

# Critical Essay #1: written by Colin Austin

"There's nothing more destructive to the metaphysical fabric that binds us than the untimely murder of one human being by another" - Minority Report

By examining the works of George Orwell and Philip K. Dick, with 1984 and Minority Report respectively, one can witness the effects of a controlling society on the human condition. In Minority Report, a post-modern society in the year 2054 turns to predictive crime methods, arresting people who will commit future crimes. Alternately, 1984 portrays a society that is at constant war; citizens are denied all luxuries which are exhausted by the war efforts, but more importantly they are denied their thoughts and actions. Through systems of control, each work dissects the human condition. Elite policy makers have control over the general public in both stories, an aspect of each work that is heavily criticized and ultimately the common link between them.

The notion of a perfect society has been theorized and sought after by governments and power holders throughout all of history. Through means of strict control and regulation, cultures have adversely created authorities that promise perfect freedom both economic and personal, yet only create totalitarian social orders. Although some political theorists are convinced that true socialistic communities can exist, there can never be an ideal utopian society due to the human conditions of power and love.

Although Minority Report takes place in the near future, the original short story written by Philip K. Dick was written in the post World War II era as was George Orwell's 1984. In a changing world with national powers rebuilding from the war, both authors prophecies or rather criticized what the future would hold. George Orwell "was essentially a political writer who wrote of his own times... He criticized communism but considered himself a socialist" (1984, introduction). Such political references are evident in his novel. In a totalitarian society, 1984 shows how an escalation of power will lead to either the prevalence of the elite where the rest of society submits or where the middle class revolts and does not submit to an oppressive way of life.

Minority Report on the other hand takes place in a democratic society where murder has turned into an epidemic. Rather than complete submission to 'pre-crime,' the United States was still in the trial phase; secluded only to the Washington D.C. area to arrest citizens before they committed a crime. Each work portrays a unique and vastly different political realm, and together they demonstrate the effects of elite power structures, where the common man is neglected. A similar scenario would be in the trial stages of the 'Revolution' in 1984. At this point in history, citizens had the option of ceding power to the elite policy makers or to question the implications of such a society to have what is just prevail.

Emmanuel Goldstein, in his book "The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism," which was denied to the Oceanic people discusses how history teaches us that society throughout the ages has been a struggle between the high, middle and low classes. The elite are prominent to lead, the middle class wishes to become the elite, and the low class intends to create a culture where everyone is equal (1984, 166-8). Oceania has effectively denied the middleclass of their luxuries and rights, so as there would never be a revolt to the elitist supreme rule. The high class essentially created a "perfect" system that could not be challenged. "Only by enacting a system of checks and balances, can a true democracy remove itself from the power struggles of a dictatorship" (Mines, 23). It is important for society to reflect on itself and to monitor its actions. In Minority Report the pre-cogs have claimed to be a perfect system, but as Danny Witwer, an FBI agent investigating the

Pre-crime system states, “there’s a flaw, its human, there always is” (Minority Report). The human condition is unique in both works as to how the body reacts to changing environments, ultimately created by the systems that control those environments.

Jon Anderton, the main character in *Minority Report* as well as Agatha the main pre-cog in this work, are both driven by love in their journey to expose the flaws of Pre-Crime. Beyond his work, Jon Anderton’s passion in life is avenging his son’s killer, just as Agatha’s anger lies in the death of her mother. In order for pre-crime to work, Agatha’s mother had to be killed in order to preserve the pre-cogs harmony. This led to a conspiracy where the developers of pre-crime used the system they created to conceal a murder necessary to keep it alive. Driven by power and ego, Lamar Burgess created the flaw that would eventually cripple pre-crime. Set up in a plot to correct the public image of pre-crime, Anderton realized that the human character has an ultimate choice in the face of murder. In the end choice prevails as a stronger force than predictive crime methods. Rather than the end justifying the means in government, the means are justified as a foreseen end. “There’s a flaw, its human, there always is” (Minority Report).

