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A PHILOSOPHICAL AND POLITICAL READING OF ORWELL'S *ANIMAL FARM* AND *1984* (FROM THE LANGUAGE OF REVOLUTION TO THE ETHICS OF CONTROL)

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) as twin manifestations of political philosophy and moral critique. It examines how Orwell transformed historical and ideological realities into allegorical and dystopian forms in order to unveil the corruption of revolutionary ideals and the manipulation of human consciousness under totalitarian power. Through a comparative and interdisciplinary analysis grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Michel Foucault, Hannah Arendt, and Louis Althusser, the paper reveals how Orwell's literary universe exposes the ethics of power, the politics of language, and the psychology of obedience. *Animal Farm* portrays the collective collapse of utopian revolution, while *Nineteen Eighty-Four* dramatizes the individual annihilation of moral autonomy through surveillance, propaganda, and linguistic control. Both novels converge on the theme that language, when subordinated to ideology, becomes a primary instrument of domination and self-erasure. The discussion emphasizes the philosophical relevance of Orwell's vision, showing how discourse, institutional power, and ideological reproduction interact to shape moral behavior and collective consciousness. By linking literary interpretation with political theory, the paper argues that Orwell's works constitute a coherent moral philosophy of language and truth. His insight remains urgently relevant in the contemporary digital era, where expanding surveillance systems and manipulative political rhetoric continue to redefine freedom, responsibility, and human integrity.

KEYWORDS: Orwell, totalitarianism, political philosophy, language and power, ethics, dystopia, ideology, surveillance, freedom

Introduction

George Orwell remains one of the most penetrating moral and political thinkers of the twentieth century. His two masterpieces, *Animal Farm* (1945) and

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Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949), are often read separately as a political fable and a dystopian nightmare, but together they form a unified philosophical inquiry into the relationship between language, power, and morality. Both works emerge from the historical trauma of the 1930s and 1940s, when fascism, Stalinism, and imperialism reshaped the moral imagination of Europe. Yet Orwell's genius lies in his ability to transform political reality into moral allegory, turning the concrete history of totalitarianism into a universal meditation on human freedom.

Born Eric Arthur Blair, Orwell experienced first-hand the contradictions of empire, class, and ideology. His participation in the Spanish Civil War (1936–1937) and his disillusionment with the Soviet model deeply marked his intellectual evolution. From these experiences arose a conviction that the greatest danger to civilization was not only political tyranny but the corruption of truth through language. He saw in propaganda, censorship, and euphemism the tools through which power could annihilate both conscience and reality. As he wrote in *Politics and the English Language*, “if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought” (Orwell, 1946, p. 254). This insight provides the ethical axis around which both *Animal Farm* and *1984* revolve.

In *Animal Farm*, Orwell satirizes the betrayal of revolutionary ideals by depicting animals who overthrow their human master only to recreate tyranny among themselves. Through its allegorical structure, the novel exposes how revolutionary discourse, once institutionalized, turns against its own principles. The pigs' gradual monopolization of privilege mirrors the transformation of Marxist equality into Stalinist hierarchy. The final, chilling commandment “All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others” (Orwell, 1945, p. 112) encapsulates Orwell's diagnosis of ideology as the perversion of moral language.

Four years later, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* extended this critique from the collective to the individual. Whereas *Animal Farm* dramatizes the sociopolitical cycle of revolution and corruption, *1984* envisions the epistemological consequences of total power: a world where the state controls not only behavior but perception, where “Big Brother is watching you” (Orwell, 1949, p. 3) and where language itself (Newspeak) erases the possibility of dissent. The protagonist Winston Smith embodies the last spark of moral autonomy in a system designed to extinguish it. His tragic failure reveals that totalitarianism operates most effectively through the internalization of control (Foucault, 1977, p. 93).

By reading *Animal Farm* and *1984* side by side, this paper proposes a philosophical interpretation that moves beyond historical allegory. It examines how Orwell uses the dynamics of language and consciousness to interrogate the ethics of power, anticipating the theories of Michel Foucault (1977), Hannah Arendt (1963), and Louis Althusser (1971). In doing so, Orwell's fiction emerges not merely as political warning but as moral philosophy in narrative form a sustained reflection on the fragile link between truth and freedom. Ultimately, Orwell's works demand that we re-examine the boundaries between language and

conscience, between collective ideals and individual integrity, in every age where words risk becoming instruments of control.

