

An Analysis of Dystopian Political Philosophy in *Nineteen Eighty Four*—in Rousseau's Social Contract View

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Abstract

A highly centralized, oligarchy politics is constructed in satirical political allegory *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell. The rationale of social contract is distorted through a zero-sum game between public will and public opinion, the reversal of power and rights, the paradoxical relationship of freedom and slavery, and dissolution of rationality of the rule of law and government, where the complex and sophisticated social power mechanisms have effectively achieved the purpose of manipulating the masses' mind, maintaining centralized rule, thereby constructing a political dystopian society. After the review and reference to the Western social contract thoughts, this paper seeks recourse to Rousseau's contract philosophy, trying to probe into the components in social contract and its practical logic of absurdity and regression in the dystopian society depicted in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. According to the study, in 1984, the government power formed by the transfer rights by the people obliterated the legitimacy of power source, disguised the will of all in the ruling class as a fallacious general will, and utilised the law and political power as a tool to invalidate the rights of people. Eventually, the contract assurance to freedom with reasonable constraints was reduced to a nominal tool of servile rule, which caused the deplorable fact that the democratic nature of social contract is evaporated, and the social contract converted into an accomplice of the oligarchy dictatorship.

Keywords

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Social Contract, Dystopia, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Political Philosophy

1. Introduction

Written by George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty Four* (abbreviated as *1984* hereafter)

is reflective of the trend of a dystopia, totalitarian political landscape under the contemplation of the radical, left-wing socialist inclinations as context. Along with the *Brave New World* by British Aldous Huxley and *We* by Russian Evgeny Ivanovich Zamiatin, 1984 is deemed as a political allegory where a dystopian narrative is delineated, signified by an oppressive and horrifying atmosphere, where human agency is utterly subjugated by the iron grip of power, individual freedoms are mercilessly curtailed, intellectual autonomy is rigorously suppressed, and the populace is plunged into abject destitution. This political allegory is tintured with dense color of dystopia where the embedded metaphors are huge ironies against an abnormal totalitarian society in the guise of a communism. The world set in novel is partitioned into three superstates: Oceania, Eastasia, and Eurasia, which is perpetually embroiled in conflict. Winston Smith, as the protagonist, works in the Ministry of Truth, tasked with the perversion of historical records, yet harbors a spirit of independent thought. In his duration of the Oceania, his skepticism towards the omnipresent and autocratic figurehead, “Big Brother”, intensifies, arousing his doubts towards the nature of this regime. His insights and dissent are clandestinely documented in a diary with aspirations to challenge. After his alliance with Julia, a zealous member of the ruling party, his participation stimulated a surge of an underground resistance movement; however, they only were apprehended by Thought Police, subjected to relentless psychological and physical torment, culminating in their ultimate capitulation. As a narrative thread, Smith’s experience exposes the irrational trajectory of a diseased and perverted totalitarian society, positing it as a grotesque caricature of the communist dystopia. It underscores the inevitable deterioration into a totalitarianism tragedy, in any guise, inflicts upon its people and nation at large. Certain terms as “Big Brother”, “double-think”, and “Newspeak” have since gained recognition in the annals of formal English lexicons. To view incisively, the operation and configuration of such a collective ruling regime is a microcosm mirror of complicated social relationships embedded in a society, where the ideology as social contract stemmed from the Enlightenment Age is repudiated to a certain extent.

The strong critically political and literary value of this novel is based on the author’s anti-facist experience in journalism. The chaotic and tense international and domestic social ecology inspired Orwell to write the novel, a monumental masterpiece that responds to the era of totalitarian capitalism, which directs its critique at Nazi products embedded in Western capitalism, imperialism and Stalinism in the lens of democratic socialism. Caught in the plight of the dim, impenetrable scenario inspires him to discern the terrible deterioration of a long-established democracy caused by a synthesis of multiple factors, and then write this post-cold war novel, which was remarked as that “*Nineteen Eighty-Four* presents Orwell’s ultimate conclusion about the future of a criminal class society, and it is clear that he sees no future in his own class” (Woodcock, 1984: p. 221). Numerous macro themes are interwoven in this novel delicately, forming a polyvocal anti-totalitarian ironic narrative about freedom, slavery, ignorance, power, war, and

