

## SURVIVING PRESSURES AND INNER CONFLICTS: WINSTON'S PARADOXICAL REALMS IN ORWELL'S *1984*

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 27-03-2025 Revised: 05-04-2025 Accepted: 30-04-2025 Published: 30-07-2025 Volume: 9 Issue: 2 DOI: <a href="https://doi.org/10.33019/lire.v9i2.462">https://doi.org/10.33019/lire.v9i2.462</a>	People are destined to live with pressures, and some deal with them by conducting paradoxes to survive. However, consciously or unconsciously people construct and conduct paradoxes to live. Paradox is a contradiction of two things. Winston Smith, has to run paradoxical life for the sake of surviving the pressures in Orwell's <i>1984</i> . This study examines the causes and reasons of Winston Smith committing paradoxes and the ways he applies his paradoxes to disclose his survivals against lethal pressures and compelling inner conflicts. Applying Roy Sorensen's paradox theory, supported with discourse study, within a qualitative method of study, this research analyzes the paradoxical realm of Winston Smith in his surviving the pressures. The result shows that Winston Smith conducts three kinds of paradoxes, i.e., the paradox of thoughts, the paradox of action, and the combination of the two paradoxes that contains how Winston's thoughts and actions are contradictory. It is a must for him to take the three kinds of paradoxes to survive the pressures and achieve his desires, yet, consequently, he has to experience inner conflicts.
KEYWORDS	
<i>Paradox, Survival, Conflicting Thoughts and Actions, Inner Conflicts</i>	

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Everyone has a unique personality and set of characteristics, and that is why people are different from one another (Cummings & Sanders, 2019, p. 857). Some people exhibit a wide range of personalities and characteristics, others have stable traits, while the others show changes in their characteristics over time. One of the characteristics of someone's personality is inconsistency that is also termed as dissonance, referring to still conducting an action for pleasure despite its comprehended danger, while stopping the action may invite another harm, as in the case of smoking habit (Festinger, 1957, p. 2). A smoker desiring to avoid the negative health effects while still continuing to smoke shows this apparent consistent inconsistency or a paradoxical deed. Health and pleasure become two colliding pressures a smoker tries to survive in that a paradoxical deed is then triggered. This illustrates how consistent inconsistency transform into a paradox where individuals manage conflicting beliefs and behaviors.

In another sphere like in an organization, one may practice paradoxes for survival because of the immense pressure to deal with. One may produce false narrative to manipulate perceptions or make a deception as a survival strategy, and in such a situation, paradoxes may play a role. Hence, surviving pressures through making paradoxes or acting inconsistency can be perceived as smart and intelligent actions in which the doer must have ability to think critically and to be in



tune with any sudden circumstances. A Greek mythology, a story of Sisyphus, is another example of paradox. Sisyphus is cursed to endlessly roll a boulder uphill, only to roll it back down again. He is successful to put the stone on the peak of the hill Albert Camus (in Sorensen, 2003) says that Sisyphus shows a paradox since he gains a victory in defeat and at the same time a defeat in victory (p. 44). He further argues, “Sisyphus is a heroic figure. Sisyphus gains victory in defeat; the very attempt to do the impossible ennobles him”.

Contradictory or paradoxical behaviors are operated through conflicting beliefs, actions, or thoughts. The doers must justify these conflicts to feel comfortable with the contradictions and to reduce the discomfort or tension to gain a sense of inner harmony. Living with and rationalizing inconsistencies underscore the complex and paradoxical nature of human behavior. “Paradox is an apparently unacceptable conclusion derived by apparently acceptable reasoning from apparently acceptable premises and also a contradiction between unacceptable conclusion and logical premises” (Sainsbury, 2009, p. 1), as can be seen in the party’s slogan in 1984, Freedom is Slavery. This slogan suggests that the party’s members must give them in totally to the party to be free. A slave is never free. When free, one is not a slave. The conclusion and the premise are then in contradictory.