This study aims to show that *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* together form a coherent moral reflection on language and power, in which ideological control is exercised mainly through the distortion of discourse and the weakening of ethical judgment. By drawing on the ideas of Foucault, Althusser, and Arendt, the article offers a renewed reading of Orwell's fiction, presenting it as an ongoing philosophical exploration of how domination shapes truth, conscience, and human freedom.

Critical Context and Previous Studies

Previous scholarship on Orwell has largely focused on his novels as political allegories and historical critiques of totalitarianism. Scholars such as Crick (1982) and Meyers (2000) highlight Orwell's engagement with Stalinism and ideological oppression, while more recent studies have examined dystopian fiction as a broader form of political warning (Booker, 2020; McGowan, 2021). However, relatively few analyses approach *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a unified philosophical exploration of language, power, and moral responsibility. This study seeks to bridge literary criticism and political philosophy by foregrounding the ethical role of discourse in Orwell's work.

Methodology

This study employs a comparative, hermeneutic, and interdisciplinary methodology to analyze George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) through the lens of political philosophy and ethics. The research is grounded in a qualitative interpretative approach, emphasizing close reading, conceptual analysis, and the dialectical relationship between text, ideology, and moral consciousness. The objective is not merely to compare two literary works but to uncover the philosophical continuity that binds them the transformation of revolutionary discourse into mechanisms of control and the erosion of ethical responsibility through language (Orwell, 1945; Orwell, 1949).

The comparative dimension seeks to reveal structural and thematic correspondences between the two novels. *Animal Farm* represents the collective dimension of power and the corruption of utopian ideals, whereas *1984* embodies the individual dimension of the loss of moral selfhood under ideological surveillance (Orwell, 1945, p. 37; Orwell, 1949, p. 103). By juxtaposing these perspectives, the study exposes the evolution of Orwell's moral vision from social allegory to existential tragedy. This comparative framework allows for an integrated understanding of how Orwell constructs a coherent political ethics across his oeuvre (Crick, 1982, p. 211).

From a philosophical standpoint, the analysis draws on three interrelated theoretical axes. First, Michel Foucault's concept of power and discourse (Foucault, 1977, pp. 26–28) is used to interpret how both novels depict control not as external coercion but

as internalized discipline. The manipulation of language in *Animal Farm* and the invention of Newspeak in *1984* mirror Foucault's notion that power operates through the production of knowledge and the shaping of what can be thought or said.

Second, Louis Althusser's theory of ideological state apparatuses (Althusser, 1971, p. 138) offers a structural framework for understanding how institutions, propaganda, and ritualized slogans in Orwell's worlds sustain domination by transforming individuals into compliant subjects. The transformation of revolutionary commandments in *Animal Farm* and the Ministry of Truth's rewriting of history in *1984* exemplify ideological mechanisms of control.

This ideological process can be further understood through Karl Mannheim's distinction between ideology and utopia. While utopia emerges as a force that challenges existing power relations, ideology gradually serves to preserve and legitimize them (Mannheim, 1929). In *Animal Farm*, Orwell vividly illustrates this shift, as the initial revolutionary dream of equality slowly solidifies into a new system of domination. What begins as a vision of liberation ultimately turns into a mechanism of control, reflecting Mannheim's argument that emancipatory ideals can be absorbed and transformed by structures of power.

Third, Hannah Arendt's ethics of responsibility (Arendt, 1963, p. 289) informs the moral reading of both texts. For Arendt, evil arises not only from fanaticism but from the inability or refusal to think critically. Orwell's characters, whether the complacent animals or the fearful citizens of Oceania embody this ethical paralysis, revealing the moral stakes of language when it becomes an instrument of conformity.