peace, presenting the abuse, destruction, and “remaking” of people in a totalitarian society through Winston’s point of view. To promote the alarming efficacy of this novel through scrutinizing underlying political rationale, this paper aims to further explicate the political logic of such retrograde in the lens of French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau’s thoughts on social contract as theoretical framework, and endeavors to offer some inspirations of a fine political apparatus away from a perverted one in the current contemporary context. This paper is divided into three major parts: the first reviews social contract theory with their useful inspirations and Rousseau’s viewpoints, followed by meticulous explication of the embodiment of dystopian political milieu and procedure demonstrated of its political negation against social contract in 1984; it will be concluded with the discussion of the underlying political and philosophical summary as well as some suggestions hereof elicited.

2. Review of Social Contract Theory

2.1. A Brief Review of Western Social Contract Theory Genealogy

The social contract theory antecedents are said to be found in Greek and Stoic philosophy and Roman and Canon Law, and the heyday of the social contract was the mid-17th to early 19th centuries, when it emerged as the leading doctrine of political legitimacy. Contract, whose tenet posits that individuals, within the “state of nature”, voluntarily relinquish their inherent rights through a consensual contract to establish political governance; similarly viewing, it is a “theory of state genesis” (Zhang, 2022: p. 56). Within this theoretical foundation, contract is employed as a rationale for political authority and as a mechanism to circumscribe its exercise.

The precondition for this theory emanates from an examination of human condition without any political order as the “state of nature”. In this condition, individuals’ actions are bound only by their personal power and conscience. From this, social contract theorists seek to demonstrate, in different ways, why a rational individual would voluntarily consent to give up their natural freedom to obtain the benefits of political order. The process of establishing an abstract relationship based on power transference between individual and community formulates a form of contract. However, once this implied contract consciousness is violated, the prospective benefits engendered are not garnered by the masses; there are possible outcomes as chaos, incessant strife, mutual assail, impeachment and even severe political persecution, which will be degenerated into a political “dystopia”. Compound of “dys” and “topia”, “dystopia” indicates an opposite utopia as an evil one (Xie, 2006: p. 12). Converse to an affirmative, idealized state as utopia for future life, dystopia reveals a negative tendency of the future life.

A philosophical investigation of the emergence and formulation of civil society can only be actualized through proper and critical navigation of contractual theories in order to bring to limelight the touchstone of this discussion. Contractual theories initiation can be traced back to the sketch description of Plato’s answer

of “what is justice?” by representing a social contract explanation for the nature of justice in *Republic*. After the Renaissance, such thoughts are further enriched by philosophers represented by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Rawls, and David Gauthier, etc.

Hobbes in his political work set a preliminary historical contract theory in *Leviathan* during the English Civil War; he aimed describing the necessity of a strong central authority to avoid the evil of discord and bellicosity. Beginning from a mechanistic understanding of human beings and passions, Hobbes postulates what life would be like without government: “the state of nature” is a stage where “each person would have a right, or license, to everything in the world”, which also would lead to a “war of all against all” (*bellum omnium contra omnes*) (Hobbes, 1999: p. 30). According to Hobbes, society is a corollary with fierce suppression and forceful administration to avoid reducing in to the “state of nature” neath a sovereign authority, to whom all individuals in that society cede some rights for the sake of protection. After the Renaissance, his thoughts greatly influenced successors in politics philosophy. For instance, founded on the necessity of establishing a strong representative and collective authority to rule, John Locke inherited partially but quite different to Hobbes’s; Locke believes that human nature is characterised by reason and tolerance under the permission of being selfish. In a natural state all people were equal and independent, and everyone had a natural right to defend his “Life, health, Liberty, or Possessions” (Locke, 2003: p. 31), which exerted an everlasting influence on the sovereign principles in “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”, as embodied in the American *Declaration of Independence*. In his monograph *First Treatise* and *Second Treatise*, the fact is argued that the natural state of humanity without an institutionalized government does not mean it is lawless; human beings are still subject to the laws of God and nature. In contrast to Hobbes who posited the state of nature as a hypothetical possibility, Locke takes great pains to show that such a state did indeed exist. Whereas Hobbes stresses the disadvantages of the state of nature, Locke points to its good sides, which is “free, if full of continual dangers” (Locke, 2003: p. 25). Finally, the proper alternative to the natural state is not political dictatorship or tyranny but democratically elected government and the effective protection of basic human rights to life, liberty, and property under the rule of law. It is to avoid the state of war that often occurs in the state of nature, and to protect their private property that men enter into civil or political society, i.e., state of society civil society. Besides, the governmental separation of powers is also put forward to check powers, and he believes that revolution is not only a right but an obligation in some circumstance to eschew the risk of developing a despotic authority.