Those examples prove how paradoxes overwhelm humans in most aspects of life. This study attempts to disclose John Winston’s paradoxical realm to survive the lethal pressures and compelling inner conflicts due to his working and living in organization since “paradoxical situations could elicit positive outcomes” (Lee et al., 2024, p. 3) and “a source of competitive advantage [...] a source of vitality and organizational renewal” (Cunha, 2022, p. 196; Berti & Simpson, 2019, p. 3). His contrary situation in devotedly staying in the party while endeavoring to rebel the party is a paradoxical sphere driving him to commit the paradoxical living. Paradox is like what was said by Havelock Ellis (1914) that “the absence of a flaw in beauty is itself a flaw.” George Orwell’s 1984 paradoxes offer a dystopian society under oppression and strict control of a party and the protagonist is the flaw of the craved stability. The stability and control are gained through brainwashing, indoctrination, coercion, and language manipulation. This means that the ways are a series of heavy pressures for the party’s members including Winston. The party’s atmosphere is in line with a famous paradoxical military maxim *si vis pacem para bellum*, if you want peace, prepare for war. Hence, paradoxes flourish the realm.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Using genetic structuralism, Maulidio (2016) analyzes the relations among characters, object, and environment in 1984. She determines binary opposition in her analysis and finds that humanism is the worldview of the novel. Naufal (2021) and Frodsham (1985) present totalitarian atmosphere of the novel. Naufal describes and analyzes the effects of totalitarian government, both in the novel and in real life, while Frodsham associates it with Soviet in Stalin’s era, Germany in Nazy time, and China under the reign of Mao. Both studies present an image of totalitarian regime in 1984 through highlighting the oppressive nature of tyrannous regulation and harmful consequences.

Through sociological method, Ma’shumah (2022) employs the concept of micro media effect to disclose the social aspects of the text. She puts forward some ways of how the government influences public’s opinion such as public surveillance, public enemy, and political bias. Aisyah (2021) applies reader-response theory to reveal how college students connect the novel’s ideas



with their real lives. Mease & Neal (2023) present gender paradox through employing the theory of enthymematic narrative in male-dominated sectors. Women are seen to obviously negate that gender affect their experiences, but depict the many ways gender affect their experience.

Those six preceding studies are in line with the mental evidence of this study, George Orwell's *1984* or the main topic, paradox. However, the difference is also obvious considering that this study focuses on the main character's paradoxical realms in wrestling against the pressures of the organizational party which do not become the concern of those studies. The analysis on his paradoxes to survive the lethal pressures and forceful inner conflicts in this study brings novelty among the myriad discussions about Orwell's *1984*.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study uses qualitative research method. According to Williams (2007) qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (p. 51). Furthermore, Creswell (2009; 2018) proposes that qualitative research offers a comprehension towards any opinions and the data used to analyze the subject. In a qualitative essay, the author accumulates various modes of data rather than counts on a particular data basis. The author then evaluates the data, logicize them, and organizes them into themes and codes. As the qualitative method for the analysis, this study explores library research to collect the appropriate data for the topic comprising both primary and secondary data sources. George Orwell's *1984* serves as the primary data source, while the secondary data are books, journals, research papers, and other studies that support this research.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Life is often full of paradoxes, where actions, thoughts, and feelings contradict each other. People pursue freedom but they are bound by fear. They seek truth but frequently hold on to comfortable lies. Paradoxes make life difficult to understand, constantly driving one to search for meaning amidst the contradictions. However, paradox can be employed as a way to survive organizational pressures as seen in the main character of the novel, Winston Smith.

Paradoxical thoughts are mental contradictions where a person has conflicting beliefs, desires, or ideas simultaneously. These thoughts arise from the complexity of human reasoning and the interplay between logic, emotion, and context. Someone may need freedom but simultaneously fear the consequences of getting it. Paradoxical thoughts often force individuals into inner conflict, where their reasoning appears valid and invalid depending on the perspective taken. Stoic doctrine is an example of a statement that makes humans capable of paradoxical thinking. Sorensen (2003) says "that those and only those are free who know that they are not free" (p. 6).

