

# **ORWELL AND HUXLEY: MAKING DISSENT UNTHINKABLE**

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## 1. Introduction

In this paper I compare the fictional world depicted by Orwell's *1984* with that of Huxley's *Brave New World* from the point of view of an analytic philosopher.

Neither novel should be read as predictions, the accuracy of which can be used to judge them. Rather, both attempt to portray what humanity could conceivably become. The authenticity of this conceivability is a necessary condition of the power of both works to raise central philosophical questions about the human condition. What is ethically wrong with control? How far can Man go in recreating himself? In what sense are these worlds anti-utopian? Are they really possible worlds? How credible are they as political systems? In what ways do the different systems depict the end of humanity? What logical and moral objections could be made against their fictional apologists?

In tackling some of these questions I set out to treat both works as autonomously as possible. In other words, I am not directly concerned with the historical or literary background of either novel, nor with their author's character or motivation, nor even directly with the literary merit of either work, although I will argue that the degree of authenticity with which either nightmare is depicted is connected with some of the disturbing philosophical possibilities that each presents to its reader. The power each novel has to disturb us in different ways is manifested to the degree that modern society has already realised such possibilities.

I first condense both novels into a corpus of fictional fact in terms of the constitution of both worlds and their fictional action. Inevitably, the resulting distillation reads something like a TV guide. But no matter.

## *2. The Constitution of Both Fictional Worlds*

*1984* is set in the world of the Party, a totalitarian regime that not only controls the overt actions and expressions of belief of its subjects but also their inner thoughts and convictions. The world has divided itself into three superpowers. Eurasia includes Europe and north Asia. Oceania includes the Americas, Britain, Australasia and southern Africa and Eastasia includes China, countries to the south of it and Japan. The government of Oceania is a hierarchical pyramid, the apex of which is the fictitious *persona* of Big Brother, who is infallible and omnipotent. Below Him comes the Inner Party, comprising two percent of the population of Oceania and below it the Outer Party, comprising 13 percent of the population, who execute Inner Party's directives. Below the Outer Party lie the proletariat, comprising 85 percent of the population. The other two superpowers are organised in identical ways and although they are perpetually at war with each other, no ultimate victory is practically possible, nor indeed intended by the Inner Party of any superpower, since the main purpose of perpetual war is to exhaust surplus wealth and keep its subjects in a continuous frenzy of hatred of enemies, triumph over victories and self-abasement before the omnipotence and infallibility of the Party.

The Inner Party use three types of methods of enforcing this eternal *status quo*.

The first is terror of physical torture, executions, forced labour and ‘vaporisation’ (in which the individual disappears along with his history). The Thought Police and the Young Spies aid the Inner Party in this by using microphones embedded in ‘telescreens’ (that also transmit continual propaganda and orders) to keep all Outer Party members under constant and ubiquitous surveillance in order to detect the slightest deviation in prescribed thought or deed. The Young Spies are trained to inform upon their parents

The second group are epistemic methods of controlling cognition that include straightforward brainwashing, a form of self-deception called ‘doublethink’ and the systematic truncation of the range of thought by the reduction of vocabulary. The third group are methods of propaganda, notably the daily rewriting of history.

The proletariat, sinking forever deeper into ignorance and poverty are cut off from any standard of comparison with the past by the continual revision of history and allowed freedom of opinion and action precisely because they have no intellect and therefore pose no threat to the Party. The material life of members of the Outer Party is a drab wartime routine of meagre rations, shoddy clothing and decrepit housing, with that of the Inner Party only slightly better.

*Brave New World* depicts the World State, a global caste system the *status quo* of which is permanently ensured by a combination of biological engineering, psychological conditioning (including sleep-teaching) and rations of a psychotropic drug called ‘soma’. Its citizens are not born, but hatched in test tubes from ova and spermatozoa to become physically identical occupants of predetermined social roles, from the mass of Epsilon-Minus Semi-Morons bred for menial labour at the bottom of the pyramid, to castes of increasing intellect up to Alpha-Plus intellectuals such as Marx. Having arranged the

genetic nature of each caste, the World State nurtures each accordingly by conditioning them during maturation to desire different things. Only for the Alpha-Plus intellectuals is the conditioning relaxed sufficiently to permit them a modicum of free choice. Above this caste comes one of ten Resident World Controllers, who are freer in the sense that they have not been so rigidly conditioned. The World State takes Henry Ford as its deity, since his economic policy of mass-production, the division of labour and the steady consumption of goods is essential to ensuring its eternal stability.

