In her influential article 'Lying in Politics' 1Hannah Arendt sought to distinguish between what she saw as the kind of lying that is intrinsic to politics, and about which she had already written at length 2, and new forms of lying. She was not concerned with Plato’s so-called ‘golden lie’ that underpins hierarchy and stability but concentrated instead on contingent lying in the processes of governance and diplomacy. Facts, she tells us, have time and again shown themselves to be inherently fragile and capable of being punctured by a single well-constructed lie. Both truth and lies deal with contingent ‘facts’, and true facts carry no imprimatur: both lie and truth could be other than what they are presented as. The liar can customise a lie to suit a particular audience whereas truth, that is, an accurate account of reality, cannot be massaged. Indeed the truth may seem implausible or unwelcome to some audiences, who may prefer the lie. Though lying has traditionally
been part of the warp and woof of politics, however, Arendt claims that it has ultimately been of limited political use. After all, it could always be defeated by reality, if only in the last resort: the truth will out. But in the modern world, she continues, there are two new, potentially interconnected forms of lying that by their nature may not be so readily unseated by the truth: image making and policy ‘science’. In the modern world of public relations an image can be a form of reality. We may be convinced, for example, that a beauty product makes us look younger and more attractive and we may then act with such assurance that others notice; our faces can grow to fit a mask. The important distinction that Hamlet was convinced he could draw between what ‘is’ and what merely ‘seems’ becomes blurred here. In short the image maker creates a kind of reality or truth to which the power of advertising gives enormous political force.

For his part, the policy scientist has a version of reality that is located in theory. The policy scientists that Arendt had in mind were, specifically, the games theorists and systems analysts who advised on US policy on Indochina. It was they who devised the domino theory that held that if South Vietnam were to be lost to communism then each of the nations of South East Asia would fall one by one as a direct consequence. It was they who advised that bombing North Vietnam would persuade Ho Chi Minh not to aid the Viet Kong in the South, where, left to its own devices, opposition to the regime would soon collapse. But the subsequent publication of The Pentagon Papers, Arendt pointed out, showed clearly that these theories were not taken seriously by systems analysts themselves; rather they made use of them in order to bolster the US image of itself as an omnipotent friend who stood by its allies. However, what was required to propagate these theories effectively through the world, said Arthur Schlesinger Jnr., was nothing less than ‘the wilful, deliberate disregard of all facts historical, political
geographical, for more than 25 years'. These policy scientists could only make such a thing possible because of what Ellsberg called internal self-deception. The private world of close-knit government bureaucracies, with their arrogance of power, that is to say, encouraged both image makers and policy scientists to confuse avoiding defeat with avoiding admitting defeat. The imperative, after all, was to save face, a goal that was all about image and not necessarily about historical and political reality.

This alliance of image makers and policy scientists could practice such deception successfully only because they were so utterly committed to the end of securing America's self-image that they became equally committed to whatever means appeared necessary to achieve that end. In support of the larger 'truth' (US self-image) smaller lies could be commandeered and rebranded as truths. They became 'true' vicariously, so to speak, or by association. They could be defended as 'the truth' because they were part and parcel of that larger truth. For Arendt this was a new and infinitely more dangerous form of lying because those in power could realistically expect to control the flow of information on which citizens would assess the veracity of what their leaders told them. To all intents and purposes they could create a truth from an untruth and sustain it in the public domain.

That governments might lie as a matter of course and that their citizens might never know what constituted 'the truth' was a possibility that had come to fixate George Orwell a quarter of a century earlier. At the end of 1936 Orwell had taken himself off to the Spanish Civil War to fight, as he said, against fascism and for common decency. He had no real grasp of the political complexities of the republican alliance of communists, trade unionists, anarchists and Trotskyites and
had by chance joined the POUM (revolutionary socialist/Trotskyite) militia. His subsequent attempts to transfer to the communist dominated International Brigade were thwarted by the internecine warfare that broke out amongst these forces in Barcelona when he returned there and so it was as a POUM militiaman that Orwell fought, on the Aragon front, until being seriously wounded. He and his wife were subsequently pursued by the communist security forces and were lucky to escape with their lives.

On his return to Britain Orwell sought to put the revolutionary case of POUM and its allies to the British public via the left-wing press, not because he believed it himself, he said, but because it deserved to be aired. He found it almost impossible to get a hearing and concluded that the left-wing intelligentsia was in thrall to Stalin and the USSR. What especially concerned him, and here he anticipated Arendt, was what he took to be a new kind of lying. In Spain Orwell had seen newspaper reports that were completely unrelated to the facts as he had experienced them, not forming 'even the relationship which is implied in any ordinary lie'. In London, he said, eager intellectuals 'built [and sold!] emotional superstructures over events that had never happened'. He found this development profoundly sinister. It portended the disappearance from the world of what he called the 'very concept of objective truth'. Now in Arendt's USA a true account of the events of the Vietnam War eventually became publicly available, but Orwell set out to create a fictional world in which no such independent account of events was possible. In Oceania, Arendt's worst fear was realised, for the very nature of truth as a concept had disappeared: not merely had it become hidden, but it had disappeared for ever.
'But it was alright, everything was alright, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother.'