Paradoxical thoughts reflect the tension between conflicting values, emotions, and circumstances. This suggests that true freedom comes from understanding the situation. In other words, if people realizes that they are not completely free, they can start thinking about what freedom means. It is like being in a world that seems free, but there are norms in society. Someone may live freely, but they live by accepting the norms around them that make people live within the rules of the norm. Winston Smith in George Orwell's *1984* embodies this conflict through his hatred of the Party, yet he obeys the party. His paradoxical thought reflects the struggle of a person



who seeks liberation yet cannot fully escape the system that enslaves him. This inner contradiction, enforced by the Party through Doublethink mechanisms, reflects the broader human tendency to hold opposing beliefs in response to external pressures or personal dilemmas.

Paradoxical actions occur when one's behavior conflicts with actions and deeds, creating a conflict between deed and action. These often stem from external pressure, conformity, or unconscious fear. Paradox between thoughts and actions highlight the inconsistencies found in human behavior, where what individuals believe or want does not always align with what they do. This contradiction is rooted in the complexity of human emotional states, reasoning, and external influences. Quitting smoking often leads to a healthier lifestyle, yet the struggle to reconcile the desire to smoke with the knowledge of its harmful effects create significant dissonance. This paradoxical sphere shows one's attempt to endure the pressures between desiring things and abandoning the desire. Ultimately, individuals must navigate this inner conflict to significantly control their decision-making process. Humans do paradoxical thoughts either unconsciously or consciously. Paradoxical thought and actions usually arise when humans feel something is wrong or change their thinking according to what they see around them or what they feel. Changes in thoughts typically lead to actions that contradict their thoughts.

#### 4.1 Winston's Paradoxical Thoughts

Winston Smith is a party official who works for the Ministry of Truth, which operates to change history. A daily ritual called Two Minutes Hate features a revolutionary named Emanuel Goldstein, portrayed as an enemy of Oceania and the embodiment of evil and subversive in a totalitarian society. Winston rewrites history according to the party's will, and it drives him, for the sake of seeking truth, to begin hating the party. The paradox emerges as at the same time he glorifies the party.

[...] Winston's hatred was [...] against Big Brother, the party, and the Thought Police; and such moments his heart went out to lonely, derided heretic on the screen, sole guardian of truth and sanity in a world of lies. [...] his moment his secret loathing of Big Brother changed into adoration.

(Orwell, 1949, p.20).

This conflict highlights the breakdown of his ability to maintain a stable and independent mindset. The Party's control over the narrative forces Winston to accept and reject its ideology simultaneously. His heart yearns for rebellion and truth, yet his mind gives up to propaganda that demands conformity. This paradox reflects the devastating psychological impact of living under a regime that erases the distinction between truth and lies, as stated by Sorensen (2003), "All beliefs are true for the believer [...] Not all beliefs are true for the believer" (p. 103), turning even the most private thoughts into opposing thoughts. The change from hating to adoring Big Brother creates a confusing situation in that Winston's actions seem inconsistent with his thoughts and behavior. This is due to the existence of Doublethink referring to the ability to hold two conflicting beliefs simultaneously and accept both as true. This concept becomes a key tool for the Party to control the minds of the people, and it directly influences Winston's paradoxical thoughts.

Winston uses the concept of Doublethink to manipulate historical information and at the same time he is the victim of this concept. Thus, Winston experiences conflict and paradox between his hatred and admiration to Big Brother.



His mind slid away into the labyrinthine world of doublethink. 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 [...]

(Orwell, 1949, p. 26).

Winston is thus trapped in his inner conflict between the reality he knows and the lies imposed by the Party, between his awareness of the Party's falsifications and his being deeply absorbed by the party's propaganda, and between the truth he knows and the Party's version he has to accept. These paradoxes give him inner conflicts, a dispute between agree and disagree in mind, a dilemma of mind between opposing feelings, options, desires, ideas, etc. or an event of facing opposing psychological desires, beliefs, feelings or impulses (Pramono, 2023, p. 7), that in turn also create a realm of survival towards any pressures he is dealing with. It becomes a struggle between personal beliefs and imposed ideology.

