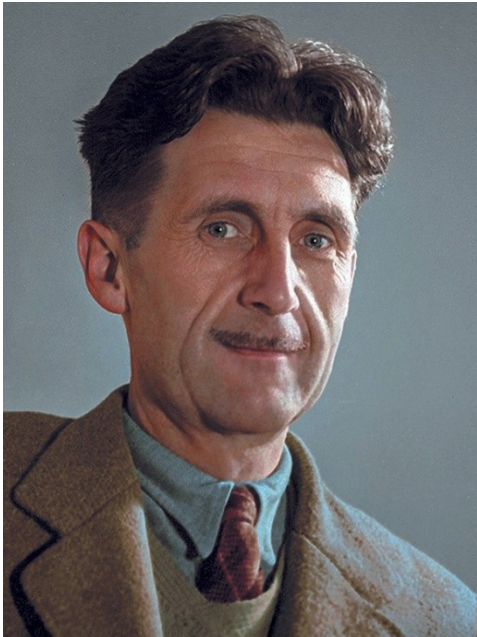
Totalitarian systems in 1900

4. ELIMINATION OF OTHER STRONG POWERS

Hitler in Germany physically eliminated all the possible weakest links in his party during the *Night of the Long Knives*.

- ✓ Fascism in Italy is considered an “**imperfect totalitarianism**”
- ✓ Mussolini didn’t eliminate either the Church or the Monarchy.

George ORWELL



Eric Blair was born in India in **1903**. He was the son of a colonial official but as a child went back to England to be educated at the best schools.

He couldn't stand the lifestyle and underlying philosophy of English public* schools: the lack of privacy, the humiliating punishments, the pressure to conform the values of strong masculinity, the prevailing moral code. As a consequence, he developed an independent mind and started professing atheism and **socialism**.

*public: private

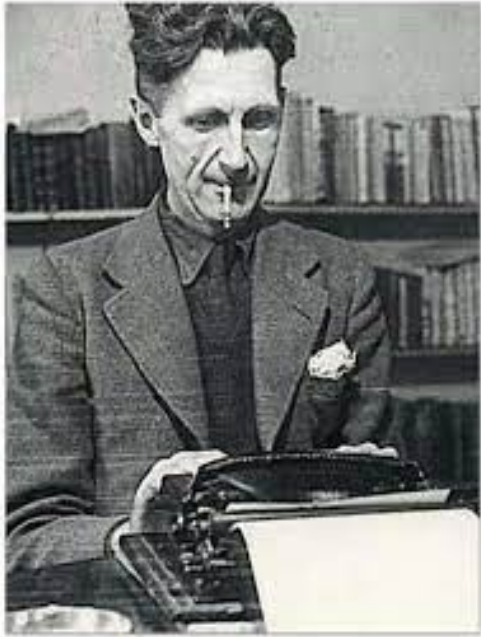
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After school, he became part of the Indian Imperial Police and was sent to serve in Burma (now Myanmar). He served there during the 1920s, when he decided that he wanted to break away from British imperialism in England. More specifically, he wanted to “*escape from [...] every form of man’s dominion over man*”, as he said in his report on the conditions of workers in the North *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937).

→ It is interesting to notice the association between the imperialistic attitude in England and the imperialism dominating the totalitarian mindset (no totalitarianism in the UK).

George ORWELL



He decided to experience personally the life of the poorest as a sort of social experiment, so he spent a short period of his life sharing the places and the life of the outcasts. He also went to Paris and worked as a dishwasher.

He then decided to publish his works under the pseudonym of **George Orwell**: he chose this name because *George* had an Englishness about it, suggesting plain and common sense, while *Orwell* was the name of a river in Suffolk, very dear to him.

George ORWELL

NATIONAL UNION OF JOURNALISTS

7 John Street, Bedford Row, London, W.C.1
'Phone : HOLborn 2258 Telegrams : Natujay Holb, London

This is to certify that
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of **The Tribune**



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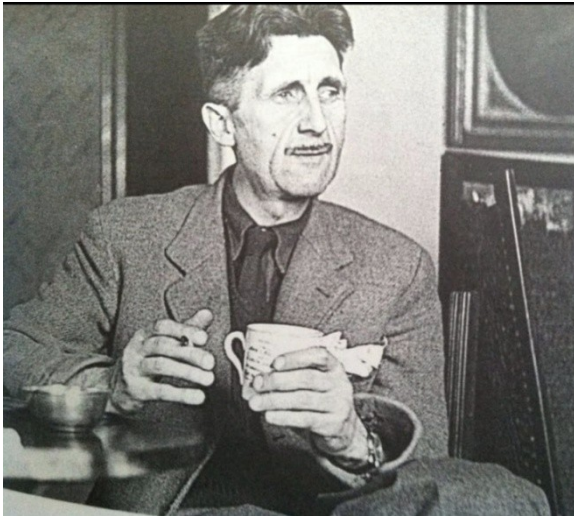
{ **Leslie R. Alston** Branch Sec.
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His first works were those of a free lance journalist: he reported the conditions of life of miners, workers and unemployed in the industrial North in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937).

