1984 Essay, Research Paper

1984 is a political parable. While Brave New World describes a future of everyone getting exactly what they want, George Orwell takes this in the opposite direction with a description of how the world most likely will be: mindless, loveless, unfeeling followers of nothing.

The first paragraph of the story already foreshadows of what is to come with a description of Victory Mansions, the home of Winston Smith, the protagonist of this story. It tells of the “swirl of gritty dust… The hallway smelt of boiled cabbage and old rag mats.” Even the names of places are depressing. He lives in the province of Airstrip One, the city of London, and in the country of Oceania. The other two countries are Eastasia and Eurasia. Big Brother, a fictional or real person—no one really knows—is the leader of this miserable system of Ingsoc—English Socialism, that is. No one is allowed to hold ideas different from those of the official propaganda outlet: Minitruth. To enforce these laws, Big Brother uses many means, the first and foremost of these being the Thought Police, a corps of law officers who monitor the populace through undercover agents, infinite amounts of surveillance cameras and hidden microphones, and a two-way television screen that can be turned down, but never off. A new language is also being introduced to retard thought: Newspeak. This new English dialect uses shortened and compacted forms of modern day words that subconsciously facilitate the assimilation of misinformation through the omission of instances such as “science”, “freedom”, and “religion.” This, obviously, is a very bleak existence, and Winston, the oddball out, realizes it. Two characters besides Winston are brought into the plot. O’Brian is an extremely famous party member who Winston suspects is really a traitor member of the underground “The Brotherhood” led by the ex-Party member Goldstein. The other is a young girl, Julia, who he hates for her commitment to an Anti-sex league, and suspects of spying on him. And so, depressed, lonely, and ever conscious of the Party’s Minitruth slogan, “Who controls the past, controls the future: who controls the present controls the past,” he begins to search for the truth of the past, the rise to power of the current system, and, overall, the truth of his existence. The plot develops as he finds Julia is actually in love with him, and O’Brian seems to be making overtures to Winston on the subject of The Brotherhood. Finally, Smith is at peace. H e has found an old, out-of-the-way place where he can engage in his love affair with Julia. He feels revitalized due to the excess in love, for, as Julia says, pain, hate, and decay are just “sex gone bad.” O’Brian also seems to trust him enough to lend him the charter of the Brotherhood. In this book, he learns the answers to the questions for which he has been searching. It seems as if happiness actually could exist in this world.

But no, this is not to be. While visiting his lover one day, they are ambushed by a group of assault troopers. When they arrive in jail, they are separated and the story shifts back to Winston. It seems that the turn of events in his life as gone in a complete circle, and he is actually below where he used to be in life. Soon he learns that both the shopkeeper that betrayed him and also O’Brian are Thought Police, the first time he has seen one. Subsequently, he is tortured into admitting (falsely) that he was a traitor. Julia soon betrays him, and he finds himself doing the same thing. The curious thing is that in prison, he learns the true meaning of life: The Party. Whatever the Party says is right, and history isn’t relevant. History can be changed. If Big Brother says two plus two is five, than it is five. If the Party says Oceania is at war with Eurasia, then it has always been at war with Eurasia. The story ends with Winston released, in a bar, drinking his money away, and completely broken. This is really no surprise to him, for he expected it and knew he had condemned himself the day he first began having his doubts.

The central theme of the book is a warning of what could be the future. Just as much as Brave New World warns of a bland, pathetic future, and Anthem of one of one grand human collective, 1984 gives faith to the theory of a population suppressed by a privileged minority by use of wanton propaganda to the point nobody is sure what way is up or down. When this level is achieved, there is no one to trust and rely on apart from the authorities. The result is the nihilist world the Orwell creates in this book.

As an overview, I think the characters were developed skillfully, and are very believable. Smith is shown as a depressed man, developed into a “living” person, and then, in the end, debased to nothing, trash. Julia seems to also follow this pattern, and, I suppose ends up in the same place as Winston. This book, in a strange way, did coincide with my Christian values, once I thought about it. Although the main theme may be a caution to future governments and to the populations over which they rule, another sub theme is that one must have absolute trust in a higher power to survive. And that if one excludes that belief and faith, he is bound to wind up hurt and literally humiliated. This is probably a very unorthodox interpretation, but if one thinks about it, it is understandable.

Overall, Mr. Orwell writes the book using a plain, persuasive narrative style to send his point home. He writes very clearly and as can be seen in some of the previous quotes I have used, pulls no punches on his descriptions.

I would definitely recommend this book to anyone who enjoys thinking. As with all books on the future, it has its own unique idea, but I think, writing from George Orwell’s time, it seemed the most feasible. He seems to not be too impressed by communism, socialism, or anything related with these forms of government, as he has a similar theme in Animal Farm. Overall, this is an excellent book that I would place high on my shelf of good reading.