Orwell had contemplated entitling his final novel *The Last Man in Europe*, for this was the rôle and status with which Orwell endowed Winston Smith. *Nineteen Eighty Four* is Orwell's longest, most complex and in many ways most ambitious book. Its basic premise appears at first glance to be that the only possible constraint upon a totalitarian regime is provided by the individual acting as an autonomous moral agent capable of passing judgements upon the nature of external reality - Orwell's 'objective truth' - and by extension upon the actions of the state. (I use the word autonomous here to imply a sense of moral and intellectual independence from monolithic institutions, especially the church or, more recently, the state.) For its part, the state will seek to crush individuals by controlling every aspect of their lives thereby rendering them incapable of making an independent judgement upon the nature of reality and hence upon the actions of the state, or indeed upon anything. Reduced to this condition, if they are to make sense of the world, they need the state to tell them what is and is not true. When we come to love Big Brother it is because we have lost the capacity to recognise what is objectively true. Like the Grand Inquisitor, Big Brother caringly saves us from our uncertainty.

At first sight Winston Smith seems to have been a particularly good example of a morally autonomous agent. What he represented was a kind of secularised Protestantism, a priesthood of all non-believers, in which each was supposedly connected by reason and experience to unmediated reality, objective truth. As autonomous individuals, we can both make and recognise true statements about that reality. But if it is to be defended vigorously this moral autonomy has to be
nurtured by a value system (which might, for example, be religious or transcendental or ideological) or it will never be strong enough to withstand the Party, and Winston's was not.

Winston had no family in which to ground his values since the Party had destroyed family loyalties. The morally autonomous agent also needs to be part of a wider system of inherited, traditional values that he has good expectations of passing on to his children. For Orwell the most important values of that tradition were incorporated in language. How else could we descry and describe the truth? As we shall see Newspeak and its stable mate doublethink made it practically impossible for any individual to perceive, let alone articulate any moral truth. But language was not the only conduit of these traditional values. 'The first step in liquidating a people,' said Milan Kundera's Hubl, 'is to erase its memory. Destroy its books, its culture, its history. Then have someone write new books, manufacture a new culture, invent a new history. Before long the nation will begin to forget what it is and what it was.'

In Nineteen Eighty Four Winston attempted, without much success, to re-establish connections with his vanished culture and history. He bought an elegant notebook in which to keep his diary, and a beautiful crystal paperweight that had no real function. 'If it [the values of the past] survives anywhere, it's in a few solid objects, with no words attached to them, like that lump of glass there,' Winston remarked. The paperweight represented 'the room he was in, and the coral was his lover Julia's life and his own...' Predictably enough, when the Thought Police broke into the room, they smashed the paperweight on the hearthstone, symbolically shattering the crystal spirit which epitomised those values (and which, in Spain, Orwell had believed to be unbreakable.) Winston's first diary entry had been a dedication 'to the future, or to the past, to a time when thought is free,
when men are different from one another and do not live alone — to a time when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone. But it was already too late: Smith's world, like Franz Kafka's, was peopled by 'a humanity that no longer knows anything, that lives in nameless cities with nameless streets or streets with names different from the ones they had yesterday, because a name means continuity with the past and people without a past are people without a name'.

Orwell's next precondition for moral autonomy was a full emotional life, about which I shall have a little to say later, but I do wish now to point a finger at it, and so, too, his claim for material sufficiency as a precondition for a full life for the individual. Winston had some ancestral memory which caused him to reject the discomfort, the dirt and the scarcities of life in Oceania, which, he believed, inevitably wore down the human spirit and denied its individuality. Last though by no means least, Orwell argued for the existence of a world into which a person could securely retire. The temple of privacy, as the tramp Bozo had told Orwell when he was down and out in London, was inside the skull, and the Party had desecrated that temple. By taking away freedom of speech and the possibility of creative socialisation, the space inside the skull so prized by Bozo had become a void and the Party, like nature, abhors a vacuum.

