

# The New Verbal Order

J. Daryl Charles

THE NOVELS *1984*, *FAHRENHEIT 451*, and *Brave New World* depict societies that represent in the mind of the author the radicalization of particular trends in Western culture. In George Orwell's *1984*, Winston Smith is employed by the Records Department of the "Ministry of Truth," where his job is to "rectify" the record of the past in order to make it conform to what the Party says in the present. In Ray Bradbury's *451*, Guy Montag's role is not unlike that of Smith: he burns books—books, that is, other than comics and pornography—for the purpose of revising the past. And Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* portrays a society in which great literature of the past is obliterated because it is superior in quality to the mass-produced entertainment of the state; the goal is to ensure the happiness of the people and thus cement the state's power-base.

In the anti-literate dystopia of these three novels, it is the literature generally considered to be "classics"—literature which has formed the curricular basis of educated Western culture—that is obsolete or held in contempt.<sup>1</sup> In order to facilitate a purging of the past, however, a transformation of the vehicle for understanding the past is requisite.<sup>2</sup> A transmuting of language and the meaning of words must first occur; hence, the peculiar significance of George Orwell's *1984*

as a cautionary tale.<sup>3</sup>

Of the three novels,<sup>4</sup> it is *1984* that has perhaps most captured the imagination of twentieth-century readers. Even those who have never read the novel are familiar with ideas that are regarded as "Orwellian," while words associated with *1984* have achieved remarkably widespread currency—as illustrated, for example, by the *Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary*. Orwell's genius lay in his perception of the role of language in preserving, and disturbing, social cohesion. Orwell's nightmare, it should be remembered, though incorporating totalitarian elements from the Stalin era, was intended to apply to liberal democracies.

A fundamental question that undergirds the literary dystopia and *1984* in particular begs revisiting. It is a profoundly philosophical, anthropological, and, as Erich Fromm<sup>5</sup> has noted, religious question. Can human nature be affected or altered in such a way that it loses all understanding of freedom, human dignity and integrity? From a distinctly Judaeo-Christian standpoint, given the pressing moral-cultural and bioethical issues facing Western societies at the end of the second millennium, is it possible that the *imago Dei* can be effaced by current and emerging cultural devices?

A basic premise of Orwell set forth in *1984* is that human nature can be modified by external means. While this external manipulation does not reconstitute "being" in its essence, it does achieve the effect of dulling one's senses, one's ability to think, and thus, one's capacity to act "freely" as a moral agent. The moral dimensions of linguistic-ideological manipulation in *1984*, which in no way are intended to reflect Orwell's personal religious convictions,<sup>6</sup> raise profoundly religious questions—questions which relate to the sacred character of human existence. Thus, on display in *1984* are competing notions of world-view<sup>7</sup> which vie for the mental habits of the inhabitants of Oceania.

The "sacred principles" of Ingsoc in Orwell's novel that are devised to meet the ideological needs of the Party are Newspeak,<sup>8</sup> doublethink,<sup>9</sup> and the "mutability of the past."<sup>10</sup> A very useful Party slogan—employed repeatedly throughout the novel—expresses the indivisible link between language and how people perceive reality: "Who controls the past controls the future, and who controls the present controls the past." Accordingly, the past is continuously altered, with history being rewritten to meet the demands of the regime. To facilitate this goal, a new language is invented. In *1984*, the single binding force that created—and maintains—Oceania is the language of Newspeak; gone are any loyalties to family, friends, institutions, laws, and any notion of history as a means of linking the present with the past.<sup>11</sup> As noted by Orwellian scholar Richard Bailey, nothing is more central to the definition of "Orwellian" than the deliberate manipulation of language to serve the ends of obscurantism, propaganda, and mind-control.<sup>12</sup> A broader aim of the Party in *1984* is to render an heretical thought, *i.e.*, a thought diverging from the principles of Ingsoc, literally unthinkable—unthink-

able to the extent that thought is dependent upon words.<sup>13</sup> A revision of traditional language, Newspeak is meant to strip Oldspeak—or standard English, as we know it—of its "unorthodox" and "useless" shades of meaning as well as "archaic" formulations that over time were to be suppressed.<sup>14</sup> Significantly, Newspeak is designed "not to extend but to diminish the range of thought."<sup>15</sup>

The enduring value of *1984* lies in its graphic portrayal of a society in which people exchange their freedoms for the enslavement of an unreflective acceptance of politically orthodox thoughts, facilitated in the main by a "centralized" language emptied of meaning, nuance, and creativity. (Enslavement of one kind or another is a recurring theme in Orwellian fiction.) In *1984*, the promulgators of Newspeak wish to replace the old language as quickly as possible by completing a dictionary that will standardize Newspeak and help eradicate any opposing ideas. Newspeak provides the ideal instrument for intellectual purging, for it renders impossible any expression of dissenting opinion. Language, however it is fashioned, places constraints on what is possible to say: in Oldspeak it is impossible to tell lies because falsehood is not tolerated; in Newspeak it is impossible to tell the truth due to the necessity of conforming all thought to the Party's purposes. Implicit in Orwell's drama is that while corruption of language proceeds by human agency, the integrity of language can in the same way be maintained (even when it is not politically expedient).<sup>16</sup>