As further progress on predecessors, Rousseau’s view further probed into the relationship of the people and the emergence of justified power. His arguments is fundamentally anchored in the concept of the “general will”, whereby the ultimate authority within a nation resides with the populace, and the collective will serves as the wellspring of all legitimate rights. His philosophical stance eschews alignment

with either Thomas Hobbes's doctrine of absolute monarchy or John Locke's doctrine of the separation of powers. Instead, Rousseau critiques Hobbes's absolutist perspective, contending that the populace bestows its totality of power upon "the community", i.e. the state itself, not upon an individual. It is through this lens that the general will is the cornerstone of his popular sovereignty, which is a pivotal element of social contract theory.

While, dialectically speaking, through abovementioned proposals of the inception, cause or presentational forms, the dystopian representation in *1984* could be deduced from the misconstrual from the source of power, the justification of national state, the lopsided relationship between general will and will of all.

2.2. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Social Contract Thoughts

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's magnum opus *Economie Politique (Discourse on Political Economy and The Social Contract)* outlines the basis for a legitimate political order within a framework of classical republicanism. It begins with the dramatic opening lines, "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains" (Rousseau, 2003: p. 6). This work published in 1762 became one of the most influential works of political philosophy in the Western tradition. Rousseau claimed that the state of nature was a primitive condition without law or morality, which human beings left for the benefits and necessity of cooperation. Accordingly, as society developed, division of labour and private property required the human race to adopt institutions of law. In the degenerate phase of society, man is prone to be in frequent competition with his fellow men while also becoming increasingly dependent on them. Such pressure threatens both his survival and his freedom. Only by joining together into civil society through social contract abandoning their claims of natural right, can individuals both preserve themselves and remain free. This is because submission to the authority of the general will of the people as a whole guarantees individuals against being subordinated to the wills of others and also ensures that they obey themselves because they are, collectively, the authors of the law. Sovereignty (or the power to make the laws) should be in the hands of the people. "Every citizen is a constituent part of the sovereign power of the state" (Rousseau, 2003: p. 84). General will, according to Rousseau, emerges when individuals cede all their rights to the communal entity of the people, thus endowing it with the authority to act in their collective interest. His social contract thoughts is also inherently geared towards the empowerment and sovereignty of the people, advocating for a governance structure that is both by and for the populace, reflecting their unified will and collective interests.

Furthermore, a marked distinction between the sovereign and the government is also clarified. The former is composed of magistrates, charged with implementing and enforcing the general will, while the latter is the rule of law, ideally decided on by direct democracy in an assembly (Rousseau, 1987: p. 45). Rousseau opposed the idea that the people should exercise sovereignty via a representative assembly. "The people as a whole is the sovereign, and every man is the people." "Every

citizen is one of the sovereign powers of the state. the general will is born when men give up all their rights to the popular community”¹ (Rousseau, 2003: p. 70), where a republican government should be founded as an idealized form of the city-state in the modern context.