A rich and sustaining family life, cultural continuity, based upon a vibrant language, a full emotional life, a life of reasonable material sufficiency and finally a completely private world: for Orwell these are the prerequisites that nourish our moral autonomy and our ability to recognise the truth. Having identified what he thought gave social substance to individual moral autonomy, Orwell then dropped these factors from consideration and concentrated instead upon the plight of the isolated individual. We shall need to return to this matter.
Whilst he was no epistemologist Orwell had a firm idea of the nature of knowledge and man's proper relationship to knowledge. Like the empiricist he was, he held knowledge and hence truth to be the result of our comprehension of the world based on our capacity for experience, observation and reflection. For Orwell reality, the external world, could be discerned by the undeceived intelligence of the ordinary individual by means of sensory perception interpreted and codified by reason. That this 'ordinary individual', ready to do battle with the state over the issue of truth, might itself be a socially constructed concept and not a child of nature was not a possibility that Orwell entertained. Man's very humanity and identity, he believed, were rooted in this capacity to apply reason to sensory experience, and his capacity for reason led him to grasp the nature of objective truth. In some respects Winston's claim on behalf of the individual reflected Martin Luther's claim on behalf of all people, that they could achieve salvation, through God's grace, only by their own agency as individuals and not by the intercession of any collective identity such as the Church (or for Winston, the Party). Winston sought to sustain his grasp of reality, and the story follows his endeavours to do this, first via the acquisition of his diary by means of which he could record reality, then by his affair with Julia in which he explored his individuality through sensually experienced reality, and finally by his putative anti-state terrorism, with O'Brien acting as agent provocateur, in which he attempted to change reality. It is our knowledge of the world gained through a range of experiences mediated by reason, Winston maintained, that guarantees our freedom and allows us to act in an autonomous and meaningful way.
Where did Orwell’s faith in man’s reason come from? There is no evidence that he ever read Descartes or Kant on the nature of the relationship between sense and reason. He was unfamiliar with Mills’ work, though naturally sympathetic to his emphasis - or what Berlin called his over-emphasis on rationality. Although towards the end of his life Orwell included amongst his acquaintances both AJ Ayer and Bertrand Russell, he was simply not interested in schools of philosophy and had no great capacity for philosophical thought. Indeed, in a letter to Richard Rees in which he referred to a philosophical argument of Bertrand Russell’s, Orwell wrote: ‘But I never can follow that kind of thing. It is the sort of thing that makes me feel that philosophy should be forbidden by law’. We could be sure that, if he had understood them, Orwell would have been offended by the relativistic tendencies of existentialism, the philosophy that had influenced so many of his contemporaries.

Orwell conceptualised his faith in reason as follows: if we can be confident as individuals that two plus two makes four, then ‘all else follows’. Orwell was fishing in deep waters here: some have contended that this constituted nothing more than a truism, others even argued it was a tautology. Hannah Arendt showed the limitations of Orwell’s argument when she wrote that although 2+2=4 was the only absolutely reliable truth human beings could fall back, this ‘truth’ was ‘empty or rather no truth at all because it does not reveal anything’. Outside of mathematics, what follows from the statement that 2+2=4 is - nothing. Orwell would have been unaware of the distinction, essential to our understanding of empiricism, that Leibniz first drew between analytical and synthetic knowledge, a distinction that had persuaded Hume to counsel diffidence and humility about what we think we know from experience about the world. Only analytical knowledge is certain, but since it inhabits the word of mathematics and formal logic it has no relevance to the world of experience and value. AJ Ayer argued that it was an
error to suppose that we can deduce any information about matters of fact from analytical propositions. Unfortunately he does not appear to have told his friend Orwell. To suggest, as Orwell did, that it was logical that the party would one day announce that 2+2=5, and that it would be necessary for everybody to believe it (to accept it would not be enough), is simply misguided. When Winston himself felt no longer certain that 2+2=4, we recognise not that he had been mistaken but that he had been broken. In fact the laws of mathematics are independent even of Big Brother and would stand despite the fact that the last man in Europe had lost faith in them. This is not a semantic matter: the relationship between fact and value is crucial to our understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of Winston's position. We shall be returning to this debate later.

Misguided as his symbolic use of 2+2=4 might have been, it nevertheless stands as a recognisable and serviceable emblem of Orwell's faith in man's 'common sense', his undeceived intelligence, his 'his ability to understand reality and thereby confidently to reach out to objective truth'. To deny that 2+2=4 was to deny not merely the validity of experience but the very existence of a knowable external reality and hence of objective truth. After all, as Goldstein (Trotsky) wrote, the state was the enemy of empiricism; it denounced commonsense as the 'heresy of heresies'.

There is a fundamental problem here surely. In Oceania the state embodied unreason, and so reason itself, affirmed by common sense, was its enemy. But that is by no means always so. In Zamyatin's We (which some commentators have injudiciously claimed to be the model for Nineteen Eighty Four) as in Chernyshevsky's What Is To Be Done, conversely, reason, not unreason, was embodied in the state: what then was the guarantee of individual autonomy? To answer this question we must defer to the foremost opponent of reason's
enthronement, Dostoevsky. For him reason was no more than one of man’s critical faculties, whereas individual volition was a ‘manifestation of the whole of life’. Dostoevsky savaged Chernichevsky’s faith (and by extension Orwell’s) in reason: \(^\text{35}\)

_We have something inside us which is stronger than self interest... Isn’t there something that is dearer to almost every man than his own best interests...and for the sake of which man is prepared, if necessary, to go against all the laws - that is, against reason... [namely] one’s own free and unfettered volition, one’s own caprice, however wild...that is the one best and greatest good._ \(^\text{37}\)