Writing in 1976 on the crisis of language, the meaning of words and truth, one noted theologian observed:

Few times in history has revealed religion been forced to contend with such serious problems of truth and word, and never in the past have the role of words and the nature of truth been as misty and undefined as now. Only if we recognize that the

truth of truth—indeed, the meaning of meaning—is today in doubt, and that this uncertainty stifles the word as the carrier of God’s truth and moral judgment, do we fathom the depth of the present crisis.<sup>17</sup>

It stands to follow that when truth and the meaning of words abide as the standard currency of public discourse, aberrations, whether linguistic or philosophical, can be met and effectively challenged. When the very nature of truth and discourse—indeed, the role of words themselves—is in dispute or denied, a collapse in verbal communication ensues, and with it a demise of the social order that is necessary to any free society.

## II

Language—and with it reflective thought—is what sets apart humans from animals. It is the basis for and vehicle through which human existence is interpreted. The word, as defined by the linguist, becomes the starting point of ontological strategy. In theological terms, the unknowable God chooses, by his creative *dabar*, to make himself known, and does so by employing the highest human faculty. Humans alone utilize symbolic language—symbolic inasmuch as words carry a direct correspondence to reality. Language reflects a basic order in creation. It is therefore significant that one of the first recorded tasks in the creation account found in Genesis is Adam’s classifying of the animals. Thus it is that the author of the Fourth Gospel can write as a controlling assumption, “In the beginning was the *logos*.” *Logos* in the mind of the biblical writer is linked with God. Correctly seen, language is a mirror of divinity, a spark of the divine nature residing in the human community. It transcends mere physical phenomena and hence is metaphysical and sacramental in nature.

*Logos*, moreover, was incarnated and “dwelt among us.”<sup>18</sup> In the Christian tra-

dition, the “word of God” is not merely morphemic; it is expressed in a person. An important philosophical construct in Stoic thought, *logos* can be understood to constitute the intermediary between God and man. It is by reason of the Incarnation, as Jacques Ellul has observed with considerable force in *The Humiliation of the Word*,<sup>19</sup> that human knowledge comes to us not primarily through image but through the word. One of the telling features of contemporary culture is the degree to which images and non-verbal experience have cancelled out verbal communication. Images can distort language and tend to distract, television being a prime example. Images, furthermore, inhibit discourse, whereas verbal communication is dialogical, requiring the exchange of ideas and opinions. Conversely, the “un-making of the word,” as one cultural critic points out, results in the production of sociobabble.<sup>20</sup> To deverbalize a society is to *dehumanize* it. A loss of verbal integrity plunges society into a social darkness of varying degrees, ultimately mutilating the fundamental way in which people relate to one another. Language can mutilate life because it can mutilate the thought process. Seen in this light, language is *everything*.

The mutilation of language and thought is indeed an important and early lesson in biblical history, reflected in Genesis in the account of the tower of Babel. The divine response to this human undertaking is worth noting: “This is only the beginning of what they will do, and nothing will be impossible for them.”<sup>21</sup> Given the fundamental depravity that lurks within humans, they will not consider restraints; they will eventually do the unthinkable. Human nature, amply attested to throughout the biblical narrative, is characterized by a progressively downward spiral. The Babel narrative is instructive, for it teaches us that language becomes the tool by which

humans strive for self-liberation and sovereignty. It is a matter of consequence that the Babel of language reinforces the Babel of human conscience. Significantly, it is possible that no generation since Babel has encountered so ponderous a crisis in communication as ours.

The inescapable link between mutilated language and thought has been vividly demonstrated in recent years in academic circles by the phenomenon of deconstruction,<sup>22</sup> which established a North American beachhead in English literature departments but over time has also become enshrined less innocuously in other parts of the academy, notably in schools of law and departments of history. In observing the ebb and flow of its influence, critics differ in their current assessment of deconstruction. Professor Patricia Meyer Spacks is quoted as saying that “[c]ontrary to the general view in the press that the [English teaching] profession is dominated by it, deconstruction is pretty much dead—except for maybe one or two people at Yale.”<sup>23</sup> City University of New York philosophy professor B.R. Gross argues that its influence lies only within a body of English-speaking literature professors, with “almost no influence in philosophy or linguistics.”<sup>24</sup> American Academy of Religion Vice President Robert Detweiler, on the other hand, cautions against dismissing deconstruction as mere academic vogue. “Deconstruction and other kinds of poststructuralism,” he notes, “won’t go away that easily,” given the fact that “we are now pretty clearly in a poststructuralist mode.”<sup>25</sup> In Detweiler’s view, some poststructuralist approaches, “now that their voguishness has passed, are evolving into extremely useful hermeneutical practices significant for teaching religious studies.”<sup>26</sup> Detweiler’s optimism would seem to be confirmed by a perusal of current catalogues put out by academic publishers. One 1995 publication by Yale University