Methodologically, this research combines textual hermeneutics (interpretation of meaning through contextual reading) with political and ethical theory, aiming to bridge literary criticism and philosophy. Primary sources include Orwell's novels and essays, while secondary literature draws from modern political theory and literary philosophy (Meyers, 2000, p. 54). The approach privileges interpretive synthesis over statistical or historical description, treating literature as a space of moral reasoning.

Ultimately, this methodological design enables an integrated analysis of Orwell's fiction as a philosophical discourse, one that exposes how linguistic corruption leads to moral collapse, and how the quest for freedom depends upon the preservation of truth within words (Orwell, 1946, p. 254).

Theoretical Framework: Language, Power, and Ideology

The philosophical foundation of this study rests on the convergence of three major theoretical paradigms that inform the interpretation of Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: Foucault's theory of discourse and power, Althusser's theory of ideology and subject formation, and Arendt's ethics of responsibility and moral judgment. These frameworks enable a reading of Orwell not merely as a political satirist but as a moral philosopher who translates abstract

ideas of power, freedom, and conscience into literary form (Crick, 1982, p. 198). Each theorist provides a conceptual key that unlocks a different layer of Orwell's vision of totalitarianism

1. Michel Foucault: Power, Discourse, and the Internalization of Control

Foucault's insight that "power is everywhere because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault, 1977, p. 93) reframes domination as a relational and productive force rather than a purely repressive one. In this view, power is not only imposed from above but circulates through social institutions, discourses, and everyday practices that shape what individuals can think or say. In Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, this logic is dramatized through the Party's control of language (Newspeak), history (the Ministry of Truth), and desire (the regulation of intimacy). The telescreens that observe citizens embody what Foucault terms the *panoptic gaze*, where surveillance induces self-discipline (Foucault, 1977, p. 201). The subject becomes both prisoner and guard, collapsing the distinction between victim and accomplice.

Similarly, in *Animal Farm*, control operates discursively through Squealer's rhetoric and the rewriting of the Seven Commandments demonstrating that power sustains itself through the manipulation of meaning rather than through brute violence. The constant reinterpretation of rules, such as "No animal shall sleep in a bed" becoming "No animal shall sleep in a bed with sheets," illustrates the Foucauldian mechanism of discursive control (Orwell, 1945, p. 47). Thus, Orwell's literary universe mirrors Foucault's understanding of the microphysics of power, where ideology resides in language and routine rather than in coercion alone.

2. Louis Althusser: Ideological Apparatuses and the Reproduction of Obedience

Althusser's concept of *Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)*, such as education, religion, and media clarifies how individuals are "interpellated" as subjects of ideology (Althusser, 1971, p. 138). This process explains why Orwell's societies persist: the animals on the farm and the citizens of Oceania internalize the discourse of their rulers until domination becomes naturalized.

The slogans "Four legs good, two legs bad" in *Animal Farm* and "War is peace; freedom is slavery; ignorance is strength" in *1984* function as linguistic rituals that produce ideological coherence while suppressing thought (Orwell, 1945, p. 35; Orwell, 1949, p. 26). The constant rewriting of history, a recurring motif in both novels, exemplifies Althusser's argument that ideology reproduces itself by reconfiguring memory and truth (Althusser, 1971, pp. 142–143).

Through this lens, Orwell's fiction becomes an anatomy of ideological capture the moment when language ceases to describe reality and begins to produce it. The power of the Party or Napoleon's regime lies not merely in

physical coercion but in the symbolic violence of discourse, which defines the limits of imagination and belief (Foucault, 1977, p. 27).

3. Hannah Arendt: The Banality of Evil and the Ethics of Thought

Hannah Arendt's reflections on the "banality of evil" in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* illuminate the ethical vacuum at the heart of totalitarian systems (Arendt, 1963, p. 287). For Arendt, evil is not necessarily monstrous but often bureaucratic, an outcome of individuals who obey without thinking. This concept resonates profoundly with Orwell's moral vision. The docile animals who accept every revision of the commandments and the citizens who cheer Big Brother both exemplify Arendt's diagnosis of moral paralysis. In Orwell's world, the most terrifying villain is not the dictator but the obedient subject who relinquishes moral judgment (Orwell, 1945, p. 86; Orwell, 1949, p. 187).