True enough, it is reason, that tells us that 2+2=4, but Dostoevsky’s Underground Man set little store by this as a safeguard of anything at all, and certainly not of individual moral autonomy. ’ ‘I agree’, he said, ‘that two and two make four is an excellent thing: but to give everything its dues, two plus two make five is also a very fine thing.’ \(^\text{38}\) For Dostoevsky it was in rejecting rationality and the quest for objective truth that man safeguarded his autonomy. It was only by pursuing one’s own ‘free and unfettered volition, one’s own caprice’ – one’s own subjective truth –, that one could become truly oneself. In becoming truly himself, in attaining the moral autonomy that Winston Smith claimed as his intellectual birthright, man ‘sends all systems and theories to the devil’. \(^\text{39}\) Clearly Orwell was not influenced by Dostoevsky; in fact in the corpus of his writing we find only a few brief references to Dostoevsky. Surprising to hear then that it is sometimes suggested that the Underground Man was a prototype for Winston Smith. Nothing could be further from the truth. Winston’s autonomy is based upon reason, the Underground Man’s on unfettered volition. In some respects he did indeed represent a prototype; not for Winston though, but for Julia. We may reasonably conclude, then, that there are problems with Orwell’s championing of the autonomous moral agent and his powers of reason. But there is a prior problem, surely: what constituted that
objective truth, grasped through reason and experience, whose possession so haunted Winston?

3.

Orwell told the apocryphal story of Sir Walter Raleigh's attempt to write a history of the world whilst imprisoned in The Tower of London. One day, after having begun work on volume two, Raleigh's attention was taken by a scuffle in the yard outside and he witnessed first hand a murder. When he came to write an accurate account of this event for the authorities, he realised that he simply could not manage to do so with any real accuracy, despite the immediacy of the event. He abandoned his world history, burning the completed first volume in despair. Orwell was critical of this decision. Whilst complete accuracy might not be possible, he acknowledged, it was possible for an individual, if he attempted it dispassionately, to write a history that approximated to the truth. Each of us has a sufficient grasp of reality to able to attempt this. But when Winston Smith's interrogator O'Brien challenged him on the nature of reality and of truth, he did so by arguing, like Raleigh, that no individual could hope to have a firm grasp of reality, of the external world. Like Orwell himself, Winston believed in reality, truth, as 'something objective' whereas, for O'Brien, it was the creation of the human mind. Not the individual human mind, for individuals were only minorities of one - lunatics - but in the 'collective and immortal' mind of the Party. When Winston advanced a Cartesian proposition to establish the truth of his own existence and, by extension, the existence of a knowable, wider external reality - he thinks he exists therefore he exists - and adds to it a version of GE Moore's evidence for an external reality - his own hands when he waved them about (for Winston it was the observable
reality of his own arms and legs) - O’Brien did not even attempt to counter his argument. When he pointed out the conclusive logicality of O’Brien’s claim: ‘You do not exist’, it was not Winston’s argument that was demolished but his person. We might conclude that if Winston could be said to have won an intellectual victory here, it was only a minor one: individuals may indeed possess autonomous knowledge but only, on this evidence, of the world of which they have immediate and direct experience.

From the perspective of a broader reality, however, it might be said that Winston had already defeated his own argument concerning autonomous understanding. One of the key passages in Nineteen Eighty Four tells of Winston gaining ‘concrete, unmistakable evidence’ of The Party’s falsification of reality. Amongst the few survivors of the original revolutionary leadership were three men who had been arrested in 1965, tried for embezzlement and intrigue against Big Brother and finally executed. Some time later, as part of his job in the Ministry of Truth, Winston found himself required to destroy a copy of The Times from about ten years earlier. His eyes had inadvertently taken in the details of a photograph of a Party function in New York. In the middle of a group of prominent Party members were, unmistakably, these same three men. Yet at their trial each had confessed to having been in Eurasia, passing on important military information to the enemy, on that very day. This, thought Winston, was a fragment of truth, a fossil bone from the abolished past. This knowledge made him, Winston Smith, the sole guardian of objective truth.

But did it? Suppose that photograph had itself been a forgery, a manipulation of some earlier and long-forgotten truth, and that the three had never been to New
York at all. Why pick on one random bone and declare it to be a genuine fossil? Nobody knew better than Winston about the falsification of evidence. Had not he himself invented ‘the truth’ when he created Comrade Ogilvy? Ogilvy, we remember, was brought into existence to cover up the disappearance of Smithers, a prominent member of the Inner Party, who had fallen foul of a change in party policy and consequently been liquidated. As an unperson he had never existed and it was Winston’s task to recast the account of one of Big Brother’s earlier speeches extolling the virtues of the now never-existent Smithers. Instead, Winston decided to replace it totally with another speech extolling the virtues of an entirely fictitious Comrade Ogilvy, for whom Winston created a whole persona and history. Thereafter Ogilvy, who had never existed in any present, came to exist in the past, ‘just as authentically, and upon the same evidence, as Charlemagne or Julius Caesar’. Official history could no longer be relied upon. Indeed all history had become a palimpsest, Winston concluded, ‘scraped clean and reinscribed as often as was necessary.’ Perhaps, but as Milan Kundera argued, the individual’s memory is just as defective, selective and indeed creative as the collective memory of the Party, and whilst Winston might not have been engaged in creating Comrade Ogilvies all the hours of his day, he was certainly involved in creating and recreating Winston Smith; just as each of us will airbrush the Smithers out of our past and replace them with our own glorious Comrade Ogilvies, creating our own less than objective ‘truths’. And if truth is not generally acknowledged and formally recorded – anywhere – what is the consolation of arguing that is must, all the same, exist somewhere?