Press, *The Postmodern Bible*,<sup>27</sup> is indeed reflective of the ascendancy of a “post-everything” paradigm.<sup>28</sup>

At the heart of poststructuralist thought, it should be remembered, is a rejection of logocentrism, that which Derrida perceives to be the skewed metaphysical principle underlying Christianity, with its emphasis on verbal revelation (*cf.* John 1). Viewed in broader philosophical terms, to deconstruct is to dismantle, to strip of any and all reference to a transcendent norm; to deconstruct is to deny the certainty of knowledge. By altering language, authorial intent,<sup>29</sup> and the meaning of words, the deconstructionist acquires the potential for bleaching language of its metaphysical transcendence and authority over us.<sup>30</sup> What begins as an academic exercise in “textuality” can readily serve as a precursor to less benign forms of “transformation.” A denial of the transcendent character of language permits humans to be manipulated and controlled for more pragmatic, and ultimately subversive, purposes. To the social critic, the essence of the deconstructionist project might be depicted in anatomical terms. Were the deconstructionist a chiropractor, he would take a living, healthy tibia, break it in pieces, and attempt to “reconstruct” it. Or he would take a skull and seek to place the eyes under the chin and hang ears from the shoulders.<sup>31</sup> In this manner, words may be arbitrarily assigned the meaning of one’s choice. Such an interpretive strategy stands in notable contrast to biblical religion, by which language both has an origin and translates knowable and fixed meaning over time and different cultures. As in Orwell’s *1984*, the deconstructionist heresy of heresies is common sense.<sup>32</sup>

To a person not interested in the vacillations of academic trendiness, phenomena such as the deconstruction enterprise in its diverse applications are

scarcely to be reconciled with the way in which we live our lives. From the standpoint of a *world-view*, however, it is well worth considering why the pseudo-intellectual or the religiously disinclined might deconstruct language (whether or not conscious of its full implications). To dismantle language and the meaning of words is to dismantle personhood and thus alter the *imago Dei*. To alter the creature-creator relationship is to alter the way in which people perceive divine authority, and, in the end, *all* authority. For Walker Percy, deconstruction represented an attempt to eradicate God by first disposing of grammar.<sup>33</sup> For Jacques Ellul, words stripped of their meaning are at the service of propaganda and falsehood.<sup>34</sup> For linguist A.A. Upinsky, deconstructing language is a precursor to the deconstruction of the entire living being.<sup>35</sup> By extension, one might argue that, linguistically, it is fundamentally characteristic of what John Paul II has described as a “culture of death.”<sup>36</sup> In its baldness, deconstruction—irrespective of its provenance—constitutes the attempt to eliminate structures of authority. For this reason, a “deconstruction” of any sort is fundamental to the questioning and undermining of cultural institutions that prevent social fluidity.<sup>37</sup> Although most proponents of radical social change would stop short of conceding such, social anarchy is a necessary and inevitable consequence of philosophical and cultural deconstruction. In one form or another, deconstruction is inherent in radical movements,<sup>38</sup> regardless of their political orientation; it lies at the heart of revolutionary social change.<sup>39</sup> Significantly, cultural deconstruction serves the process of consolidating political power and thus preparing the way for a soft form of totalitarianism. Not infrequently, this process is abetted by its borrowing of the rhetoric of social reform (e.g., “solidarity,” “liberation,” “em-

powerment,” “social justice,” “diversity,” “equality,” “transformation”) which has popular appeal. This might explain in part the literary force and fascination of *1984*, even fifty years removed. Language, as it turns out, *is* everything.

### III

Characteristic of the way in which the totalitarian mindset works is the phenomenon of doublethink, so vividly depicted in the Orwell dystopia. The appendix to *1984* defines doublethink as the “power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one’s mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them.”<sup>40</sup> It is to tell deliberate lies while genuinely believing in them; to forget any fact that has become inconvenient, and then, when it becomes necessary again, to draw it back from oblivion for just so long as it is needed; to deny the existence of objective reality and all the while to take account of the reality which one denies—all this is indispensably necessary.<sup>41</sup>

For Orwell, totalitarianism promises an age of schizophrenia rather than faith. A society becomes totalitarian, he observes, when “its structure becomes flagrantly artificial: that is, when the ruling class has lost its function but succeeds in clinging to power by force or fraud. Such a society, no matter how long it persists, can never afford to become either tolerant or intellectually stable. It can never permit either the truthful recording of facts, or the emotional sincerity that literary creation demands.”<sup>42</sup>

Post-Soviet turmoil that one finds in Russia today offers striking testimony to this tragic phenomenon. Decades of totalitarian rule, as Wilson Center fellow Anatoly Naiman points out, have enfeebled language, rendering contemporary political discourse next to impossible—this amidst a people *noted* for its *extraordinary* literary culture. In calling attention to the penchant for acronyms in the former Soviet state, Naiman de-

scribes a society where speech was forced to function in an environment of artificiality.