Orwell thus converges with Arendt in his belief that ethical freedom begins with the courage to think. Winston Smith's resistance writing a diary, questioning authority, insisting on the truth that "two plus two equals four", represents the fragile act of thought that defies the totalitarian imperative (Orwell, 1949, p. 81). Yet his defeat underscores Arendt's warning: when thinking is replaced by ideological automatism, evil becomes ordinary, and conscience collapses.

Synthesis

Together, these three frameworks illuminate Orwell's dual critique of politics and morality. Foucault explains how power infiltrates language and desire (Foucault, 1977, pp. 92–93); Althusser exposes the structural reproduction of ideology (Althusser, 1971, p. 145); and Arendt restores the ethical dimension by insisting on personal responsibility (Arendt, 1963, p. 289).

Orwell's fiction integrates these dimensions into a literary phenomenology of power, revealing how the corruption of words leads to the corruption of the self. By situating Orwell within this triangulated theoretical space, the study treats his novels as moral inquiries into the human condition under domination, offering a conceptual bridge between twentieth-century political thought and the enduring philosophical question of what it means to remain human in the face of power (Meyers, 2000, p. 103).

Analysis and Discussion

1. The Allegory of Power and the Corruption of Language in *Animal Farm*

At first sight, *Animal Farm* appears to be a simple fable about animals overthrowing their human master; yet its true subject is the linguistic and moral transformation that occurs once idealism becomes institutionalized. Orwell presents the early revolutionary moment as a utopian impulse toward equality embodied in Old Major's speech, where the call for justice is articulated in pure,

universal terms: “All men are enemies. All animals are comrades” (Orwell, 1945, p. 6). The moment the revolution succeeds, however, language itself begins to fracture under the pressure of power.

Squealer’s constant reinterpretation of commandments “No animal shall sleep in a bed” becomes “No animal shall sleep in a bed with sheets” (Orwell, 1945, p. 47) represents what Foucault (1977, pp. 26–27) calls the discursive production of truth: the act of redefining moral norms to preserve authority. What once expressed collective liberation becomes an instrument of control. Orwell thus dramatizes the Foucauldian insight that “power and knowledge directly imply one another” (Foucault, 1977, p. 27).

The manipulation of memory and history intensifies as the pigs assume human characteristics, culminating in the final paradoxical maxim: “All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others” (Orwell, 1945, p. 112). This sentence, perhaps the most famous in Orwell’s oeuvre, embodies the moral contradiction at the heart of ideology. In Althusserian terms, it signals the interpellation of subjects into a false consciousness: the animals come to accept inequality as a natural truth because it is linguistically normalized (Althusser, 1971, p. 143).

What makes *Animal Farm* philosophically significant is its portrayal of power not merely as repression but as semantic corruption, a process through which language ceases to signify moral reality (Foucault, 1977, p. 200). The revolutionary dream collapses not through external invasion but through internal erosion. The animals’ inability to think critically mirrors Arendt’s (1963, p. 288) notion of the banality of evil: evil thrives when thought disappears. Thus, Orwell’s farm becomes a moral microcosm of totalitarian modernity, where obedience replaces reflection and fear supplants ethical responsibility.

2. The Ethics of Control and the Erasure of Self in Nineteen Eighty-Four

If *Animal Farm* explores the collective degradation of moral ideals, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* turns inward to the psychological and epistemological mechanisms of domination. Winston Smith, the novel’s protagonist, becomes a philosophical figure of the modern conscience. His rebellion is minimal writing in a diary, falling in love, affirming that “Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four” (Orwell, 1949, p. 81), yet within the context of the Party’s absolute control, such gestures are revolutionary.

The Party’s power derives from its ability to determine reality. As O’Brien tells Winston, “Reality exists in the human mind, and nowhere else” (Orwell, 1949, p. 205). This statement encapsulates the novel’s transformation of Foucault’s panopticons into metaphysical totalitarianism. The omnipresent telescreens function not merely as instruments of surveillance but as devices of internalized discipline, producing what Foucault (1977, p. 201) describes as “docile bodies” subjects who regulate themselves in anticipation of the gaze.