This economic policy is undergirded by a philosophy of communal utilitarianism in which the individual is nothing more than a replaceable social cell and in which human lives are valuable only insofar as they contribute to the stability and happiness of the community. A consequence of this social utilitarianism is that its passive and obedient citizens are expected to be emotional infants whenever their duties to the World State permit and that any chance of reflective thought or solitude is to be precluded by constant communal activities in the form of games, songs and orgies. The comfortable and immediately gratified pleasures of material consumption, sports, mass entertainment (constructed out of practically nothing but pure sensation) and sexual promiscuity are to be maximised and the pains of individualism and old age, including the fear of death, the wonder of nature, the *angst* of the meaning of life and indeed strong emotions in general, abolished. Beyond the direct control of the World State lie the Savage Reservations, the aboriginal inhabitants of which are still born into monogamous families, practice religious worship and are allowed to follow their pre-Fordian culture.

### *3. The Bare Plots of Both Novels Within That Constitution*

1984 follows the rebellion of the misfit Winston Smith against the Party. Smith, a middle-aged Outer Party member who rewrites historical records in the Ministry of Truth, takes his first step towards rebellion by keeping a diary, itself a manifestation of his nostalgia for a past he half-remembers. In the diary, Smith, who suspects himself mad, pours out his repressed hatred of the Party and his attempts to come to terms with a world that horrifies and baffles him. Because historical records are constantly re-written, Smith has only his fallible memory by which to judge if life is better than it was. To corroborate this Smith seeks out an elderly prole and befriends him in a pub, but finds that the man's memory is confined to episodes the specificity of which preclude an answer. Smith then embarks on a clandestine sexual relationship with Julia, a member of the Junior Anti-Sex League and a fitter in the mechanised pornography section, which eventually flowers into love.

They are then both recruited by O'Brien, a charismatic personality in the Inner Party to whom Smith is inexplicably drawn, as members of the Brotherhood. The Brotherhood is supposedly an underground organisation dedicated to the overthrow of the Party. O'Brien sends Smith a book entitled 'The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism' by Goldstein, Big Brother's supposed moral and political opponent. Smith reads part of this in a room in a junk shop he has rented from its ostensibly proletarian owner, Mr Charrington, as a refuge of privacy that he can enjoy with Julia. When the room is stormed and both he and Julia are captured, Smith realises that they have been under surveillance all along and that Charrington is a member of the Thought Police. In

the holding cell Smith meets his colleague the professional poet Ampleforth, who is sentenced to Room 101 for rhyming with 'God' and Parsons his neighbour, who has been denounced by his seven-year-old daughter for muttering 'Down with Big Brother' in his sleep. Under the direction of O' Brien, who in fact has watched over Smith for seven years (and whose attraction to O'Brien one suspects may be the product of Huxlean conditioning) Smith is incarcerated, beaten and then brainwashed until he accepts the central philosophy of the Party and is incapable of loving Julia. The novel ends with the pessimistic words, 'He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother'.

*Brave New World* similarly explores the consequences of social misfits. Both Bernard Marx, an employee of the Psychology Bureau and his caste-mate and friend, Helmholtz Watson, a writer or 'emotional engineer', are misfits in virtue of their deviant desires. Marx is jaded by promiscuity, soma and Obstacle Golf, enjoys solitude, appreciates the beauty of untamed Nature and even yearns to be free of his conditioning. These social defects, along with the fact that he is eight centimetres short of the standard Alpha height, are rumoured to be the result of his blood-surrogate becoming accidentally tainted by alcohol. Despite these oddities, Lenina Crowe, a nurse involved in inoculating foetuses in the Central London Hatchery, forms an inexplicable attachment to Marx. In granting Marx permission to visit the reservation in New Mexico with Lenina, the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning divulges the fact that twenty years before, he too visited the same reservation with a Beta-Minus blonde who became lost in the mountains during a thunderstorm. Piqued by the fact that he has also unwittingly evinced the discreditable emotion of personal loss, the Director warns Marx that he will exile him to a

Sub-Centre in Iceland should he continue to ‘lapse from a proper standard of infantile decorum’.