It was impossible, for example, to call by their proper names the fraud, treachery, theft, and murder that became Soviet state policy:

The necessity of replacing these terms with words that expressed the same concepts yet somehow covered over their ugly reality...led to the creation of a special language of double-entendres, a two-track phenomenon that Orwell later named "doublespeak." A man is fired from his job, arrested, and shot; this comes to be called a "purge." In effect such renaming resembled someone's deciding that alongside the standard number system, based on 10, one could also employ a base-two system when the mood struck—so the number 100 could mean either 100 or four, depending. "So-and-so was shot" was the truth, but "such-and-such an establishment cleansed its ranks of an alien element" was not an untruth.<sup>43</sup>

Consider how the concept of "destruction" was invested with a positive connotation by the substitution of the word "cleansing." "Purging" humans begins initially, however, with a "purging" of language.

Tactically, as Naiman points out, the desired effect of such a linguistic strategy is that the "sense of a word had to slip ever so gradually, a degree or two at a time, down the slope in the [politically] desired direction."<sup>44</sup> The spine of language, so to speak, had to be "bent until the bones were cracking," but in the end "not to the point where the spinal column itself snapped."<sup>45</sup> Over time, "the direction in which language evolved, at each step along the way, was dictated arbitrarily by (and always to the advantage of) those whose power permitted whim and willfulness."<sup>46</sup> The upshot of seventy years of "purposeful epithets" and "bending" of the linguistic "spine" in Russian culture is a virtual

collapse of language's basic standards;<sup>47</sup> words lose their precise and commonly accepted meanings. Along the way there occurs a mutation in the thought process, a mental disorientation. Hence, the reader is immediately disoriented with the very first sentence in Orwell's *1984*: "It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen."<sup>48</sup> In *1984*, language has been robbed of its precision, meaning, and transcendence, having become the handmaiden of demagoguery. The thought-life, subsequently, has undergone significant modification.

Orwell was fully convinced of the extent to which doublethink serves a radically *political* purpose. Indeed, the enlightened strata of political and social revolutionary movements throughout the world have frequently recognized the necessity of transmuting language as an instrument for political purposes. In politics, unlike simple arithmetic, one's views—however contradictory they may be—will not have to be tested against concrete reality. In political life, facts can be both true and untrue, known and unknown. A fact that is unbearable to some, such as the suffering of the human fetus during an abortion procedure, can easily be prevented from entering public discourse. Conversely, myth and fantasy can be injected into political discourse and take on the aura of perceived rational truth. Both fact and fantasy can serve a political end. Doublethink, for the politician, is an effective means of "reality control" (another Orwellianism)—*i.e.*, a way of averting the consequences of mistakes and failures.<sup>49</sup> When truth in its essence is denied, it becomes impossible to demarcate falsehood. As a result, a moral vacuum exists that only political-social tyranny can fill.

In noting the correlation between culture and communication, it is necessary for social conditions to be primed in order that language might be moved in a politically desirable direction. In this

case, it is reinforcing what Rutgers University sociologist David Popenoe has called a "knowledge blackout."<sup>50</sup> Applying Popenoe's insights linguistically, the habitual use of language that is shorn of its interpretive and semantic nuances, as Orwell sought to illustrate, fosters the creation of its own reality.

That language is an eminently political tool and inescapably suited to ideology can be seen by contemporary debates—or lack thereof—over key social-moral and political issues. Indicative of the government's stake in health care or regulating the economy, for example, taxes become "sacrifice" and health care becomes a "universal crisis." The politicization of disease control becomes "AIDS awareness" and "comprehensive sex education." In the same way, people of principle becomes "bigots" or "extremists," while openness to all ideas becomes "tolerance" or "progressive thinking." Suicide, increasingly sanitized, becomes "death with dignity," while one's "exit preference" (conspicuously Orwellian) becomes legally protected by the "right to die."

The possibilities for transmuting language are endless. Totalitarian regimes become oligarchies (or democratic socialist republics), while guerilla warfare becomes liberation. Intellectual promiscuity becomes academic freedom, while cultural apostasy becomes progressive thinking. Illegal aliens become undocumented residents, while projects become public housing developments. Prostitutes become sex-care providers, while killing the unborn becomes terminating a pregnancy. Sodomy becomes an alternative lifestyle or "being true to oneself," while debased pornography becomes provocative and controversial. Censorship becomes government control of speech, while indecency becomes artistic courage. Rape becomes seduction or psychological coercion, while convicted murderers are only alleged to

be such. Recession becomes negative economic growth, while to be nonretained is to be fired from one's job. Indeed, the opportunities for linguistic foreplay are boundless and limited only by one's imagination. Strategically viewed, all sorts of notions can be bombarded using the canonnades of linguistic artillery. G.K. Chesterton, as it turns out, was not far from the mark: when someone wishes to wage a social war against conventional notions of decency, the initial requisite step is to find some artificial term that sounds relatively decent.<sup>51</sup>