He then went to Spain during the Civil War and fought in the Aragon front. He recalled this experience in *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), where he stated that what he had lived marked his real conversion to socialism and to the ideas of equality and brotherhood.

During the WW2, he joined the BBC and worked as a journalist. In 1943, he resigned and became the literary editor of an influential socialist weekly, *The Tribune*.

George ORWELL



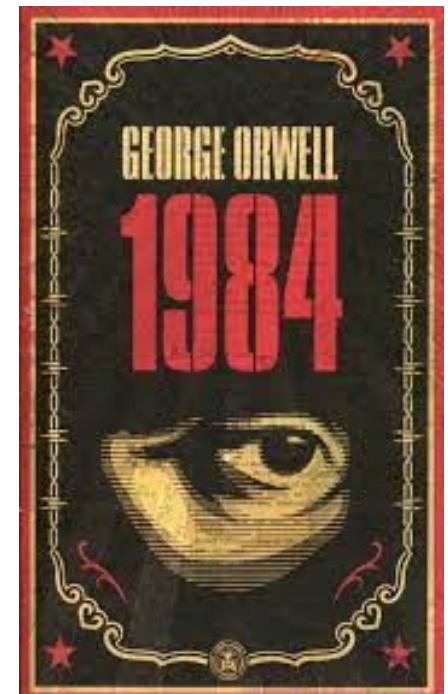
In the last years of his life, he wrote his two most important novels: *Animal Farm* in 1945 and *1984* in 1948. He died of tuberculosis in **1950**.

In the essay *Inside the Whale* (1940), he tried to define the role of the writers of the 30s: they should show **social commitment** and devote to **content over form**. For him, writing interpreted reality and therefore it served a **social function**. Despite left-wing sympathies, the writers should be **independent**, because no good writing could come from following a party line.

1984 by George ORWELL

The novel describes a **future world divided into three blocks**: Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia. The regimented, oppressive world of Oceania is ruled by 'the Party', which is led by a figure called '**Big Brother**', and is continuously at war with the other two States. In order to **control people's lives**, the Party is implementing 'Newspeak', an invented language with a limited number of words, and threatening them through the 'Thought Police'. **Free thought, sex and any expression of individuality are forbidden**, but the protagonist, Winston Smith, illegally buys a diary in which he begins to write his thoughts and memories, addressing them to the future generations. At the 'Ministry of Truth', where he rewrites historical records to suit the needs of the Party, Winston notices an attractive dark-haired girl staring at him, and is afraid she might be an informant who will prove him guilty of 'thoughtcrime'. The girl's name is Julia; she proves to also have a rebellious attitude, and they begin a secret affair. One day O'Brien, a member of the powerful 'Inner Party', summons them to his luxury flat and tells them that he too hates the Party and works against it as a member of the 'Brotherhood' led by Emmanuel Goldstein. This mysterious group is trying to overthrow the Party. O'Brien gives Winston a copy of Goldstein's book, the manifesto of the

Brotherhood. Winston is reading it to Julia in their room when some soldiers suddenly break in and arrest them. He is taken to the 'Ministry of Love', where he finds out that O'Brien is a Party spy. O'Brien tortures and brainwashes Winston for months, but he struggles to resist. At last O'Brien sends him to Room 101, the final destination for those who oppose the Party. Here Winston is forced to confront his worst fear: rats on his head, ready to eat his face. **Winston's will is broken** and he is released to the outside world. He meets Julia, but no longer loves her. He **has completely given up his identity** and has learned to love Big Brother.



1984 by George ORWELL

DYSTOPIAN NOVEL: while a utopia is an ideal or perfect community, a dystopia shows a possible future society that is anything but ideal and that satirises existing conditions of society. It is a model of what the world should not become.

Orwell set his novel in a historical background that his readers perfectly knew:

- the state of perpetual war reminded of WW2
- the shortages, the bomb sites, the regular failure of things to work properly, the prevailing squalor reminded of WW2
- the political atmosphere of tyrannies reminded of the totalitarian systems: hunger, forced labour, mass torture, imprisonment, the perpetual monitoring of the authorities.