Just as he failed to disprove Winston’s argument for autonomy in regard to the individual’s immediate experience, so O’Brien failed to establish a convincing philosophical case for the Party’s monopoly in understanding and commenting on
broader external reality. He claimed, for example, that the stars were near or distant according to the needs of the Party; if it found it necessary or useful the Party would invent a dual system of astronomy - 'Do you suppose our mathematicians are unequal to that? Have you forgotten doublethink?' O'Brien's oxymoronic characterisation of the relationship between the Party and external reality as 'collective solipsism' is arresting but not, surely, persuasive. After all, though Galileo might have been obliged by the Church formally to acknowledge his errors and to give way to Ptolemy, it was his vision and not the Church's collective solipsism that came to govern modern man's understanding of the universe. O'Brien established only the reality and decisiveness of power, where power consisted in winning arguments by inflicting pain. JS Mill once noted that the dictum that truth will overcome falsehood was refuted by experience. Persecution, he said, had always succeeded. 'It is a piece of idle sentimentalism that truth, merely as truth, has any inherent power...of prevailing against the dungeon and the stake.' In the long run, Mill thought, truth might prevail, though as JM Keynes dryly observed, in the long run we are all dead.

Though Winston successfully defended a commonsense view of man's relationship to external reality - physical facts are independent of mental facts - he did so only in a limited and indeed selective sense. As science developed following Galileo's discoveries it became apparent to thinkers like Descartes that truth and reality no longer surrendered to common-sensible contemplation. To follow Orwell and hold on to common sense and the belief that truisms are true, that the 'solid world exists; its laws do not change. Stones are hard, water is wet..." is not to establish the basis of an understanding of the complexities of the physical world or a convincing case for encouraging Walter Raleigh to pursue his attempted history of the world.
A major factor, already alluded to, that assisted in establishing the Party’s monopoly in identifying reality was the concept of doublethink. Doublethink entails holding simultaneously two contradictory ideas and believing in both. This is precisely the state in which Arendt’s policy scientists found themselves during the Vietnam War. The concept is not a new one. It was used in biblical times, for example, when alms givers were advised, ‘let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth’. 50 Orwellian doublethink is not basically different, requiring us to ‘use logic against logic’. 51 Some theorists have invested this concept with considerable philosophical significance. 52 David Rudrum has linked the apparent contradiction of doublethink to the kinds of ambiguity inherent in Wittgenstein’s exploration of the differences between the statements ‘I know’ and ‘I believe’. 53 But Orwell had not read Wittgenstein and anyway he had written earlier about the power of holding mutually contradictory ideas, though then he called it schizophrenia, a vice that flourished in politics, he said. 54

Orwell’s elaborate structure of doublethink, however, was not as substantial as these theorists think; in fact he undermined it himself, for as Winston made clear ‘the subtlest practitioners of doublethink are those who invented doublethink and know that it is a vast system of mental cheating’. 55 The rhetoricians and metaphysicians of the inner party do not hold a system of ideas mysteriously incorporating seemingly contradictory articles of knowledge and belief simultaneously: they only pretended to. This was an idea that Orwell had entertained for some time, writing in 1939 for example: ‘It is quite easy to imagine a state in which the ruling caste deceive their followers without deceiving themselves’. 56 Members of the Inner Party, Oceania’s rulers, recognised
doublethink for what it was: a sophisticated and sophistical method of social
control through manipulating the truth so that war may be represented as peace
and slavery as freedom. If once they really came to believe their own truths then
they would ipso facto have lost the power to manipulate them just as they chose.
They would have surrendered that Machiavellian ability that Arendt’s image makers
and policy scientists cherished, of creating ‘truths’ to serve the public interest, as
they construed it, as and when they saw fit. Perhaps we should take doublethink to
represent a conceptualisation of Arendt’s policy scientists creating associational or
vicarious ‘truths’, belief in which may be sanctioned by the greater truth.