In exploring the political uses of language, it is instructive to note the role that euphemisms play in *1984*. "Euphony," as the appendix to the novel explains, "outweighed every consideration other than exactitude of meaning."<sup>52</sup> The euphony employed in Newspeak is not necessarily a pleasing or harmonious sound as much as it is a "gabbling" and "monotonous" style of speech.<sup>53</sup> The linguistic strategy is, by way of monotony, to discourage as much as possible independent and reflective thinking. In this way, speech that becomes independent of consciousness loses its creative and highly nuanced character, conforming itself to what Richard Bailey calls "mass psychosis."<sup>54</sup> What euphemism in *1984* accomplishes, strategically, is to purge Oldspeak of its precision and thus remove from the language old associations that are not consonant with the goals of the Party. Undergirding the rampant use of euphemism in *1984* is Orwell's conviction that to provide ideological terms with pleasant or unpleasant and frequent associations can be an inherently subversive and decidedly dishonest enterprise. At issue is the question of truthfulness,<sup>55</sup> and in *1984* the supreme dilemma for Winston Smith is living in a society that would seem collectively to conspire in preventing him from laying hold of what is true.

#### IV

The sort of linguistic promiscuity that is so pervasive today surely is an invitation to Western culture to come to its social senses. At the very least, it is a barometer of our desperate need to reflect, to analyze, to reason. It is not uncommon for foreign exchange students studying in the United States, when questioned on observations about lifestyle, to point out among many Americans the absence of time taken to think and reflect in their daily routines. Indeed, one would hope that, in the academy, critical thinking and reflective inquiry should be encouraged so as to rediscover the "intellectual virtues" called for by Jaroslav Pelikan<sup>56</sup>—notably the balance of free inquiry and intellectual honesty, the pursuit of truth, self-critique, and a sense of historical continuity. The contemporary university, in many respects a microcosm of cultural life, is losing its reputation for intellectual rigor; in its place has emerged a heightened and, at times, rigidly intense emphasis on "diversity," which not infrequently has had the effect of quenching rather than encouraging critical reflection and open inquiry.<sup>57</sup> Frequently attending this stifling of critical thinking is a corresponding (conscious or unconscious) *transformation of the meaning of words*. "Tolerance," "diversity," "multiculturalism," and eradicating "bigotry" may be inspired by noble thoughts; less benign forms of social transformation, however, may follow, depending on the assumptions of the world view undergirding these notions. Significantly, the increased calls for "social transformation" have run parallel to increasing hostility, both within the academy and in culture at large, toward the classical Judaeo-Christian tradition in general. The warning of A.A. Upinsky may shock but is not overstated: decapitate language and words, and its (literal) physical counter-

part may follow.<sup>58</sup>

A primary task in the world, given the potential for the Orwellian scenario just described, is to preserve language and the meaning of words. Subversion of both language and thought—and the two are inescapably connected—must be countered by clear thinking, linguistic integrity, and intellectual honesty,<sup>59</sup> all of which are anchored in the confession of a higher moral authority. In particular, biblical religion is reminded of its central task: proclamation of the word of God, through which both the community of faith and the human community are exhorted, entreated, and, when necessary, exposed. The faithful exposure of the human condition, with its downward spiral, inevitably results in a call to turn, or return, to the "Living Word," Who alone constitutes meaning (linguistic or otherwise) in life. Human language is thus purified, insofar as those who corrupt and subvert language are purified. In the realm of human existence, it is the word, above all, the *inspired* word, that purifies, restores, and infuses with meaning.

According to classical Christian tradition, language serves as a carrier of the word of God; the Bible, thus seen, is the literary form of the inspired word, spanning two "Testaments." While Christianity is not the only religion "of the book," some precision is needed in articulating the uniqueness of authentically Christian claims. The Scriptures claim what other "sacred books" do not: a superintendence, a divine control, of revelation, without necessarily being a mechanical dictation. It is "Scripture," not merely the prophets or the holy writers, which the New Testament claims to be "inspired." Consequently, the concept of the word sheds important light on the biblical notion of "inspiration": *theopneustia* is transmitted via the word expressly spoken by and coming from God.<sup>60</sup> Judaeo-Christian religion is rooted

preeminently in the living Creator-God who has disclosed himself through the word. In fact, the entire theology of Israel is organized around discourse, narratives, instruction, and prophetic speech. Jesus cited frequently from the Old Testament, and the apostolic witness is that both the Old Testament and Jesus, the word incarnate, are authoritative.