Orwell wanted the readers to recognise the reality of the world they had been living in, to be aware of the extremes of totalitarian systems and to oppose to any form of domination of one being over the other.

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NEWSPEAK: new form of language invented in the novel

new, fictional society → new language, new means of expressing what this society is
language → expression of the thoughts

society → language → thoughts

totalitarian system wants to control the society and the mind of people →
→ control of the language

language in the novel has an active role, a social and political role: it doesn't just describe the reality, it modifies it to shape the minds and thoughts

→ it modifies the way people think and people's perception of reality

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THE APPENDIX - The Principles of Newspeak

Newspeak was the official language of Oceania and had been devised to meet the ideological needs of Ingsoc, or English Socialism.

Two are the functions of Newspeak:

1. the mode of expression of the world-view and the mental habit
2. means to make the other forms of thought impossible



heretical (unorthodox) thought (everything diverging from the principles of Ingsoc) would be unthinkable as long as thoughts depend on words → if the words to express that thought don't exist, the thought itself doesn't exist

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THE APPENDIX - The Principles of Newspeak

- invention of new words
- elimination of undesirable words
- elimination of unorthodox meaning from some words

→ FREE: “This field is free of weeds” ✓
“politically free” ✗
“intellectually free” ✗ → political and intellectual freedom
didn’t exist anymore even as
concepts and so became nameless

- diminishing the range of words
- cutting the choice of words down to a minimum

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A Vocabulary

everyday words to describe everyday business
expression of real objects and physical action

B Vocabulary

words constructed for political purposes
intended to impose a desirable mental attitude on those using them
packing of more ideas into few syllables
umbrella terms to cover and replace other words (eliminated)
→ SEXCRIME and GOODSEX
abbreviations: to narrow and alter meanings
to cut out most meanings
“a word that can be uttered almost without taking thought”
few associations and easier to control
the fewer the words, the smaller the temptation to think of them

C Vocabulary

scientific and technical terms
no word to express “science” as a habit of mind or habit of thought

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the two Newspeak words SEXCRIME (sexual immorality) and GOODSEX (chastity). SEXCRIME covered all sexual misdeeds whatever. It covered fornication, adultery, homosexuality, and other perversions, and, in addition, normal intercourse practised for its own sake. There was no need to enumerate them separately, since they were all equally culpable, and, in principle, all punishable by death.

He knew what was meant by GOODSEX—that is to say, normal intercourse between man and wife, for the sole purpose of begetting children, and without physical pleasure on the part of the woman: all else was SEXCRIME. In Newspeak it was seldom possible to follow a heretical thought further than the perception that it WAS heretical: beyond that point the necessary words were nonexistent.

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*Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make **thoughtcrime** literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it. Every concept that can ever be needed, will be expressed by exactly one word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten.*

Part I, Chapter 5

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A Dystopian Novel

Set in a grotesque, squalid and menacing London, Nineteen Eighty-Four is a dystopian novel. Orwell presents a frightening picture of the future as being under the constant control of Big Brother. There is no privacy because there are monitors called “telescreens” watching every step people take; the country is in a perpetual state of war.

The Party has absolute control of the press, communication and propaganda; language, history and thought are controlled in the interests of the state through the gradual introduction of Newspeak, whose lexis is so limited that people find it impossible to express their own ideas.

Any form of rebellion against the rules is punished with prison, torture and liquidation. The novel does not offer consolation but reveals the author’s acute sense of history and his sympathy with the millions of people persecuted and murdered in the name of the totalitarian ideologies of the 20th century.

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Winston Smith

The overwhelming impression made by *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is one of a sense of loss, a feeling that beauty and truth, and all finer emotions and values belong to the past.

This is symbolised by the protagonist, Winston Smith, the last man to believe in humane values in a totalitarian age. *Smith*, the commonest English surname, suggests his symbolic value; *Winston* evokes Churchill's patriotic appeals for "blood, toil, tears and sweat" during the Second World War.

Winston is middle-aged and physically weak; he experiences alienation from society and feels a desire for spiritual and moral integrity. In the first two parts of the novel, it is likely that Winston and the narrator are one, and that he expresses Orwell's views.

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In the end, the novel doesn't offer any forms of consolation, but it still makes reader think by giving some elements of positivity which can represent a future salvation.

1. MUTUAL TRUST

Orwell believed that if man has someone to trust, his individuality cannot be destroyed because his identity arises from interaction, not autonomy or isolation. Isolation, indeed, makes people weak and prone to accept the lure of totalitarian propaganda.