Once at the reservation, Lenina is predictably shocked by its instances of dirt, disease, poverty, old-age, motherhood and religious flagellation, but reciprocates the sexual attraction of John, a non-aboriginal who has taught himself to read by the aid of a chance possession of a copy of ‘*The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*’ and from which he is disposed to quote freely. From John’s description of his mother Linda, Marx deduces that the Director is John’s father. John introduces them to the physically revolting Linda, who complains of her persisting horror of aboriginal life, in particular the inferiority of peyote to soma and the prohibition on promiscuity with a repugnance that Lenina can half-understand. Presumably in order to embarrass the Director and save himself from exile, Marx invites John and Linda to return to London. While Lenina is in a soma-induced coma, Marx requests permission from Mustapha Mond, World Controller of Western Europe, to bring John and Linda back to London and Mond agrees on the grounds that doing so is of scientific interest. As the Director is publicly justifying Marx’s exile ‘by his heretical views on sport and *soma*, by the scandalous unorthodoxy of his sex-life, by his refusal to obey the teachings of Our Ford and behave out of after hours “like a babe in a bottle”’ Marx produces the horrible Linda and then John the son to the chagrin of the Director who flees, later to resign.

While Linda takes to her bed with an endless supply of soma, John is besieged by curious thrill-seeking Fordians, to the corresponding celebrity of Marx, which he promptly loses in the wake of John’s physical nausea at the sight of a set of Bokanovsky Groups running a factory for lightning equipment. Revolted by the entertainment *Three*

*Weeks in a Helicopter* and ashamed of his sexual desire for Lenina, John refuses her advances. Marx's friend, Watson, a lecturer in poetry or 'emotional engineering' who half-consciously yearns for something to say, tries his rhymes on John, hears Shakespeare for the first time with excitement and incomprehension and concludes that we need madness and violence for poetry. Lenina strips and offers herself to John, who recoils in horror. As Lenina is hiding in the toilet, John learns that Linda is in the Park Lane Hospital for the Dying, where eight-year olds are conditioned to resist acquisition of the fear of death. John arrives at Linda's bed only to witness and perhaps partly cause the moment of her demise. In grief and remorse and incensed by the indifference of the inhabitants of the hospital, John disrupts the soma distribution to two Bokanovsky Groups of Deltas, throwing it out of a window in the name of freedom. Summoned by the hospital, Marx and Watson become embroiled in a punch-up between the Deltas and John, with Watson taking sides with John. Riot Police then quell the commotion with nothing more than drugs and conditioned responses and arrest all three.

They are taken to Mond, who informs Marx and Watson that they are to be exiled to an island. He tranquilises the distraught Marx and reasons with Watson but refuses John's request to join them in exile on the grounds that the experiment should continue. John retreats to the rustic solitude of an abandoned air lighthouse, where his attempts to purify himself through prayer and self-flagellation again make him the unwitting spectacle of crowd of thrill-seekers, including Lenina. In an escalation of violence against them and himself, he joins in the resulting soma-enhanced orgy and then kills himself in the hangover of remorse that follows.

#### 4. *The Two Worlds as Literature: Drab Tragedy versus Black Comedy*

As should now be obvious, the constitution of each anti-utopia is meat for philosophy of politics, language, epistemology and metaphysics while their embedded plots are the skeleton of literary criticism. The bare but necessarily selective plots warrant us in thinking that while *1984* is a tragedy, *Brave New World* is a comedy. As benefits this difference of genre, each has incommensurable flaws and brilliances. Corresponding to this difference is an appropriate difference in tone. Huxley dazzles his reader with erudite wit and a self-conscious satire of Americanised consumerism, while Orwell numbs him in pedestrian, functional, indeed utilitarian prose. While Orwell's narrative is straightforward chronology from Smith's point of view, Huxley's rapid alternations of scene and the double interpenetration of the aboriginal world with the Fordian (after the manner of *Crocodile Dundee*) affords many opportunities for comedy. By contrast there is little scenic interpenetration in *1984* between the world of the Party and the Proles.