It is true that we may not always readily comprehend or appreciate the power of language. Yet, language is what unites human beings; it furnishes the vehicle by which humans think reflectively, seek ultimate truth and meaning, and communicate that search to others. To devalue language is to embrace falsehood and, in effect, to devalue God. To devalue God inevitably leads to a tragic defacing of those created in the image of God. At the twilight of the second millennium, when the defacing of the *imago Dei* in Western societies proceeds in frightening proportions, the religious community needs to heed the advice of Abraham Kuyper: "When the principles

that run against your deepest convictions begin to win the day, then the battle is your calling, and peace has become sin; you must, at the price of dearest peace, lay your convictions bare before friend and enemy, with all the fire of your faith."<sup>61</sup> In short, contemporary idiom, clarified and cleansed by the word of God, cries out to be reconciled to truth and ultimate meaning.

In his essay "Politics and the English Language," Orwell observed that "if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought." "Political chaos," he maintained, "is connected with the decay of language."<sup>62</sup> Only if we succumb to the formative powers of barbarous language, as Richard Bailey has well noted, will we have arrived at "1984." But that grim eventuality need not arrive *if* we courageously affirm our beliefs, which in turn will inform our view of language and human freedom. After all, in Orwell's words, "however much you deny the truth, the truth goes on existing...behind your back."<sup>63</sup>

1. The emergence of this literary genre is best understood as a counterpoint to the literary utopia, whose philosophical and anthropological assumptions were lucidly expressed by eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophers as well as socialists of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Events of the twentieth century, however, would drastically alter this optimism. 2. The past is dangerous in both Bradbury's USA and Orwell's Oceania, and it is central to the plot of the dystopia for both political and literary reasons. Any political establishment which must consolidate its hold on power must view the past with suspicion. From the standpoint of literary genre, the link with the past is the link between the author and the reader. 3. One important feature of *1984* distinguishing it from other dystopic novels, noted by W. Steinhoff ("Doublethink and Newspeak," in *George Orwell and the Origins of 1984* [Ann Arbor, 1975], 160), is Orwell's focus on the way the state can control discourse, thoughts, even emotions without a waste of expenditure of force. 4. The Russian writer Eugene Zamyatin—notably in *We*, a novel about the "total state" written in the 1920's—joins Orwell and Huxley in expressing the classic dystopic mood of the

present and future. For a helpful discussion of similarities and differences in these three works as well as Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, see M. Skovmand, ed., *George Orwell and 1984: Six Essays* (Aarhus, 1984). 5. See his Afterword to *1984*, 257-67. 6. A dominant feature in many of Orwell's writings is a faith in objective reality and in the possibility of writing truthful history. It was Orwell's conviction that a society's character is affected by its history and its cultural memory. Isolated from their past, people possess no true inner freedom. 7. Orwell, in fact, expresses this conviction in precisely these terms (246-47). 8. Newspeak words were divided into three distinct classes—the A, B and C vocabularies. While A and C words were needed for the business of everyday life and science/technology respectively, the B vocabulary had been deliberately constructed for political purposes. This category of words both had important political implications and was intended to impose a desirable mental attitude upon the user. The rationale for distinct vocabularies is explained in the novel's Appendix, 247-54. 9. "Doublethink" itself belongs to the B vocabulary, a sort of verbal shorthand that frequently packed whole ranges of ideas into a few

syllables. The special function of many Newspeak words, of which "doublethink" was one, was not to express meanings, rather to destroy them (pp. 250-51). For an excellent discussion of the relationship between Doublethink and Newspeak as they were observed in the political developments of Orwell's day, see W. Steinhoff, "Doublethink and Newspeak," 160-69. **10.** Orwell, pp. 25, 255. From the revisionist point of view, history is something to be created rather than learned. While a truthful recording of history for Orwell was not an easy task, Orwell held that when human beings begin to doubt that it can be written at all, it is only a small step to the grim reality that finds falsified history becoming a vehicle for mass propaganda. Totalitarianism, in fact, demands a cognitive *disbelief* in the very existence of objective truth. Thus, in *1984* the Party is portrayed as not merely controlling people but history and reality itself. All records of past events are changed to reflect shifts in government policy; even rules of arithmetic are ultimately subject to the Party's whims. **11.** Several important links to the past for Winston Smith, whose job is to revise historical records for the Party, are his diary, a paperweight with an inscription, and a nursery rhyme. **12.** "George Orwell and the English Language," in *The Future of Nineteen Eighty-Four* (ed. E.J. Jensen; Ann Arbor, 1984), p. 30. **13.** Orwell, 43-47, 246. **14.** *Ibid.*, 246. Grammar itself served ideological needs in the Orwellian scheme. Two linguistic peculiarities abetting this process were (1) a virtually complete interchangeability between different parts of speech and (2) the negating of a word by adding the prefix *un-*. Thus, for example, *uncold* meant "warm," *unlight* meant "darkness," *ungood* was substituted for "evil." **15.** *Ibid.*, 46, 247. The reduction of vocabulary in Newspeak, unlike almost all other languages which grow in vocabulary, represented an ideological gain, since "the smaller the area of choice, the smaller the temptation to take thought" (254). **16.** Orwell, in the words of Lionel Trilling, was "the man who tells the truth." **17.** C.F.H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority—Vol. I: God Who Speaks and Shows* (Waco, 1976), 24. **18.** John 1:14. **19.** (Grand Rapids, 1985). The volume originally appeared as *La parole humiliée* (Paris, 1981). **20.** G.E. Roche, *A World without Heroes: A Modern Tragedy* (Hillsdale, Mich., 1987), 135-63. **21.** Gen. 11:6. **22.** While the deconstructionist project has evoked a whole range of philosophical responses, the *fact* of its manifestation in the broader cultural context is deserving of some reflection. British intellectuals, in contrast to their American counterparts, tend in the main to view manifestations of the deconstructionist phenomenon as pseudo-intellectual. The frequently required textbooks in American humanities departments, such as the works of Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, Kristeva or Taylor, would rarely be read—and much less required reading—in the British university. In point of fact, at a recent conference on history and