Nevertheless, Rousseau’s utopian vision is so ideal that is tintured with oddly apolitical conservatism. Neither did he display interest in political struggles for power; nor did he devoted time to conceiving political or parliamentary institutions, even the concerns about the economic justice. Although he has devised the basic performing mechanism of a contract society based on “peace, union and equality”, he hasn’t contemplate on parliamentary rules or an economic bill of right with complex, concrete legal or jural stipulation. It should be pointed out that his theory is tend to be more applicable to a relatively small or specific community of citizens, which boasts a compatibility with such extreme authoritative society depicted in *1984*. He rejected the idea of a representative democracy, for he holds that representatives would rob citizens not of their sovereignty but also of their civic responsibilities (Rousseau, 2017: p. 12). With aspect to this point, such proposal may maximally ensure everyone’s will directly, but to some extent, an inclination to unchecked right exercise is subject to be usurped by some sinister totalitarian politicians. This limitation, in return, may provide certain inspiration on possibilities to the emergence of authoritative government that lacks monitoring, checks or balance of power separation.

3. Dissection of Society Dystopia in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* from Rousseau’s Social Contract

Utopia and modernity are closely connected (Xie, 2006: p. 10), and utopia is a product of modernity. As Karl Max portrays in *German Ideology*, the ultimate goal for humankind is the liberation from labor and social relationship, to achieve the free and comprehensive development in the progress of human quality (Marx & Engels, 1965: p. 60). This resonates with the key theme of modernity in communist movement, i.e., a nearly utopian society. The concepts of science, rationality and progress are the constituent elements of modernity because they provide a source of power for human emancipation, and they are therefore the ideological principles on which various utopian visions are built. However, due to either mistreatment or dialectical defects embedded in those elements, the emancipation of people from the old shackles is accompanied by new and heavier shackles on people. Just as Krishan Kumar puts it, utopia often “begin with absolute freedom and end with absolute despotism” (Kumar, 1987: p. 119). From the political and sociological perspective, such outcome is inextricably with the misoperation of governing apparatus and mistreatment of technology. Politically speaking, the formation of a dystopian society shares close association with deformation of contract spirit, since in social contract, contracts are used to prove the legitimacy of political authority, or to impose restrictions on political authority (Zhang & He,

¹This argument can be referred in Chapter XV, Volume 3 in *On the Social Contract*.

2024: p. 105). Here, a sociological and historical view is adopted, to scrutinize the underlying process of a delineated dystopian communistic society and how the original nature of social contract is broken in *1984*.

3.1. Presupposition of the State of Nature

The state of nature has been the pivotal premise to formulate social contract. An scrutiny of macro setting in social contract engage with the concept of the state of nature, which sets the social model before the state. Different illustration into the state of nature assist scholars to penetrate into the essence and inception of a country through social contract theory. Thinkers such as Grotius and Hobbes, in their assumptions about the state of nature, described a pre-state existence marked by ignorance and brutal strife among individuals, suggesting that the state of nature emerged from a collection of interests (Yao, 2011: p. 33). While, Rousseau envisioned the pristine state as one where individuals enjoyed freedom without intense rivalry. He posited that the primal social configuration was the family unit, with offspring transitioning to independent personhood upon ceasing reliance on their progenitors, thus forming the state. Views of presupposition of the state of nature sets keynote of politics and milieu of social contract, majorly reflecting in this novel.

As the initial stage before the construction of a political contract, settings in *1984* reflects and echoes with Rousseau's presupposition of the state of nature. Rousseau argued that humans began in a state of freedom, with the advent of private property instigating a collective convergence and a cession of authority to the state, thereby consolidating state power (Rousseau, 2003: p. 55). This transition from individual autonomy to collective governance is central to the social contract's narrative. Proletarians in *1984* seem to live a difficult life, but a still peaceful one despite clandestine political surveillance and white terror. Protagonist Winston also believes that the proletarians are the hope of the world. Perhaps the existence of class allows different people to have different interests, and even causes endless disputes because of interests. But the proletarian's life should be peaceful, which coincides with Rousseau's definition of the state of nature. Therefore, such understandings of the state of nature coincides, but they are differentiated by a striking foregrounding of an extremely authoritative state.

