

Doublethink

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Doublethink, a word coined by George Orwell in the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, describes the act of simultaneously accepting two mutually contradictory beliefs as correct, often in distinct social contexts. It is related to, but distinct from, hypocrisy and neutrality. Its opposite is cognitive dissonance, where the two beliefs cause conflict in one's mind. Doublethink is an integral concept of George Orwell's dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The word doublethink is part of Newspeak.

Origin and concepts

According to the novel, doublethink is:

"To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them, to use logic against logic, to repudiate morality while laying claim to it, to believe that democracy was impossible and that the Party was the guardian of democracy, to forget, whatever it was necessary to forget, then to draw it back into memory again at the moment when it was needed, and then promptly to forget it again, and above all, to apply the same process to the process itself -- that was the ultimate subtlety; consciously to induce unconsciousness, and then, once again, to become unconscious of the act of hypnosis you had just performed. Even to understand the word 'doublethink' involved the use of doublethink."

"The power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them....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. Even in using the word doublethink it is necessary to exercise doublethink. For by using the word one admits that one is tampering with reality; by a fresh act of doublethink one erases this knowledge; and so on indefinitely, with the lie always one leap ahead of the truth."

Orwell explains that the Party could not protect its iron power without degrading its people with constant propaganda. Yet, knowledge of this brutal deception, even within the Inner Party itself, could lead to collapse of the state from within. Though *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is most famous for the Party's pervasive surveillance of everyday life, this control means that the population of Oceania--all of it, including the ruling elite--could be controlled and manipulated merely through the alteration of everyday thought and language. Newspeak is the method for controlling thought through language; doublethink is the method of directly controlling thought.

Newspeak incorporates doublethink, as it contains many words that create assumed associations between contradictory meanings, especially true of fundamentally important words such as good

and evil; right and wrong; truth and falsehood; justice and injustice.

In the case of workers at the Records Department in the Ministry of Truth, doublethink means being able to falsify public records, and then believe in the new history that they, themselves, had just written. As revealed in Goldstein's Book, the Ministry's name is itself an example of doublethink: the Ministry of Truth is really concerned with lies. The other ministries of Airstrip One are similarly named: the Ministry of Peace is concerned with war, the Ministry of Love is concerned with torture and the Ministry of Plenty is concerned with starvation. The three slogans of the Party - War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, and Ignorance is Strength -- are also examples.

Moreover, doublethink's self-deception allows the Party to maintain huge goals and realistic expectations:

If one is to rule, and to continue ruling, one must be able to dislocate the sense of reality. For the secret of rulership is to combine a belief in one's own infallibility with the power to learn from past mistakes.

Thus, each Party member could be a credulous pawn, but would never lack relevant information. The Party is both fanatical and well-informed, thus unlikely either to "ossify" or "grow soft" and collapse. Doublethink would avoid a "killing the messenger" attitude that could disturb the Command structure. Thus, doublethink is the key tool of self-discipline for the Party, complementing the state-imposed discipline of propaganda and the police state. Together, these tools hid the government's evil not just from the people, but from the government itself, but without the confusion and misinformation associated with primitive totalitarian regimes.

Doublethink is critical in allowing the Party to know what its true goals are without recoiling from them, avoiding the conflation of a regime's egalitarian propaganda with its true purpose.

Paradoxically, during the long and harrowing process in which the protagonist, Winston Smith, is systematically tortured and broken, he contemplates using doublethink as the ultimate recourse in his rebellion--i.e. to let himself become consciously a loyal party member while letting his hatred of the party remain an unconscious presence deep in his mind, and let it surface again at the very moment of his execution so that "the bullet would enter a free mind" which the Thought Police would not have a chance to tamper with again.

Since 1949 (when Nineteen Eighty-Four was published), the word doublethink has become synonymous with relieving cognitive dissonance by ignoring the contradiction between two world views--or even of deliberately seeking to relieve cognitive dissonance. Some schools of psychotherapy, such as cognitive therapy, encourage people to alter their own thoughts as a way of treating different psychological maladies (see cognitive distortions).

Orwell's "Doublethink" is also credited with having inspired the commonly used "Doubletalk", which

itself does not appear in Orwell's book.

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