Whereas the narrative structure of Huxley's black comedy contains a dynamic bias towards the filmic farce of the Park Lane punch-up that really isn't (with the result that sometimes the intended humour doesn't quite come off) Orwell allows the reader to laugh only when the authenticity of the horror requires it - as in Smith's attempt to get the old prole in the pub to confirm the veridicality of his remembered past:

'E could'a drawed me off a pint,' grumbled the old man as he settled down behind his lass. 'A 'alf-litre ain't enough. It don't satisfy. 'And a 'ole litre's too much. It starts me bladder runnin. Let alone the price'.

'You must have seen great changes since you were a young man,' said Winston tentatively.

The old man's pale blue eyes moved from the dart board to the bar, and from the bar to the door of the Gents, as though it were in the bar-room that he expected the changes to have occurred.

‘The beer was better,’ he said finally. “And cheaper! When I was a young man, mild beer - wallop, we used to call it - was fourpence a pint. That was before the war, of course.’

Which war was that? said Winston.

‘Its all wars,’ said the old man vaguely. He took up his glass, and his shoulders straightened again. ‘Ere’s wishing you the very best of ‘ealth!’

This is closest the unremittingly sombre novel gets to humour, as Orwell is forced to lampoon the intellectual myopia of the underclass in workmanlike yet evocative prose. Although the British reader is hard-pressed to believe in Charrington as a prole, here Orwell shows a good ear for Cockney vernacular. By contrast, all the characters in *Brave New World*, even John at his most manic, arguably talk like Huxley. Huxley himself evinces a mastery of sophisticated literary devices, notably his multi-layered use of quotation. Thus Shakespeare in the mouth of John provides comic counterpoint to Watson’s ridiculously bad poetry, although sometimes the glorious quotations threaten to burn a hole in Huxley’s text. This difference in tone is complimented by a difference of visual setting, in which a world of colourful yet ridiculous fashions, dominated by bright synthetic garments, Malthusian belts (stuffed with contraceptives) and zippers, contrasts with the dull uniforms of the Party and the rags of proletarian poverty.

As befits a comedy, *Brave New World* contains no main protagonist. Although we identify to some extent with Watson, John is the main vehicle of dark farce whereas Marx starts the novel as a hero only to end it as a craven buffoon. As the comically self-sacrificing John shows by counterpoint, there is no bravery in the ‘*Brave New World*’.

Yet no other character befalls tragedy. As the compassionate Mond points out in his apology of Fordian utility, things could be worse. Watson and Marx are to be segregated with other more interesting deviants who have likewise broken free of the yoke of conditioning and one has the feeling that the Fordian world, full of pneumatic

easy blondes, chemical euphoria and the best hotels, will remain available as well, a quick helicopter flight away. Thus their exile is more a preventive detention than a punishment. Indeed, given the constraints on human freedom already engineered into the Fordian world, Mond is actually attempting to maximise the freedom of those that resist it. Watson, for instance, is still free to write his atrocious poetry in the gloomy Hebrides and John to follow older Gods. As for the more successful and conformist Fordians, they are so conditioned to always want what they get and get what they want. Yet the comedy is black, since the joke is ultimately on humanity itself, including Mond. As he admits in the course of his apology, arranging the Benthamite pleasures of the world is a miserable business. And despite his arguments, such pleasures are ultimately an impoverishment of what humanity can achieve, to the extent that its plastic and pneumatic creatures cease to be human at all. As John puts it, nothing costs enough.

By contrast, *1984* has one main protagonist, in the form of Smith, whose claim to heroism is augmented by his total absence of stoicism in the face of physical pain. Indeed, although in a larger sense all its characters are victims, including O'Brien himself, Smith is the only male victim with which any sane reader can really identify:

As he sat waiting on the edge of the bed he thought again of the cellars of the Ministry of Love. It was curious how that predestined horror moved in and out of one's consciousness .... One could not avoid it, but one could perhaps postpone it and yet instead, ever now and then, by a conscious, wilful act, one chose to shorten the interval before it happened.