Another realm of paradox refers to Winston's awareness of the proles' potential power to be against the party, yet he believes they cannot act without first gaining consciousness about their oppression, which seems impossible to attain in the current situation. "Until they become conscious, they will never rebel, and until after they have rebelled, they cannot become conscious" (Orwell, 1949, p. 92). This creates a logical circle in which one condition depends on the other, but neither can exist without the other being realized. Winston cannot decide how to break this cycle, neither does he ever look for ways to break this cycle. "If you have the misfortune of picking a question that you cannot answer, you will not be able to switch the topic. You will come to hate the question but will not be able to stop thinking about it" (Sorensen, 2003, p. 92).

Despite his strong desire to bring down the party and recognizing the Party's manipulation of truth, Winston justifies the party for he keeps employing the concept of Doublethink. This often disturbs his mind.

In the end the Party would announce that two and two made five, and you would have to believe it. [...] what was terrifying was not that they would kill you for thinking otherwise, but that they might be right. For, after all, how do we know that two and two make four? [...] His courage seemed suddenly to stiffen of its own accord.

(Orwell, 1949, pp. 104-105)

This leads to an ominous inner conflict as he grapples with the contradiction between the reality of his situation and his concurrently defending the oppressive regime that controls him. His consciousness favors rebellion, but his subconscious doubts lead him to accept the Party's logic, creating a paradox where he both resists and validates the system he seeks to destroy. This, his actions are both valid and invalid (Sorensen, 2003, p.195). The Party's power is so overwhelming that it can make Winston doubt even the most basic and self-evident truths.

Winston always looks for the truth about the past, but at the same time, he is part of the effort to change the past. "Nothing exists except an endless present in which the Party is always right. I know, of course, that the past is falsified, but it would never be possible for me to prove it, even





when I did the falsification myself” (Orwell, 1949, p. 203). The paradox lies in the coexistence of two conflicting beliefs in Winston’s mind. He knows that the past is real and has been altered by the Party, but he understands that no evidence remains to prove this truth. This creates a state where Winston is both a seeker of truth and a contributor to its falsification. His job involves altering historical records to fit the Party’s narrative, conceiving inner suppression that his integrity is compromised for the sake of conformity and survival. “We learn from history that we learn nothing from history” (Hegel in Sorensen, 2003, p. 306) reflects Winston’s struggle to find verifiable truth in the past while he goes on rewriting and manipulating the story of the past.

Winston, who once aims to bring down the party has given up after accepting O’Brien’s manipulation of the party’s thinking by writing the party’s slogan without any hesitation. He accepts the reality that the party cannot be brought down and even accepts the party’s slogan that he initially hates.

FREEDOM IS SLAVERY

Then almost without a pause he wrote beneath it:

TWO AND TWO MAKE FIVE [...]

He knew that he was in the wrong, but he preferred to be in the wrong.

(Orwell, 1949, pp. 364-368)

Winston’s writing FREEDOM IS SLAVERY and TWO TO FIVE signals his complete submission to Party doctrine. Initially, he rejects these slogans, seeing them as tools of oppression. Despite his compliance, his acceptance is not out of genuine conviction but rather a forced resignation to an oppressive reality. This duality obeying the Party while still feeling hostility highlights the complexity of human emotions under totalitarian regimes, where individuals are torn between survival and true feelings. Winston’s existence is finally a complexity of rebellion and compliance, making his mind contradictory by hating and loving the party.

#### 4.2 Winston’s Paradoxical Actions

Love affairs between party members are a major offense unless the couple agree to devote their family life to serve the party. Winston’s having love affair with a female party member is a part of his intention to rebel against the party. His decision to rent a room for his love affair with Julia represents a critical step in his rebellion against the Party. This act is not merely about seeking privacy, but also about rejecting the Party’s control over personal relationships and intimacy.