Another area of social control that Orwell explored, fitting hand in glove with
doublethink, was language, that ‘repository of forgotten experience’ as Margaret
Canovan called it, and its Oceanian variety newspeak. Whilst they were lunching
together, Winston’s friend Syme, who was working on the eleventh edition of the
newspeak dictionary, explained the nature of his project. Its object was to narrow
the range of thought by paring vocabulary to its irreducible minimum. ‘In the end we
shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in
which to express it.’ This process, he went on, involved the destruction of the
entire literary heritage and with it all the old ways of thinking which had created
that heritage and then become embedded in it. Only then will the revolution have
been completed: ‘Newspeak is Ingsoc and Ingsoc is Newspeak’. Winston found
himself listening to a man at a nearby table, an important figure from the Fiction
Department. He was speaking about the ‘complete and final elimination of
Goldsteinism’ but Winston found himself imagining that it was not a human brain
that was speaking but only a larynx. This was not speech in any real sense: it was a
noise, a simple repetition of meaningless phrases ‘like the quacking of a duck’.

17
Since the time of Engels, communists and other political scientists have been notorious for duckspeak. But they have been far from alone. Military spokesmen, perhaps more than any other group, have developed vocabularies specifically designed to anaesthetise and mislead the public upon whose support they rely. They have created grotesque euphemisms, a particularly obnoxious form of ungood duckspeak. 'Friendly fire' and 'collateral damage' are only the most obvious examples but from the Vietnam War came 'ambient non-combatant personnel' for refugees, 'pacification programmes' for the widespread destruction of villages, and the fearful 'pre-emptive defensive strike' for acts of unprovoked aggression. As chilling as any example of duckspeak, though, is the modern phrase 'extraordinary rendition'. Who could guess that it denoted the alleged transportation of suspected terrorists from the USA to countries whose techniques of interrogation were illegal in the USA? On a more everyday level, the institutional reforms initiated by the Thatcher and Blair governments in the United Kingdom as part of the general process of liberalising state structures, were accompanied by a new vocabulary that had to be learned as much by the opponents of reform as by its supporters. Foucault and Marcuse have famously written about the undemocratic nature of dominant discourses, the latter referring to a one-dimensional language that restricted thought and debate to the terms and interests of the establishment. Significantly, Marcuse referred to this as 'Orwellian language'.

To acknowledge the importance of the relationship between language and politics is one thing; to believe that a state can actually manipulate not merely the perception but the behaviour of all citizens is quite another. In the Appendix to the novel, The
Principles of Newspeak, Orwell gave the example of the effect of the invention of the word 'sexcrime' on sexual behaviour. It covered all sexual misdeeds, from normal sexual intercourse indulged in for pleasure and not procreation to any form of sexual perversion. Orwell argued that because only one word was available to describe all of these misdeeds, they would in time become recognised as equally reprehensible and deserving of the same punishment. If this were indeed feasible – and who is to say it is not – then the capacity for the individual to aspire to know the truth would have been utterly routed. Orwell's picture of the state commandeering language for political goals in Nineteen Eighty Four describes a process far more systematic than the almost casual manipulation that had alarmed Arendt.

What emerges from this discussion is that the relationship between truth and untruth is by no means as straightforward as Orwell seemed to think. His Oceania represented the kind of state that Arendt feared, one from which the very idea of truth had been banished. Orwell shows us how 'truths' are created and citizens' perceptions manipulated. What he does not do, however, is instruct us how to identify what he called objective truth so that we may defend it. Indeed from Orwell's arguments, the case for an objective truth discernible by individual common sense and reason is seen to be unreliable and of limited political application. Does he, in fact, offer any useful advice in this matter?
At his very birth, enlightenment man, Winston Smith’s direct ancestor, that paradigm of reason, that searcher for truth, having freed himself from the oppression of the Church and so established his autonomy, promptly recreated himself. So said Arendt. Hardly had he appeared as an emancipated, autonomous moral being ‘who carried his dignity within himself’ than he disappeared again, to become a member of the people. In short he sacrificed part of his autonomy better to defend it. For liberal thinkers the state must allow, indeed encourage, a plurality of institutions in which individuals could, in Arendt’s words, recreate themselves as social beings. That is why Bakunin, certainly no lover of the state, nevertheless cried that he did not want to be ‘I’; he wanted to be ‘We’.

JS Mill, who, like Orwell, sought to champion the cause of individual moral autonomy, and whose discussion on the issue in part resembles Winston’s, was also certain about the social dimension of that autonomy. Truth was to be nailed not by individual experience alone, but by discussion, by ‘the steady habit of correcting and completing his own opinion by collating it with those of others…’ In Nineteen Eighty Four, however, Orwell portrayed the struggle for individual liberty as part of a wider struggle over the nature of truth and reality fought out between the state and the individual, autonomous and isolated; a fight with only one possible winner. He wrote about a state in which civil society had been utterly crushed and so the social dimension of truth, Mill’s collecting and collating, was entirely absent. Without the endorsement of the formal and informal institutions that make up civil society the autonomous individual simply cannot build any safeguard against the all-powerful state. As Arendt suggested in respect of Enlightenment Man, individual autonomy can only be defended by sacrificing part of it to civil society, for example
by becoming ‘the people’. Orwell would have been happy to endorse that idea; indeed, as we saw earlier, in depriving Winston of any supportive social structure, he seems to agree that it is the social context that empowers individual autonomy. But this is not the central theme of the book, and there are two principal reasons for this. The first is the personal one: Orwell himself was always a very private man and he became increasingly so as his illness claimed him. He detested all ‘-isms’, though like Winston, he found the prospect of revolutionary action alluring. More important, though, is the political dimension. If we were to characterize Orwell’s political thinking, it would come closest to ethical socialism, distinguished, we are told, by its tradition that rests ‘above all [on] the good sense of ordinary people’. Others believed that ordinary people, left to their own devices, would be moved principally by ignorance and prejudice. The Fabian Beatrice Webb one famously queried the theory that ‘by multiplying ignorant opinion indefinitely we produce wisdom’. Orwell fiercely opposed this élitism, and had always argued that any hope for a democratic future rested with ordinary people. He was not referring to organised labour and its agents but to individual ordinary men and women, of whom Winston was the last in Europe.