As the mad apologist O'Brien points out to Smith, things are supposed to get worse. Unlike Mond, who is in the business of arranging pleasures and building minds at the cost of human freedom, O'Brien's vocation is the maximisation of misery and the rearranging of minds at the cost of human rationality. In the Fordian world, Man creates

an image of himself that is less than human. In the world of the Party, Man makes himself mad.

The tragedy consists primary in the fact that *1984* depicts the death of love. Smith's first attraction to Julia is credibly physical, but is transformed into a wish to be a married couple of ten year's standing, pottering around in privacy and talking trivialities. After their minds have been reassembled, the two lovers lack any significance for each other at all. And whereas *Brave New World* ends with a suicide, *1984* ends with a murder. Smith's realisation that he now incapable of loving Julia triggers the final transformation of his mind, created in the image of Big Brother. As the fragments of his mind finally fall in a new, immutable shape, one that is equivalent to a bullet entering the brain of his original, self-tortured but sane personality, Smith's body is still physically present, sitting in the Chestnut café with gin-scented tears on his face in a dawning adoration of the God of misery and power, but Smith himself is gone forever. His love of Big Brother is the *reductio ad absurdum* of human love and his final peace of mind is the peace of the death of human personality.

By contrast, although at most ten like Mond have compassion, *Brave New World* depicts a world in which love is impossible from the very beginning. The nearest we get to it is the scene in which, following Mond's interview with the three protagonists, they say goodbye and in which Marx admits he is ashamed of the way John has been treated:

The Savage cut him short and, taking his hand, affectionately pressed it.

'Helmholtz was wonderful to me', Bernard resumed, after a little pause.

'If it hadn't been for him, I should ...'

'Now, now', Helmholtz protested.

There was a silence. In spite of their sadness – because of it, even; for their sadness was the symptom of their love for one another – the three young men were happy

Although here Huxley strikes one of his most stridently false notes, it is interesting that Mond lacks the intelligence to see how much possible happiness (and even pleasure) he has denied present and future generations of Fordians in the form of the love of God, the love of Science, the love of creative expression or even a consciousness of the possibility of conflicting human aspirations. Yet in a larger way this is consistent with the genre of the novel, since the absence of genuine love is a hallmark of farce, as exemplified by the Park Lane punch-up that isn't. Huxley's effeminate riot police, armed with water pistols and soothing words, provide stark dissonance to Orwell's slit-eyed macho thugs, with their scientifically methodical clubs.

The difference between comedy and the tragedy dictates a radical difference in psychological tone. The first leaves the reader with the horror of the inescapability of plastic bubbleheads and elevator music, the second with the horror of an insane world in which paranoia is the only sane strategy for survival. The world of the Fordians is full of flashy and (ultimately, from our perspective) cloying pleasures, that of the Party, the drab misery of perpetual wartime austerity. This is as it should be, since the *raison d'être* of the first world is the maximisation of pleasure as far as this is consistent with the exclusion of social change or progress, whereas that of the second is the perpetual maximisation of suffering. In *1984* God is Power, but in *Brave New World*, He is Utility. Only perhaps ten like Mond in the Fordian world can grasp the concepts of God, Death and Time. But in the world of the Party, where the parameters of thought are shrunk by the constriction of language, such thoughts are unthinkable, or at least have been corrupted into thoughts of something entirely different. In neither can there be any science, creativity, religion or art, appreciation of nature, solitude or reflective thought.

Since *ex hypothesis* the Fordian world militates against psychological depth, it is a measure of the brilliance of *Brave New World* that its characters have any degree of personal complexity without compromising the authenticity of the novel's philosophical underpinnings. Although characters like Lenina are genetically predetermined as shallow, flat and predictable, narrative action is enabled by the deviance of its protagonists plus the inbuilt snobbery of Fordians and their engineered desire for popularity. By comparison, Orwell faces the different challenge of imbuing his characters with recognisable personalities in a world that by definition has reassembled them into unrecognisable shapes. It is a consequence of this that the psychology of O'Brien is ultimately a mystery. Orwell's brilliance lies in the fact that despite the flat prose and a rather flat protagonist, he does allow the sane reader to enter imaginatively into a world of madness.