‘You like doing this? I don’t mean simply me: I mean the thing in itself?’

‘I adore it’

‘That was above all what he wanted to hear. Not merely the love of one person but the animal instinct, the simple undifferentiated desire: that was the force that would tear the party to pieces’

(Orwell, 1949, p. 163).

However, his actions contradict his job. He perfectly falsifies history and improves articles in accord with the party. His intended betrayal and his enjoyment of his work are a contradiction between conformity and rebellion. He is running a paradox as he keeps attempting to rebel against the Party, yet he plays a direct role in strengthening the party’s propaganda.



Winston's greatest pleasure in life was in his work. Most of it was a tedious routine, but included in it there were also jobs so difficult and intricate that you could lose yourself in them as in the depths of a mathematical problem --delicate pieces of forgery in which you had nothing to guide you except your knowledge of the principles of Ingsoc and your estimate of what the Party wanted you to say.  
(Orwell, 1949, p. 57)

Winston's paradoxical actions depict life in a totalitarian society, where someone will inevitably perform paradoxical actions to survive. Winston's choice is the same, as he chooses to rebel even though he enjoys his job, even though this action can also lead to his downfall.

We are enemies of the party. We disbelieve in the principles of Ingsoc. We thought criminals. We also adulterers. I tell you this because we want to put ourselves at your mercy. If you want us to incriminate ourselves in any other way, we are ready.  
(Orwell, 1949, p. 222)

Winston takes a big step towards rebelling against the party by joining the Brotherhood. Now it is obvious that Winston places himself in a realm of paradox and suppression. He chooses to act paradoxically by going along with what the party wants and acts with what he believes in by seeking ways to bring down the party. He realizes and understands the consequence of his choice. It is the core of human right as well as the trait of self-respect and self-reliance when one come to a decision upon choices (Pramono, 2023, p. 8; Pramono, 2013, p. 19) because life is an unescapable choice. His actions are risky for sufferings can be the outcomes. However, his absurdly paradoxical actions have basis to hold up. "A paradox is just any conclusion that at first sounds absurd but that has an argument to sustain it," says Quine (in Sorensen, 2003, p. 350).

#### 4.3 Other Kinds of Paradoxes

Winston hates the party and works dedicatedly for the party. He searches for the truth but he falsifies the history in accord to the party's command. He intends to challenge the party but he adores Big Brother, the leading figure of the party. Hence it can be said that Winston is both a dangerous enemy and a devoted tool of the party.

Winston's actions are paradoxical as he lives under the pressure of a totalitarian system that forces individuals to act contradictorily to their beliefs. These paradoxes create conflicts between his desires and his actions. This reflects the complexity of humans in dealing with a stressful and contradictory reality. According to Sorensen (2003), "inquiry into physical causes cannot yield reasons for acting or thinking in one way rather than another. Only reasons justify actions" (p. 59). Winston's character serves as a powerful representation of the paradoxes inherent in human behavior under totalitarian rule. His actions, dictated by the Party's demands, lack genuine justification, emphasizing the disconnect between his beliefs and the reasons behind his actions. This highlights the philosophical struggle of finding meaning and justification in a world dominated by lies.

Winston deeply despises the party, which he considers full of lies and nonsense. Nonetheless, he feels that his job is his greatest pleasure, which is a tool to reinforce the party's lies and propaganda while making the party stronger. This situation is very contradictory, as he hates the party very much, but at the same time he strengthens the party system.



Winston's greatest pleasure in life was in his work. Most of it was a tedious routine, but included in it there were also jobs so difficult and intricate that you could lose yourself in them as in the depths of a mathematical problem -- delicate pieces of forgery in which you had nothing to guide you except your knowledge of the principles of Ingsoc and your estimate of what the Party wanted you to say.  
(Orwell, 1949, p. 57)

The contradiction between his enjoyment of work and his hatred for the Party illustrates a significant inner struggle. Winston is caught in his loyalty to his job, which provides him with a sense of purpose and fulfillment, while simultaneously recognizing that this job contributes to the oppression and manipulation of truth. This duality reflects how individuals can become complicit in systems they detest, often leading to feelings of guilt and confusion. Winston is in his state of "self-deception" (Sorensen, 2003, p. 343). Although, Winston does not deliberately deceive himself, his enjoyment of work indirectly sustains the Party. His actions reflect a form of complicity born of necessity, rather than a conscious acceptance of the system.