Newspeak, the regime's official language, is perhaps Orwell's most profound philosophical invention. By eliminating words like *freedom* or *justice*, the Party eradicates the very concepts they represent (Orwell, 1949, p. 55). Althusser's (1971, pp. 142–143) theory of ideological reproduction finds its perfect narrative expression here: by controlling linguistic structures, the Party controls the categories of thought. *Thoughtcrime*, therefore, is not an act but the possibility of difference.

The novel's moral climax the moment Winston betrays Julia under torture, demonstrates Arendt's insight into the fragility of ethics under total domination. Evil, in Orwell's vision, does not appear as ecstatic cruelty but as obedience emptied of conscience. When Winston cries, "Do it to her! Not me!" (Orwell, 1949, p. 236), he embodies the annihilation of the moral self. In that instant, he ceases to be a thinking subject and becomes, in Arendt's (1963, p. 289) sense, an unthinking functionary of power. The torture room of the Ministry of Love thus becomes a metaphysical space where ideology conquers the soul by eradicating empathy.

Orwell's narrative structure reinforces this philosophical descent. The novel's tripartite division from rebellion to capture to re-education mirrors the stages of ideological conditioning (Meyers, 2000, p. 118). It is the process by which truth becomes mutable and moral certainty dissolves. The Party's slogans "War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength." (Orwell, 1949, p. 26) operate as a linguistic triad that erases the logic of contradiction. Through these inversions, Orwell demonstrates that the destruction of reason precedes the destruction of freedom (Foucault, 1977, p. 202).

3. Dialectics of Collective and Individual Rebellion

A comparative reading of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* reveals a dialectical progression from collective revolution to individual conscience, reflecting the transformation of political struggle into an ethical one. In *Animal Farm*, the collective pursuit of equality degenerates into a hierarchy of privilege; in *1984*, the individual pursuit of truth collapses under systemic coercion. Both trajectories illustrate what Foucault (1977, pp. 92–93) termed the "mutual implication of power and resistance": every act of liberation already contains the seeds of domination.

In the early chapters of *Animal Farm*, the animals' unity appears genuine, sustained by shared ideals. Yet the same structures that empower them the commandments, the slogans, the rituals become instruments of control once monopolized by the pigs (Orwell, 1945, pp. 35–47). The collective dream transforms into a collective delusion. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the inverse occurs: an individual's effort to reclaim moral truth Winston's insistence that two plus two make four is crushed by the overwhelming apparatus of state ideology (Orwell, 1949, p. 81). The personal conscience is suffocated by the collective lie.

These opposing but complementary dynamics illustrate Orwell's overarching thesis: that the failure of political revolutions and the failure of

personal ethics are two expressions of the same moral crisis (Crick, 1982, p. 226). When language becomes detached from truth, whether in the public square or the private mind, totalitarianism triumphs (Foucault, 1977, p. 27).

From a philosophical perspective, Orwell's vision anticipates Arendt's critique of modernity as the loss of the world the disintegration of a shared space of meaning where truth can be collectively affirmed (Arendt, 1963, p. 288). Likewise, it resonates with Foucault's idea that modern power operates not by silencing but by producing discourse the slogans, chants, and ideological formulas that masquerade as thought (Foucault, 1977, pp. 199–200). Orwell's achievement lies in dramatizing these theories decades before they were articulated, transforming them into emotional experience rather than abstract doctrine (Meyers, 2000, p. 119).

Both novels converge in their portrayal of language as the threshold of freedom. The animals' gullibility and Winston's despair stem from the same ontological vulnerability: when words lose integrity, reality itself dissolves (Orwell, 1945, p. 112; Orwell, 1949, p. 205). Orwell's prose thus enacts what might be called a moral phenomenology of power, an exploration of how domination invades perception, memory, and conscience (Foucault, 1977, p. 201).