##### *5. Metaphysics of Two Ideologies*

We can question the possibility of a best possible world. In utilitarian terms, couldn't there always be a further world that is better in virtue of having happier inhabitants or more equally happy inhabitants? Conversely, we can question the coherence of an anti-utopia. Both fictional worlds are inversely utilitarian. The one aims to maximise pleasure while preserving as much freedom as possible and its apologist, Mond, claims this to be both consistent and desirable. The other aims to maximise misery and the thrill of power and its apologist, O'Brien, claims this to be both logically possible and psychologically feasible. Is any of this true?

One way in which the Party pursues its aim is by a denial of external reality. As Smith is being brainwashed by O'Brien, he objects that this denial amounts to an untenable solipsism. Solipsism in its epistemic form, claims that only the contents of one's own mind can be known to exist, or in its ontological form, can exist at all. O'Brien replies that the Party's philosophy is 'quite the opposite', namely a *collective* solipsism. This turns out to be the position that if the Party now collectively believes that the moon is made of green cheese then it was always the case that it was. Equally, if the Party subsequently believes that it was not then it never was made of green cheese. Since the Party is in the business of rewriting history, O'Brien is forced to admit that the beliefs of the Party need to change yet are always infallible. It follows on pain of contradiction that there is neither physical reality nor time independent of the fluctuating opinions of the Party. The problem is that it is far from obvious that O'Brien can even coherently state such a claim. Collective solipsism is an insane position because it destroys the very notion of truth as a correspondence between belief and reality. Moreover, 'rewriting history' is deeper than it seems. The Party doesn't just claim that all its present historical records always infallibly match the unchangeable facts of the past, but instead adopts the crazier position that the infallibility of the changing records requires the mutability of the past. Consequently this is a form of idealism or anti-realism that requires backward causation in which effects precede their causes. Whereas Fordians have been conditioned against the acquisition of the concept of time (in line with the suppression of the fear of death), Party Members can have no concept of time that we, as readers, can recognise, because *their* concept of time entails that there is none.

O'Brien partly anticipates this objection by unflinchingly embracing irrationality in the form of contradiction. After all, he can retort, it is a principle of doublethink that in order to match the fluctuating beliefs of Big Brother, one must recognise a contradiction before deciding whether to accept or deny it. But from the time of Aristotle, it is universally accepted that any minimally rational thinker must avoid belief in contradiction. The Party's epistemology goes further in sometimes requiring its subjects to believe a contradiction in the *knowledge* that it one. This is the very essence of a form of self-deception so virulently irrational that one wonders if Aristotle was right to say that it is psychologically impossible. But although O'Brien's philosophical apology is strictly amateur, the larger point is the vindication of imagination - in depicting the execution of a philosophical system that banishes the very possibility of rationality, Orwell depicts a world in which the mad maximise the madness of their subjects.

The other way in which the rationality of Party Members is eroded is by the constriction of language. By adopting 'Newspeak', in which the size of the vocabulary is maximally decreased by purging of it both synonyms and antonyms, so that 'very bad' is replaced by 'doubleplusungood', the Party aims to make its subjects incapable of entertaining dissenting thoughts by removing the required linguistic vehicle of thought. Some linguists have challenged the possibility of such an enterprise succeeding. In particular, followers of Chomsky are usually hostile to the Whorff-Sapir hypothesis. But the credibility of Orwell's fictional philosophy actually depends upon the plausibility of a rather clear and simple claim that should not be confused with the many and mutating formulations of the Whorff-Sapir hypothesis, namely that concepts are

acquired *via* the acquisition of language, so the less language you acquire the less concepts are available to you, along with the thoughts and beliefs you might otherwise have had. This solid piece of commonsense explains why although we feel comfortable in supposing that a dog has rudimentary beliefs about the food in its bowl (which helps us explain its behaviour as it strains at its leash), it is counterintuitive to attribute it the belief, say, that it will be beaten every second Sunday in Lent. Clearly the dog does not have the concept of Lent embodied in the proposition that is the object of that would-be belief. The requirement of understanding also explains why it is difficult for us to characterise the beliefs of members of other species in any fine-grained way, since it is difficult to specify, using the linguistic expressions of *our* thoughts, exactly what concepts (or derivatively, thoughts) are available to those with radically different linguistic capacities and ways of behaving.