2. MEMORY

The fundamental theme of memory is linked to a view of morality. Winston is forced to change the past and history to conform a political view, but still fights it by recording his personal memories in the diary.

1984, G. ORWELL

This is the beginning of the novel. The following extract gives an insight into the life in London, the capital of Airstrip One in Oceania, a totalitarian State where men have lost control of their inner being. The only person who tries to resist indoctrination is the protagonist of the book, Winston Smith.

It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. Winston Smith, his chin nuzzled into his breast in an effort to escape the vile wind, slipped quickly through the glass doors of Victory Mansions, though not quickly enough to prevent a swirl of gritty dust from entering along with him.

The hallway smelt of boiled cabbage and old rag mats. At one end of it a coloured poster, too large for indoor display, had been tacked to the wall. It depicted simply an enormous face, more than a metre wide: the face of a man of about forty-five, with a heavy black moustache and ruggedly handsome features. Winston made for the stairs. It was no use trying the lift. Even at the best of times it was seldom working, and at present the electric current was cut off during daylight hours. It was part of the economy drive in preparation for Hate Week. The flat was seven flights up, and Winston, who was thirty-nine and had a varicose ulcer above his right ankle, went slowly, resting several times on the way. On each landing, opposite the lift-shaft, the poster with the enormous face gazed from the wall. It was one of those pictures which are so contrived that the eyes follow you about when you move. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption beneath it ran.

Inside the flat a fruity voice was reading out a list of figures which had something to do with the production of pig-iron. The voice came from an oblong metal plaque like a dulled mirror which formed part of the surface of the right-hand wall. Winston turned a switch and the voice sank somewhat, though the words were still distinguishable. The instrument (the telescreen, it was called) could be dimmed, but there was no way of shutting it off completely. He moved over to the window: a smallish, frail figure, the meagreness of his body merely emphasized by the blue overalls which were the uniform of the party. His hair was very fair, his face naturally sanguine, his skin roughened by coarse soap and blunt razor blades and the cold of the winter that had just ended.

Outside, even through the shut window-pane, the world looked cold. Down in the street little eddies of wind were whirling dust and torn paper into spirals, and though the sun was shining and the sky a harsh blue, there seemed to be no colour in anything, except the posters that were plastered everywhere. The blackmoustachio'd face gazed down from every commanding corner. There was one on the house-front immediately opposite. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption said, while the dark eyes looked deep into Winston's own. Down at street level another poster, torn at one corner, flapped fitfully in the wind, alternately covering and uncovering the single word INGSOC¹. In the far distance a helicopter skimmed down between the roofs, hovered for an instant like a bluebottle, and darted away again with a curving flight. It was the police patrol, snooping into people's windows. The patrols did not matter, however. Only the Thought Police mattered.

Behind Winston's back the voice from the telescreen was still babbling away about pig-iron and the overfulfilment of the Ninth Three-Year Plan. The telescreen received and transmitted simultaneously. Any sound that Winston made, above the level of a very low whisper, would be picked up by it, moreover, so long as he remained within the field of vision which the metal plaque commanded, he could be seen as well as heard. There was of course no way of knowing whether

¹ INGSOC: it means English Socialism in Newspeak; it is the only party of the Totalitarian State.

you were being watched at any given moment. How often, or on what system, the Thought Police plugged in on any individual wire was guesswork. It was even conceivable that they watched everybody all the time. But at any rate they could plug in your wire whenever they wanted to. You had to live - did live, from habit that became instinct - in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized.

Winston kept his back turned to the telescreen. It was safer, though, as he well knew, even a back can be revealing. A kilometre away the Ministry of Truth, his place of work, towered vast and white above the grimy landscape. This, he thought with a sort of vague distaste - this was London, chief city of Airstrip One, itself the third most populous of the provinces of Oceania. He tried to squeeze out some childhood memory that should tell him whether London had always been quite like this. Were there always these vistas of rotting nineteenth-century houses, their sides shored up with baulks of timber, their windows patched with cardboard and their roofs with corrugated iron, their crazy garden walls sagging in all directions? And the bombed sites where the plaster dust swirled in the air and the willow-herb straggled over the heaps of rubble; and the places where the bombs had cleared a larger patch and there had sprung up sordid colonies of wooden dwellings like chicken-houses? But it was no use, he could not remember: nothing remained of his childhood except a series of brightlit tableaux occurring against no background and mostly unintelligible.