3.2. Game between General Will and Will of All

The interplay between the general will and will of all made of individual wills is of basic power relationship within the framework of social contract. In Rousseau's argumentation, the emergence of sovereignty realizes right of transfer from the individual to the group, in order to ensure individual's being free and unrestrained from others. That means, a justified reason for a government is to protect its member's right of freedom and assets by forming a general will from the assemblage, refinement of will of all; the two terms epitomizes two contrary of will execution, cannot be muddled together. As Rousseau argues in *Discourse on Political Economy*

²This arguments can be found in Chapter V, Volume 1.

and *The Social Contract* (abbreviated as *On the Social Contract hereafter*), “The total alienation of each associate, together with all his rights, to the whole community” (2003: 23). The only legitimate social contract, according to Rousseau, is one that represents the shared interest by a collective community via a reasonable alienation of individual’s will; this community isn’t the sum of forces as an eclectic one. Besides, their sovereignty, like their freedom, is unalienable, and they may not transfer their sovereignty to anyone else or submit to the will of any others (Rousseau, 2017: p. 10). The originality of Rousseau’s social contract is that the people bind themselves to a contract but do not subject themselves to any authority except a collective will that is towering above them, revered by all, looms the strange concept of the people’s “General Will”. The association between the individual’s and the general is reciprocal, as Rousseau states that: “Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and, in our corporate capacity, we receive each member of the community as an indivisible³ part of the whole.” (Rousseau, 2003: p. 23)

Succinctly, it could be concluded that the unity of the state is predicated on the extraction of a general interest from individual wills, with this common interest serving as the state’s supreme directive, encapsulated by “general will”. It isn’t merely the aggregate of unprocessed will of all; which does not inherently equate with the general will due to lack of refinement. Since there is inherent antithesis between personal interests and the general will, individual interests are inherently self-serving and cannot encapsulate the collective interests of the populace. An individual’s actions, driven by personal interests, represent an exercise of inherent freedom, which may conflict with the public interest. The commitment to public interests is thus perceived as an act of sacrifice. If an individual refuse to fulfill his civic duties while still partaking in civil rights, this dereliction of duty may incite the intervention of national laws. Prolonged non-compliance with these obligations could ultimately lead to the disintegration of the political community.

A stark illustration of the conflict between the general will and will of all is conspicuously presented in Orwell’s *1984*. Both the central and peripheral parties, epitomized by figures like Big Brother or O’Brien, serve as personifications of individual interests, crafted as political idols to embody the collection of individual will, instead of general will. The Oceania state exemplifies the pernicious extent of governmental intervention and economic monopolization, serving as an instrument for the ruling elite to exert dominance and exploitation. This oligarchy, termed “manager”, comprises a cadre of professional elites, including bureaucrats, corporate executives, scientists, and engineers. Although, as in individual, they possess minimal private wealth, they wield the power to make the individual’s will overrides the general one, to “collectively exploit” the populace through their stewardship of state apparatuses, control over the means of production, and preferential allocation of goods.

As previously discussed, without the refinement of general will, the mere

³In Jean Jacques Rousseau’s Geneva Manuscripts, “indivisible” is written as “non-negotiable”.

aggregation of individual interests cannot culminate in a collective one capable of guiding the governance of a nation. In this dystopian narrative, Oceania is devoid of laws and regulations, existing solely under the dominion of the supreme Party, whose control over the populace is not processed from the individual will, but from a vacancy of a justified modulation that can represent the refined collection of its member's will. Even if they possess actual control, their rule lacks legitimacy under contemporary legal philosophy, which posits that sovereignty resides with the people and that state power is a manifestation of the people's will. The sovereignty in question here is not merely the narrow concept of territorial sovereignty but rather the broader notion of state authority. On this foundation, law is the will of the ruling class elevated to the status of state will, with the people constituting the ruling class. The fundamental purpose of law is to emancipate and foster the development of productive forces. However, the governance of Oceania does not adhere to this ultimate goal. Just as O'Brien articulates in this novel, power in Oceania is "an end in itself, not a means to an end" (Orwell, 2006: p. 126). Here the object of such governance is categorically disavows itself from its setting aim to safeguard the revolution and its member's rights through appropriate right alienation; but, paradoxically, its power is derived from a utter deprivation of everyone's rights, and consequently, the revolution itself is a means to sustain a "dictatorship", a fake, perverse "general will". Essentially speaking, one of the most paramount features of communism must build on the public's will and interest, rather than the private one. Just as Karl Marx's explication in the communist society: "The renunciation of private property is the complete emancipation of all human senses and characteristics" (Marx & Engels, 2009: p. 190) and while such a disguised communistic society is devoid of legitimacy of its function to represent, to protect, to emancipate its people, but to surveill, to persecute, to override the public's will for private, owns partial interests.