On the other hand, the requirement of understanding seems challenged by the fact that in one sense I can believe things on authority that I do not understand. For example I may believe an authority on physics that assures me that entropy is increasing, although I have no idea what entropy is. But there is a distinction between believing what someone says and believing that he has said something true. Although I lack the belief that entropy is increasing, I do believe that the authority has said something true (although I don't know what) since I have the concept of the authoritative transmission of truth.

There is another kind of vindication of the authenticity of the philosophical underpinnings of Orwell's world. Consider the Newspeak instruction Smith receives:

times 3.12.83 reporting bb dayorder doubleplusungood refs unpersons rewrite fullwise upsub antefiling

as compared to

The way in which the Times of the third of December 1983 has reported Big Brother's Order of the Day is entirely bad in that it makes multiple reference to non-existent persons. Rectify this report in full and submit for approval before filing the new version

The Newspeak version contains an ambiguity. Does 'good' in 'doubleplusungood' mean 'good standard of correspondence with external reality', in other words, 'accurate'? Or does it mean, 'good avoidance of prohibited thought'? Even someone like Smith, who has originally learned to think in Oldspeak, finds it hard to recognise the difference. Moreover, self-deception is again required on the second reading, since to avoid a prohibited thought, one must first recognise it as prohibited, which is *ipso facto* to think it. The more practical point however, is the instruction's *memoese*. It is the sort of instruction that, if not exactly precluding thought, at least only minimally requires it. A basic secretarial procedural understanding is all that's needed.

For these reasons, it is impossible for subsequent generations of Party members matured in Newspeak to have dissenting thoughts (such as 'Big Brother is bad'), because their conceptual powers, along with their ability to distinguish truth from falsehood and opinion from fact have been expunged, partly by the truncation of language and partly by the replacement of reason with terrified self-deception. If man is indeed a rational animal, then Smith is indeed one of the last men until his death at the close of the novel.

In a different sense, so is Mond. Whereas the Party's control of dissent is epistemic, Mond's elite caste prefers the gentler method of the causal determination of desire. Even if she could realise that her caste snobbery has been causally determined such that she cannot think otherwise, Lenina would still think the same thoughts, voice

the ‘opinions’ and follow the same predetermined fashions. Dissenting thoughts are impossible, mainly because the emotive machinery that directs them has been so efficiently engineered. Thus, since desires as well as beliefs are conceptually laden, ‘fun’ in the mouths of Fordians, as well as ‘fact’ in the mouths of Party members, denotes a radically different thought from ours.

As Mond half-recognises in his apology, the threat to humanity here is the erosion of freedom. One of the most troubling aspects of the ambitious aims of cognitive science in its heyday ten years ago was that it seemed to threaten to eradicate the difference between Man and Machine. Fordians are not literally computers, but their responses and desires seem similarly hard-wired, even if their causal antecedents are biologically, not electronically, engineered. Thus one moral objection that Mond could have faced is that his world of stability and happiness is not one of human happiness at all, given that freedom is a *sine qua non* of authentic humanity. Mond’s apology half-anticipates this objection by claiming that properly engineered Fordians always do what they desire. Thus the metaphysics that undergirds the implementation of utilitarianism is a form of deterministic compatibilism.

Our intuition that Lenina is more machine than Man is fuelled by the intuition that she is causally determined to act in the way she does (for instance by expressing revulsion at the decrepitude of old age) in the sense given her causal (biologically realised) antecedents (plus the Laws of Nature) *she could not have done otherwise*. But to say this appears to claim that nothing she actually does or thinks is done or thought freely.