The Ministry of Truth - Minitrue, in Newspeak - was startlingly different from any other object in sight. It was an enormous pyramidal structure of glittering white concrete, soaring up, terrace after terrace, 300 metres into the air. From where Winston stood it was just possible to read, picked out on its white face in elegant lettering, the three slogans of the Party:

WAR IS PEACE

FREEDOM IS SLAVERY

IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH

Look at the extract above and write what the underlined sentences refer to:

1. : _____
2. : _____
3. : _____
4. : _____

Discuss the symbolic meaning of the elements concerning Winston Smith's description.

1. His name 'Winston': who may have inspired Orwell in the choice of such a name?
2. His surname 'Smith': how would you explain the choice of such a common British surname?
3. His age and appearance: do they correspond to the traditional features of the "hero"?
4. His memories: can he remember anything about his past?

Analyse the presence of Big Brother in the extract.

1. Through what device is Big Brother conveyed? What does this method remind you of?
2. Big Brother is also the parody of a historical figure. Single out the details of his description and try to guess who he is.

Analyse the three slogans of the Party.

1. What kind of words does Orwell employ?
2. How does this affect the meaning of each slogan?

What does “having an identity” mean to you? Do you think it is important to preserve the memory of the past? If so, why and how?

1984, G. ORWELL

2+2=5

These two extracts are taken from the final part of the novel: the first one comes from the part where O'Brien tortures Winston; the second one is right at the end of the story. In both extracts, you can see the violence of the regime and the importance of a free mind in a totalitarian system: it is a powerful weapon and, as such, the system wants to destroy it.

"Do you remember," he went on, "writing in your diary, 'Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four?'"

"Yes," said Winston.

O'Brien held up his left hand, its back towards Winston, with the thumb hidden and the four fingers extended. "How many fingers am I holding up, Winston?"

"Four."

"And if the party says that it is not four but five - then how many?"

"Four."

The word ended in a gasp of pain. The needle of the dial had shot up to fifty-five. The sweat had sprung out all over Winston's body. The air tore into his lungs and issued again in deep groans which even by clenching his teeth he could not stop. O'Brien watched him, the four fingers still extended. He drew back the lever. This time the pain was only slightly eased.

"How many fingers, Winston?"

"Four."

The needle went up to sixty.

"How many fingers, Winston?"

"Four! Four! What else can I say? Four!"

The needle must have risen again, but he did not look at it. The heavy, stern face and the four fingers filled his vision. The fingers stood up before his eyes like pillars, enormous, blurry, and seeming to vibrate, but unmistakably four.

"How many fingers, Winston?"

"Four! Stop it, stop it! How can you go on? Four! Four!"

"How many fingers, Winston?"

"Five! Five! Five!"

"No, Winston, that is no use. You are lying. You still think there are four. How many fingers, please?"

"Four! five! Four! Anything you like. Only stop it, stop the pain!"

Abruptly he was sitting up with O'Brien's arm round his shoulders. He had perhaps lost consciousness for a few seconds. The bonds that had held his body down were loosened. He felt

very cold, he was shaking uncontrollably, his teeth were chattering, the tears were rolling down his cheeks. For a moment he clung to O'Brien like a baby, curiously comforted by the heavy arm round his shoulders. 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. "You are a slow learner, Winston," said O'Brien gently.

"How can I help it?" he blubbered. "How can I help seeing what is in front of my eyes? Two and two are four."

"Sometimes, Winston. Sometimes they are five. Sometimes they are three. Sometimes they are all of them at once. You must try harder. It is not easy to become sane."

~~~~~

The Chestnut Tree was almost empty. A ray of sunlight slanting through a window fell on dusty table-tops. It was the lonely hour of fifteen. A tinny music trickled from the telescreens.

Winston sat in his usual corner, gazing into an empty glass. Now and again he glanced up at a vast face which eyed him from the opposite wall. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption said. Unbidden, a waiter came and filled his glass up with Victory Gin, shaking into it a few drops from another bottle with a quill through the cork. It was saccharine flavoured with cloves, the speciality of the cafe. Winston was listening to the telescreen. [...]

A waiter, again unbidden, brought the chessboard and the current issue of *The Times*, with the page turned down at the chess problem. Then, seeing that Winston's glass was empty, he brought the gin bottle and filled it. There was no need to give orders. They knew his habits. The chessboard was always waiting for him, his corner table was always reserved; even when the place was full he had it to himself, since nobody cared to be seen sitting too close to him. [...]

He put the white knight back in its place, but for the moment he could not settle down to serious study of the chess problem. His thoughts wandered again. Almost unconsciously he traced with his finger in the dust on the table:  $2+2=5$ .