To encapsulate, the game between general will is supplanted by the collection of individual wills of the ruling stratification, ended with a zero game between them that undermines a harmonious society built on contract.

3.3. Reversal of Power and Right

In the framework of social contract theory, a government marked by instability precludes citizens from engaging in the political process, despite the direct relevance to their interests. This "tendency of the government to degenerate" insinuates the fact that, once the power over-functions the rights, the so-called "power will" proposed by F.W. Nietzsche will impersonate in state apparatus, driving its owner to purchase unremitting expansion of will to manipulate, to subdue, to enslave all the inalienable rights in the governance of the state. The delegation of government's power links with rights, while the interruption between them it will convert into an irreversible trajectory that is, "from democracy to aristocracy, and from aristocracy to royalty" (Rousseau, 2003: p. 84). Once the juxtaposition of power and rights is reversed, or the former overtakes the latter, people as the true

master of running a state is bound to lack the right of suffrage and uttering their political voice, and individuals become disengaged from the governance of the state and performance of rights in social life, transforming into mere “actors” or even slaves that are self-enslaved. Such term doesn’t signifies an authentic one, but a political icon embodying personal interests. They may be skilled and eloquent, but what they ultimately represent is not the interests of the people, that is, the general will. Such mis-execution of power deprived the value of general rights as its political cornerstone, likely to cause self-serve or a narrow collective will, diverging from the general will as stipulated by the original contract. The lopsided relationship between power and right in Oceania is a proof that was put the cart before the horse.

The social compact stipulates that the power is from the transference of people’s rights. However, society depicted in *1984* is predicated on the perpetuation of power and the sustenance of a decaying society, rather than the fulfillment of a sound contractual society. In this aspect, a phenomenon worth pondering can be scrutinized from ubiquitous surveillance in 1984, which expressed through all sorts of visible or invisible forms. Essentially speaking, such imposed surveillance is another example of imbalance and reversal in significance regarding power and rights. In Oceania, there are not only ground patrol police and helicopters that can monitor residents’ homes. There are also “tele-screens” that are widely installed in various public (and even private) places, and, more frighteningly, the thought police constantly searching the mind for heretics. Such scenarios are a variation and extension of “panoramic supervision prison” proposed by Bentham, whose surveillance and disciplinary facilities reinforces oligarchic rule. Bentham’s discipline thoughts relies on the architectural form, while in 1984, breaking the exterior physical constraints, the mechanism itself is emphatically highlighted, thereby this novel can be termed as “an accurate and true representation of the panoramic surveillance society”. In short, the “managed totalitarian society” magnifying the function of power not for safeguard the people’s legal rights, by to brutally exploited them in production, accumulation and distribution.

The sustenance and healthy evolution of the political community hinge on the establishment of a robust connection with the populace, ensuring that political life is intrinsically linked to the interests of the citizens. Only then can the political entity thrive and endure, avoiding the erosion of civic and state interests and the potential dissolution of the social contract’s legitimacy arising from unchecked expansion of biased and extreme power of leadership.