Once freedom is thrown out of the window, so is the possibility of moral judgement, since we cannot coherently attach moral praise nor blame to persons who were compelled to do what they did. A Fordian world of agents who are thus incapable of right or wrong is surely not recognisably human. Doesn't this subvert Mond's aim? If Aristotle was correct to say that the good life is by definition freely chosen then isn't the Fordian world of compulsory fun a Humpty-Dumptyism of human flourishing? Mond can try to sidestep this objection by claiming that a person freely does or thinks something just in case she always does want she desires to do. In that case, causal determinism is *compatible* with human freedom, since free action can be consistently determined by causally determining desires as well – which is precisely what takes place in *Brave New World*.

A philosophical opponent of greater sophistication than John could respond in various ways the most obvious of which is to challenge the compatibilist's definition of freedom. But in any case, the most the compatibilist seems entitled to say is that there are two senses of freedom, the difference being that *one allows for freedom of desire as well* as freedom of action. In this richer sense of freedom, human choice is certainly impoverished.

The second moral objection that Mond never faces is that his account of social benefit suffers from the same powerful objections that befell the classical utilitarians. In this light, Mond's compassion, albeit sincere, is simply wrongheaded. Mond seems to ignore the fact that there is no such thing as happiness or pleasure as an end to which means can be directed. Happiness isn't quantifiable like soma, but internal to an activity. To say that Watson writes poetry for pleasure is not to say that the pleasure is discretely

separable from the poetry writing, but rather that for Watson, the poetry writing is an end in itself. Moreover, determining Fordians to have desires that are *immediately* satisfiable does injustice to richer possibilities of desire, if only because there is a difference between *being* satisfied and *becoming* so. Any rational drinker knows that the pleasure of drinking is not instantaneously switching from a state of complete sobriety to one of helpless intoxication but rather the pleasure of getting drunk stage-by-stage. Any intelligent drinker will exploit this fact by respecting the law of diminishing returns. We all know that drinking the first beer is much more pleasurable than drinking the sixth.

Thirdly, there is a sense in which Mond's disarming preference for Fordian pleasures is either dishonest or shortsighted:

‘But I like the inconveniences.’

‘We don't,’ said the Controller. ‘We prefer to do things comfortably.’

‘But I don't want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin.’

‘In fact’, said Mustapha Mond, ‘you're claiming the right to be unhappy.’

‘All right, then,’ said the Savage defiantly, ‘I'm claiming the right to be unhappy.’  
‘Not to mention the right to grow old and ugly and impotent; the right to have syphilis and cancer; the right to have too little to eat; the right to be lousy; the right to live in constant apprehension of what may happen tomorrow; the right to catch typhoid; the right to be tortured by unspeakable pains of every kind.’

There was a long silence.

‘I claim them all,’ said the Savage at last.

Mustapha Mond shrugged his shoulders. ‘You're welcome,’ he said.

Mond's reply fails to fully acknowledge a principle of opposites, namely that higher-order pleasures are logically parasitic upon corresponding lower-order pains. For example, removing the possibility of terror in the face of danger removes the possibility of genuine satisfaction in one's courage. The right to be unhappy in certain specific ways thus *includes the right to be happy* in others. Mond should admit if pressed that he has denied the Fordian world that right as well. Related to this is the fact that Mond fails to

see that desires and thus pleasures as well, are cognitively or conceptually laden. An apt example in the context of the novel is a type of sexual pleasure of which Lenina is incapable. The essence of flirtation is the promise of gratification after the chase, not physiological orgasm on demand. The price we pay for the heightened gratification is not only its delay but also the real possibility that it may not arrive. A second key element in flirtation is the epistemic complexity of the players. Isn't naughty sex more exciting precisely because one *knows* it is forbidden? Such epistemic possibilities are of course closed to Lenina, for whom sex is a social duty (although in a diametrically opposed way from that of Katherine, Smith's estranged wife). My first eye-contact with an attractive stranger is pleurably heightened by the knowledge that she has recognised it and heightened still further by the realization that she then knows that I know she likes it. Lenina has not been engineered for such epistemic complexity. In short, no Fordian is capable of Julia's joy in sex.

Thus the compulsory fun isn't actually as much fun as Mond pretends it could be. Thus even if Mond can really justify his complacent assertion that the Fordian world is better off without God, science, love or art, one still has the sneaking feeling that he has never really grasped the degree to which, even in the currency of pleasure, the Fordians have been short-changed.