Winston hates the party but he does nothing to support his course, even in the small act of keeping a record of what he does. Paradoxically, he works well for the party, "Winston, [...], spent long periods every day in going through back files of the Times and altering and embellishing news items which were to be quoted in speeches" (Orwell, 1949, p. 192). This starts a contradiction between his conflicting beliefs and actions. Winston has a strong desire to bring down the party but this desire is not matched by his actions in his work. He does not try to find the truth of the party through his work, instead, he just does his job and indirectly supports the propaganda and contributes to all the lies of the party he hates.

Winston wants to uncover the truth and expose the Party's lies with photographs he finds to undermine the Party's control over history. However, instead of preserving the evidence, he destroys it by throwing it into the memory hole, erasing the truth he desires to protect.

this was concrete evidence; it was a fragment of the abolished past, like a fossil bone which turns up in the wrong stratum and destroys a geological theory. It was enough to blow the Party to atoms, if in some way it could have been published to the world and its significance made known. [...] without uncovering it again, he dropped the photograph into the memory hole, along with some other waste papers. Within another minute, perhaps, it would have crumbled into ashes.

(Orwell, 1949, pp. 102-103)

In fact, the finding of photographs that expose the Party's manipulation of the past may support his will of bringing down the party. It seems that inner conflict and suppression are too heavy to bear so that he feels coerced to destroy the photograph, knowing it is too dangerous to keep. This shows another paradox between thoughts and acts because his inner reasoning is contradictory. He values the truth but accepts the futility of preserving it, influenced by his fear and indoctrination. This situation reflects the concept by Sorensen, where individuals may struggle with conflicting beliefs; "since the respondent does not believe what he must defend, his background beliefs conflict with the thesis in the foreground. If the respondent fails to censor his real beliefs, a later answer will be inconsistent with earlier answers" (Sorensen, 2003, p. 205). Winston always discards all the evidence he can use to overthrow the party. His actions strongly represent Doublethink, where he





is eager to find the truth and bring down the party, but at the same time he throws away all the evidence and participates in falsifying the truth.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Winston commits a paradoxical action because he seeks the truth in a totalitarian society. Life in a totalitarian society is a life where lies are commonly used to gain an advantage or to survive. Winston, who lives in such a society, commits several paradoxes. Winston paradoxes his mind because of Doublethink; this greatly influences Winston's mind to stick to his beliefs about the party and often believes in two contradictory beliefs. Winston is paradoxical in his actions. He also performs paradoxes that contradict his thoughts and actions. Paradox is what everyone in a totalitarian society will do to survive either suppression or inner conflicts as the effect of absolute power abuse.

The paradox of politicians is reflected in the way parties control contradictory policies but are still accepted as absolute truths. The party slogan “War is Peace,” “Freedom is Slavery,” and “Ignorance is Strength” illustrates how contradictory policies are created by the party but accepted as absolute truth. Big Brother and the Party claim that they work for the welfare of the people but instead oppress them through surveillance, propaganda, and history manipulation. Politician's paradoxes in *1984* illustrates how Big Brother deprives and oppresses people, yet simultaneously convinces them that they live in a utopia. This manipulation of reality fosters a sense of loyalty and fear, ensuring that dissent is quashed before it can take root. Therefore, since suppressions and inner conflicts emerge from such horrific states, paradoxes are the channels to survive as shown by Winston Smith.

It can be briefly stated that there are personal and political paradoxes that Winston has to live on for the sake of his life, and living a paradoxical life means a struggle of enduring inner conflicts. Goerge Orwell's *1984*, the novel, obviously advances these lessons.



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