theology at Cambridge University, this writer raised the issue of deconstructionist practice in the humanities. The response by conference participants was uniform: "deconstruction" was regarded as methodologically incogitable. **23.** B. Yagoda, "Re-tooling Critical Theory: Buddy, Can You Paradigm?" *The New York Times* (4 September 1994), E6. **24.** "What Was Deconstruction?" *Midstream* (November 1994), 10. **25.** "Poststructuralism and the Teaching of Religion," *Spotlight on Teaching* (May 1995), 2. **26.** *Ibid.* 27. Edited by G. Aichele et al. **28.** In the second chapter of his book *The Idea of the University: A Reexamination* (New Haven/London, 1992), Jaroslav Pelikan observes the crisis confronting the late twentieth-century university as a crisis both "within university walls" as well as "of the age beyond its walls" (p. 13). As it relates to the academy, this crisis is largely due, in Pelikan's own thinking, to confusion as to the university's "first principles." Hence, the concern for a return to these "first principles" is the primary motivation for Pelikan's revisiting of John Henry Newman's *The Idea of a University*, published in 1852. Pelikan argues that it is "an unjustifiable capitulation to intellectual and moral relativism to conclude, as many contemporaries have done, that a consensus about what seem almost unavoidably to be called "values" is beyond our grasp" (p. 48). These virtues *are* attainable, Pelikan contends, for underlying a catalogue of intellectual virtues is what Newman considered to be a doctrine "of nature and of truth"; therefore, it is natural and reasonable "to expect...that the philosophy of Education is founded on truths in the natural order" (*Idea* 1.1.2).

The chief intellectual virtues for which Pelikan argues (a discussion of which is taken up in chapter 5 of the book) include free inquiry (predicated on a doctrine of human worth); intellectual honesty (a necessary counter-balance to free inquiry); sustained trust in rationality (based on the assumption of an ordered universe); continuity with historical scholarship (whereby each generation is linked to and builds upon—rather than dismisses—the past); moral conscience and self-critique; a balance of toleration and conviction; and discipline (whereby the scholar demonstrates an aware of limitations, excesses and liabilities).

Academic discussions of the mutability of language, the impossibility of fixed meaning, and discourse in general are surely an invitation to reexamine, along with Pelikan, "the idea of a university," as the Yale historian with great sobriety calls us to do. **29.** To privilege the listener's/reader's semantics over those of the speaker/writer is to defy the way in which people, the deconstructionist included, go about daily living. **30.** Thus, Jonathan Culler: "To deconstruct the opposition is, above all, at a particular moment, to reverse the [dominating] hierarchy [in a traditional philosophical approach]" (*On Deconstruction* [Ithaca, 1982], 85). As political power that insulates itself from electoral defeat, such