4. The Continuing Relevance of Orwell's Ethical Vision

Reading Orwell through the lenses of Foucault, Althusser, and Arendt not only deepens the understanding of his historical context but also underscores the enduring philosophical resonance of his work. In today's world of digital surveillance, algorithmic manipulation, and post-truth politics, the mechanisms of control that Orwell imagined have become embedded in technological and linguistic systems. The telescreen has evolved into the smartphone, and *Newspeak* has become the fragmented discourse of online propaganda (Orwell, 1949, pp. 3–4; Foucault, 1977, p. 201).

Orwell's ethical message remains urgent: freedom begins in the responsibility to preserve the integrity of words. His novels insist that moral resistance is inseparable from linguistic clarity (Orwell, 1946, p. 254). As long as language retains meaning, the possibility of truth and therefore of humanity endures. This conviction aligns with Arendt's belief that "the moment we begin to think, we are already engaged in moral action" (Arendt, 1963, p. 287). For Orwell, thought and ethics are inseparable; the destruction of one inevitably entails the destruction of the other.

In Foucauldian terms, Orwell's vision continues to expose the subtler mechanisms of modern domination, what Foucault (1977, p. 203) describes as the *capillary circulation of power* through discourse, institutions, and knowledge. The Party's control of language in *1984* finds its contemporary echo in the algorithmic filtering of speech and perception. Likewise, Althusser's (1971, pp. 145–146) notion of ideological reproduction can be read today in the normalization of digital conformity how social media and political rhetoric interpellated individuals into predictable patterns of belief and reaction.

Ultimately, Orwell's fiction insists that moral clarity depends upon linguistic honesty. His characters' downfall arises not from ignorance but from acquiescence the surrender of words to authority. The closing scene of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where Winston loves Big Brother, dramatizes what Arendt (1963, p. 289) calls the victory of thoughtless obedience over conscience. By equating linguistic integrity with ethical freedom, Orwell constructs what may be called a "philosophy of truth": a moral vision in which the defense of reality begins with the defense of language (Orwell, 1949, p. 240).

Conclusion

George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* form a unified moral and philosophical vision of the modern world, a meditation on how power corrupts both language and conscience. Through the allegory of the farm and the dystopia of Oceania, Orwell demonstrates that totalitarianism thrives not simply through coercion, but through the manipulation of truth. His fiction exposes the moral anatomy of domination: the corruption of ideals in *Animal Farm* and the annihilation of self in *1984* reveal two stages of the same process, where ideology first conquers language and then consciousness (Orwell, 1945, p. 112; Orwell, 1949, p. 205).

By aligning Orwell's insights with those of Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, and Hannah Arendt, the study has shown how his literary imagination anticipates the philosophical questions that would later define the twentieth century: How does power circulate through discourse? How are subjects formed by ideology? How does moral thought survive under domination? Foucault's theory of discourse illuminates the microphysics of control in Orwell's world, Althusser's ideology theory explains the ritualized obedience of his characters, and Arendt's ethics of responsibility restores the moral dimension of Orwell's despair (Foucault, 1977, p. 93; Althusser, 1971, p. 145; Arendt, 1963, p. 287).

The tragedy of Orwell's heroes is that they fail to preserve truth in a world that denies its existence. Yet this failure itself becomes testimony to the enduring human need for meaning. In this sense, Orwell's works are not merely political allegories but philosophical treatises on the ethics of freedom. They remind us that tyranny begins when words lose integrity, and that resistance begins in thought itself (Orwell, 1946, p. 254).

Even in the twenty-first century, where power hides behind algorithms and ideologies masquerade as information, Orwell's moral appeal remains vital. His fiction continues to echo Arendt's warning that "the most radical revolutionary will become a conservative the day after the revolution" (Arendt, 1963, p. 289) – a reminder that every society must guard against the corruption of its ideals. Ultimately, Orwell challenges us to defend not only political liberty but the moral and linguistic conditions that make liberty possible.

Taken together, *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* convey Orwell's lasting philosophical warning: when language is separated from truth, both political freedom and moral responsibility begin to erode. Through allegory and

dystopian narrative, Orwell anticipates modern theories of ideological control, showing that domination is sustained not only by force, but by the shaping of discourse itself. His work therefore stands as a powerful ethical reflection on resistance, reminding us that the integrity of language is the first foundation of genuine freedom.

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