The human condition can not be controlled by a system or government. In a world where an elitist society has already formed and suppressed its constituents, such as in 1984, the effects of this control can be seen on a lot larger scale. Winston Smith suppressed his actions and the way he composed himself. Yet inside, he questioned and hated the government that he worked for. He yearned for love, he yearned for the truth, and he yearned to live a free life. His beacon came in the form of Julia who exposed him to a free life with love. As he opened his eyes to these, he slowly answered the question of what truth is. In a society where people who disobeyed the government were “vanished,” an unregulated or unchecked structure left little room for any individual to pursue these actions. It ultimately was the need for love and/or power that led these people to be detained by the Thought Police.

Recent studies in psychopharmacology advocate what George Orwell and Philip Dick suggested 50 years ago holds scientific truth. As humans have evolved from a time when instincts drove human desires, society has been a big factor in shaping the human condition. In 1984 we see a society where humans are secluded and generally unhappy. It is almost impossible to get married for love, and there is often no time to socialize. *Minority Report* shows a society that was plagued by murder where people became fearful and corruption took over basic human emotions. Doctor Bruce G Charlton and the University of Newcastle published this study on psychopharmacology and the human condition:

“Unless we are political utopians it seems very probable that this is broadly the kind of world most people shall continue to inhabit for the foreseeable future. Indeed, the interest in psychopharmacology has grown inversely with the decline of belief in utopian politics. Political idealism is now just a temporary teenage phase - soon past. The rest of us are starting to realize that if we cannot change the world to suit human nature, our only option is to change human nature to suit the world.”

Denying personal freedoms allows for a controlling political environment to emerge, however, Dr. Charlton also points out that the effects on society at large are slowly becoming felt. 1984 and *Minority Report* are cautionary tales that explain although a society might function better or safer, then human condition adversely feels the consequences.

In a world that is “bare, hungry and dilapidated,” post war devastation created a dim future, one that a fruitful past could never have imagined (1984, 155). By essentially erasing the past, Big Brother controls the attitudes of

its citizens. In doing so, Big Brother is controlling the thoughts of its citizens. More over, by controlling love, InsoG controls the heart of human emotion, training the citizens of Oceania to force those emotions into hate. As a psychological propaganda “2 minutes of hate” along with a “hate week” are common occurrences. Not only through these hate session, but on every telescreen and billboard Big Brother shows its influence on Oceania. Washington D.C. is also lined with television commercials and video billboards that influence the public at large that pre-crime works. Lamar Burgess, one of the founders of pre-crime stated, “You don’t get to choose the things you believe in, they choose you” (Minority Report). These subliminal messages in present day life are a very useful and powerful to shape a persons attitude. Yet, as both authors demonstrate, if these tools are used to brainwash a society then they are debilitating to the free human condition. In a present day society where they media is trusted as always truthful, this reality has become all too evident.

Minority Report by Stephen Spielberg shows a clearer image of today’s future outlook; incorporating the components of the computer age which 1984 lacks. Along with the technological component, Minority Report is less distinguishable as it deals with altering the future rather than the past. This discrepancy delves on the physical theories of time space, yet develops similar effects to altering the past. Central to this issue is the notion of physically changing time space rather than altering a perception of time space. If 1984 physically changed the past, it would technically create a far more perfect model, yet with dire consequences. On the lines of the butterfly effect, altering the future has inverse implications to that of the past, yet such a divine interaction placed in the hands of a single authority could have equally if not more severe consequences. Suffering under the hardships of a depressed society offers the reality of a physical life. Alternately, repressing the ability to live a life to someone who could potentially choose the right path is denying humanity the right to live. These minority reports are few, yet certainly real and covered up. The governing law enacted with the Department of Precrime is a theoretically sound idea, but completely defaces the concept of just humanity, where as 1984 defaces humanity through the concepts it imposes.

Society must be cautious of how it regulates its citizens. The more and more governments impede on the basic human conditions that are tied to human instinct; the more we separate ourselves from true liberty and freedom. Both personally and politically, 1984 and Minority Report caution viewers and readers that unless mankind ensures the most basic needs of love and power, a system of control cannot effectively rule. There is no such thing as a perfect society and there never will be due to these essential human needs. The ultimate question that emerges from both works questions mankind: Should one accept a flawed society and its control or will one notice a flawed societies control and do something about it?

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