JS Mill, on the other hand, had argued almost one hundred years earlier, that individually, man can provide no safeguard of liberty, of autonomy or of the truth. Moreover, man’s ability to reason, clumsily exemplified here by the equation 2+2=4, is if Dostoevsky is to be believed, just as likely to be an emblem of tyranny as of autonomy. In reality Winston’s cry, echoing Bakunin’s, was not, after all, the cry of the ‘I’ who wants to remain ‘I’, the champion of individual moral autonomy, but the cry of the ‘I’ who craves to be ‘We’. Not the ‘We’ of some all-inclusive Hegelian state but the ‘We’ of some collective agency for which he would indeed be willing to sacrifice his autonomy. Far from being an autonomous searcher for the truth, the bloodied champion of the individual as an autonomous moral agent, Winston Smith
turns out to have been a closet collectivist and indeed a potential terrorist. Can we seriously consider a man who was prepared, even anxious, to undertake savage acts which, of their nature, would necessarily deprive many unknown individuals of their own truth, indeed of their own lives, to be a talisman for individual moral autonomy? Winston Smith was just as willing as Rousseau to force other people to be free.

Sandison likened Winston Smith to Martin Luther – the last and the first men in Europe. The comparison stands better if we remember that Luther’s attack on the Church led not to an entirely new relationship between God and millions of morally autonomous men and women but to a rival institution to the Church, boasting a similar orthodoxy, demanding a similar kind of loyalty. What *Nineteen Eighty Four* suggests is that individual autonomy turns out to be a myth, and our capacity to recognise the truth must be social and the truth we recognise must therefore, at least in part, be social – a product of our loyalty to the social groups of civil society to which we belong. Before leaving this crucial issue, it is worth pursuing, if only briefly, a distinction that takes us away from Leibniz’s analytic/synthetic distinction: that between fact and truth. The moment such a distinction is considered we see that although some facts are objectively verifiable, the notion of truth implies something else: a value. If we say that ‘it is a true that X beat Y by 2-0’, we really mean that *it is a fact* that X beat Y. If however we say that ‘it is fact that X outplayed Y’ this is invalid: it is not a fact. It might be *generally considered to be true* but supporters of Y might disagree. Orwell’s autonomous individual might have a firm grip on some basic facts – probably fewer than Orwell thinks – but truths have a social component, and it is this surely that gives them their force. Some post-modernists argue that there are no truths but I do not argue this: I support Mill’s contention that to all intents and purposes truth is based upon a complex social consensus.
Briefly to conclude, in *Nineteen Eighty Four* Orwell analyses the relationship between truth and power. Arendt showed how, for too long, policy makers in America were able to use their power to create an alternative truth about Vietnam. Orwell explored the conditions under which such a state of affairs might be made permanent. His was an imaginative world and the picture he painted is even more chilling than Arendt’s real world, for here no truth emerges nor ever will emerge. Moreover his conceptualisation of the psychology of those private institutions of government, in the shape of doublethink and its formal expression newspeak, crystallised Arendt’s fears. Doublethink, newspeak, the Ministries of Love and Truth, and above all the caring embrace of Big Brother entered into the consciousness of a generation and helped to shape the world in which we live.

The destruction of Oceanian civil society brought about by the erosion of its cultural base, especially its language, provides a picture of the threat posed by all modern governments and indeed corporations, which to a greater or lesser extent, have a propensity, enhanced by modern information technology, to control public opinion by destroying the individual’s hold on what Orwell called objective truth and what I would call societal or consensual truth. *Nineteen Eighty Four* is deficient in two senses: its lack of clarity and conviction concerning the nature of that objective truth to be defended and its failure fully to develop an understanding of the communal or societal setting of the moral autonomy to be marshalled in its defence. Yet here and almost everywhere in his writings Orwell identified the crucial field of battle for liberals who wish to sustain consensual truth: plain language. Plain language is both democratically inclusive and far more difficult to conscript to serve corrupt and despotic purposes with their vicarious truths than the various forms of duckspeak that sully so much of modern public life, both in
state and corporate arenas. Newspeak has the propensity to undermine civic culture and social values, and thereby to make Oceania, or something like it, a reality and not just a figment of Orwell's powerful imagination. Monolithic, totalitarian states might seem anachronistic today but other hegemonic structures of domination are not and the growing power of the broadcasting media provides a means of effecting such domination. Liberals should remember that power and language are inextricably linked: newspeak is ingsoc and ingsoc is newspeak. They should fight everywhere and anybody for plain language, with Patrick Reilly's rhetorical question always in their minds: ‘Who writes a warning against an impossibility?’