intellectual arguments insulate themselves from reason and dialogue.<sup>31</sup> Thus, A.R. Kayayan, "Modulation or Communication?" *Communiqué* 2 (1993), 23. <sup>32</sup> Orwell, 80. Preparing to resist the Party's onslaught ("the Party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears"), Winston Smith scribbles in his diary what for him is to be an important axiom: "Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four. If that is granted, all else follows" (Orwell, 69). <sup>33</sup> J. Tolson, *Pilgrim in the Ruins: A Life of Walker Percy* (New York, 1993), 460. <sup>34</sup> *The Humiliation of the Word* (Grand Rapids, 1985), 158. <sup>35</sup> *La Tête Coupée ou la Parole Coupée* (Paris, 1991), 12-36. <sup>36</sup> *Evangelium Vitae* 12 (an English translation of which appears in *Origins* 24/42 [1995], 694). <sup>37</sup> Society must be able to define its moral limits in order to have a nature other than "fluid." <sup>38</sup> This has been argued forcefully by J. Malmude, in "The Emerging Mandate Society: Implications for Sex Roles and Family Life," *Social Justice Review* (May/June 1994), 71-74. <sup>39</sup> Even the evolving of the Heideggerian term "destruktion" to "deconstruction" noted in Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, while reflecting a bit of socio-linguistic sleight-of-hand, nevertheless in some respects is a necessary and "logical" philosophical step in the "articulation" of a "poststructural" worldview. <sup>40</sup> Orwell, 264. <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 215-26. <sup>42</sup> "Prevention of Literature," in *Shooting an Elephant, and Other Essays* (New York, 1950), 114-15. <sup>43</sup> A. Naiman, "Language on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown," *Wilson Quarterly* (Summer 1994), 110. <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 111. <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>47</sup> A very helpful and complementary assessment of present-day Russian discourse, given the information explosion of the '90's, is found in R. Kapuscinski, "Fear and Information in the Imperium," *New Perspectives Quarterly* (Fall 1994), 38-41. <sup>48</sup> 1984, 5. <sup>49</sup> The psychology and evolution of the "Party conscience" or "groupthink" is poignantly described by the highest ranking KGB official ever to defect to the West in his reflections collected in V. Sheymov, *Tower of Secrets* (Annapolis, 1993), 265-71. <sup>50</sup> On how this informs Popenoe's thinking, see his *Disturbing the Nest: Family Change and Decline in Modern Societies* (New York, 1988), and *Private Pleasure, Public Plight: American Metropolitan Community Life in Comparative Perspective* (New Brunswick, 1985). <sup>51</sup> *A Miscelany of Man* (London, 1920), 145-51; *idem*, *Everlasting Man* (New York, 1926), 49-52, 229-31. In the same way, C.S. Lewis could speak of the human penchant for "verbicide," given the rather remarkable "selling quality" of particular words (*Studies in Words* [2nd ed.; Cambridge, Eng., 1967], 7). <sup>52</sup> 1984, 253. <sup>53</sup> Especially the words of the B vocabulary, those imbued with a foremost political purpose, achieved their intended effect from the fact that nearly all of them were alike. Invariably, these words—e.g., goodthink, crimethink, sexcrime, joycamp, lngsoc, thinkpol, bellyfeel, Minilove, along with countless others—consisted of two or three syllables. Use of

these encouraged a gabbling, staccato and monotonous style of speech. <sup>54</sup> "Future," 33. <sup>55</sup> Consider the "Nine Principles for Evaluating Doublespeak" discussed by G.R. Bramer in *Beyond Nineteen Eighty-Four: Doublespeak in a Post-Orwellian Age* (ed. W. Lutz; Urbana, Ill., 1989), 69-73. <sup>56</sup> Reexamination, 44-56. <sup>57</sup> Concerns over departure from free inquiry coupled with the proliferation of speech codes and similar forms of control have resulted in the emergence of groups such as the National Alumni Forum. Notes Kenyon College trustee and NAF advisory committee member Richard Baehr: "My concern is that college compuses today really are not reflective of what you'd hope their mission would be. They are not places where people can speak their mind without intimidation" (J. Mercer, "Alumni Activism," *Chronicle of Higher Education* [31 March, 1995], A30). While the more extreme manifestations of intellectual suppression are not universally the case in the academy, the mere volume of books decrying intellectual terrorism since publication of Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* in 1987 is symptomatic of the presence of some "crisis" to which Pelican points. To cite but a few of these titles: *Profscam: Professors and the Demise of Higher Education* (1988), *The Moral Collapse of the University* (1990), *The Death of Literature* (1990), *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education* (1990), *Tyrannical Machines* (1990), *Killing the Spirit: Higher Education in America* (1991), *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (1991), *The Fall of the Ivory Tower* (1994). <sup>58</sup> Upinsky, 1-15. Similar arguments are put forth in J. Brun, *L'Homme et la Langage* (Paris, 1992). <sup>59</sup> These components are argued for implicitly in works as diverse as G.E. Veith, Jr.'s *Reading between the Lines: A Christian Guide to Literature* (Westchester, 1990), and N. Postman et al., eds., *Language in America* (New York, 1969), especially Postman's essay "Demeaning of Meaning," 13-21. <sup>60</sup> 2 Pet. 1:19-21. Significantly, the phrase "Thus says the Lord" occurs roughly 1,200 times in the Old Testament alone. For further discussion of the Petrine conception of *theopneustia*, see the related commentary on 2 Pet. 1:16-21 in J.D. Charles, *Jude, 2 Peter* (Scottsdale, forthcoming). <sup>61</sup> Cited in G.C. Berkouwer, *A Half Century of Theology* (trans. L.B. Smedes; Grand Rapids, 1977), 12. <sup>62</sup> S. Orwell and I. Angus, eds., *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* (4 vols.; Harmondsworth, Eng., 1970), 4, 167. <sup>63</sup> "Looking Back on the Spanish War," in *Such, Such Were the Joys* (New York, 1953), 142.