Notes.

1 Arendt, Hannah, 'Lying in Politics', New York Review of Books, Vol.17 (8), November 18, 1971
3 In his recent novel Birds Without Wings (London: Vintage, 2005), Louis de Bernièrè's Leyla Hanm instructs the young Philothei on the secret art of appearing beautiful: 'My secret is that the secret of being beautiful is to make people believe that you are, until you believe it yourself, and then it becomes true.' (p.217.) The commercial implications of this secret are obvious, the political ones only slightly less so.

14 Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty Four*, p. 126
15 In 'Looking back on the Spanish War' Orwell including the poem on the Italian militiaman, which concluded:

   But the thing I saw in your face
   No power can disinherit.
   No bomb that ever burst
   Shatters the crystal spirit.

19 Sandison argues that if Winston Smith was the 'last man' in Europe, Martin Luther was the first.
22 Orwell wrote of one of Sartre's books 'I doubt whether it would be possible to pack more nonsense into so short a space', and of Sartre himself (to whom he had sent a copy of Animal Farm) he wrote: 'I have maintained from the start that Sartre is a bag of wind, though possibly when it comes to existentialism, which I don’t profess to understand, it may not be so.' George Orwell, letter to Julian Symonds, October 29, 1948 (CW 20, p. 461)
23 Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p. 68
24 It is an analytical statement and thus one that simply could not be perverted even under the conditions of absolute human isolation or indeed under the ravages of brutal torture. According to AJ Ayer, Poincaré argued that mathematics 'cannot amount to anything more than an immense tautology'. (see his *Language, Truth and Logic*, Ch. 4.


30 It is no coincidence that Moore, whose ideas Orwell follows elsewhere, wrote an essay entitled 'Common Sense' from a similar standpoint. (Moore, GE, 'Common Sense', Philosophical Papers, London: Allen and Unwin.)

31 Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p.68.

32 Orwell argues convincingly that many British intellectuals, themselves the product of reason, failed to see the unreason of totalitarianism, chiefly because the 'order of the State' was based upon reason; but it was employed in the service of unreason. See 'Wells, Hitler and the World State', *Horizon*, August 1941, *CEJL* (2), pp. 139-54.


37 My italics.

38 Dostoevsky, *Notes*, p. 41

39 Dostoevsky, *Notes*, pp. 33, 34.


41 *Nineteen Eighty Four*, pp. 199-209.


43 *Nineteen Eighty Four*, pp. 63-67.

44 *Nineteen Eighty Four*, pp. 39-42.

45 Kundera's *Laughter* begins with a story of senior Czech political figures appearing before a Prague crowd. The leader has not hat on and a faithful lieutenant, careful of the leader's health, loans him his own fur ha to ward off the snow. Many copies of the resulting photograph were made. Four years later the lieutenant was hanged for treason. 'The propaganda section immediately airbrushed him out of history, and, obviously, out of all the photographs as well', says Kundera. All that remained of him was his hat, on the leader's head (p.3.)

Brecht's Galileo, too, we may remember, longed for a day 'when we no longer have to look over our shoulder like criminals when we say that twice two is four'.


Orwell, Nineteen Eighty Four, p. 68.

Matthew 6, 3.

Orwell, Nineteen Eighty Four, p. 31.

For example, Martin, Mike, 'Demystifying Doublethink: Self-Deception, Truth and Freedom', Social Theory and Practice, 10 (3), Nineteen Eighty-Four, pp. 319-31


Orwell, George, 'In Front of Your Nose', Tribune, 11 March 1946, CW18, pp. 161-4.

Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four, p. 171. My italics.

Orwell, George, Review of Bertrand Russell's Power: A New Social Analysis, Adelphi, January 1939, CW14,p.311


Orwell, Nineteen Eighty Four, p. 45.

Orwell, Nineteen Eighty Four, p.47.

See Fairclough, Norman, New Labour, New Language, London: Routledge, 200, esp. Chs. 3 and 4. The overall effect on political communications of the mass media and their manipulative models of narrative is discussed in Meyers, Thomas, and Hinchman, Lew's, Media Democracy, Cambridge; Polity Press, 2002. Poole, Steven's Unspeak provides a chilling recent commentary on these issues (London: Little, Brown, 2006).

Mill, On Liberty, p. 82.


This was certainly Bernard Shaw's belief, as set out, for example, in his early play Major Barbara.