3.4. Paradox between Freedom and Slavery

A salient presentation of the dystopian nature in Oceania is insinuated through the three slogans of the party, where the presence of certain paradoxical states reversed the normal state of a civil society, but a preposterous, contradictory societal form that dissolves the boundary between the right and wrong. Freedom and slavery should be antonyms indisputably, but the slogan of Oceania absurdly

combines them: “War Is Peace, Freedom Is Slavery, Ignorance Is Power” (Orwell, 2006: p. 2). Freedom is slavery, but the rulers of Oceania have never admitted their slavery to their people throughout, but glorify it in every propaganda slogan. As O’Brien said, “The purpose of power is power” (Orwell, 2006: p. 126). In reality, the purpose of freedom is just freedom, and the purpose of slavery is just slavery without any disguise.

Rousseau begins his illustration of social contract by noting, “Man is born free, but he is always in chains. One thinks himself master of others, and still remains a greater slave than they” (Rousseau, 2003: p. 6). His discussion is not about how to free people from political shackles and restore their natural freedom, but how to ensure people can gain political freedom under certain legitimate regulations; i.e. how to establish the legitimacy of political authority. Based on this, the political freedom and slavery is relative but unified in one. However, the “chains” in 1984 transformed from an effective political checks targeting regulated political execution in social contract to a really oppressive “chains” targeting to the people. We can observe that, as for the masses, the fallacious politic exercise seized the people’s innately endowed freedom, and all their freedom should be conducted in the overwhelmingly dominant tangible or intangible “chains”: just as The Ministry of Love, there is “a maze of barbed-wire entanglements, steel doors, and hidden machine-gun nests” (Orwell, 2006: p. 2), which totally thwarted people’s freedom to participate into state affairs. Furthermore, the antithesis of deprivation of freedom for them even transcend the superficial servitude: the most terrible outcome for the masses as the result of violating “Big Brother” is to “disappear”—both in political and physical sense. Those who are subject to arrest, in the vast majority of cases, faces even “non trial, no report of the arrest” (Orwell, 2006: p. 9). People “simply disappeared always during the night”. Their names “was removed from the registers, every record of everything you had ever done was wiped out... They were abolished, annihilated; vaporized” (ibid). Being spiritually monitored, the people were alienated to a thoughtless object, suffering from being mental servile. Winston, “seemed not merely to have lost the power of expressing himself, but even to have forgotten what it was that he had originally intended to say” (Orwell, 2006: p. 4) when he wanted to write diary. The masses, lost their agency to contemplate but to “rose to a frenzy” (Orwell, 2006: p. 6), being led nose by the government’s media when Emmanuel Goldstein flashed on to the screen. The divestiture of thinking freely but being controlled by the Big Brother’s individual will is no more than a horrible spiritual servitude in the form of despicable rage, an invisible, imperceptible “chain” on their mind:

Two Minutes Hate was not that one was obliged to act a part, but, on the contrary, that it was impossible to avoid joining in. Within thirty seconds any pretence was unnecessary. A hideous ecstasy of fear and vindictiveness, a desire to kill, to torture, to mash faces in with a sledge-hammer, seemed to flow through the whole group of people like an electric current, turning one even against one’s will into a grimacing, screaming lunatic. (Orwell, 2006: p. 6)

The Ruling apparatus that should have been used for democracy maintenance didn't go through any obligated ratification of procedure, but robbed people's agency to participatory democracy and any opportunity for the arrested to voice, to dispute or refute. Such phenomenon is analogous to an overgeneralization of forceful execution, whose infiltration and manipulation has supplanted the conducive but restrictive nature of political "chains".

Besides, although the people of Oceania are enslaved and deprived of agency, it is the people of the ruling class who ultimately lose their freedom are also ensnared in a veiled form of slavery, therefore the paradox between freedom and slavery is also embodied via their co-existence on the ruling class. Although dominant and extremely free for unfettered power, they have to extinguish all conscience, repress all desires, lose their children, and lose their old lives in order to ensure their loyalty and execution of power, being examined and sit on pins and needles in the gaze of Big Brother. They enslave others while being enslaved by their undertaking. It may be said of O'Brien that he's free, but his freedom is another kind of obedience; as he told Winston, "We are the priests of power... God is power" (Orwell, 2006: p. 127). For him, he knows full well that he is enslaved to power as well, an obsession towards power-supremacy dominates him totally, from which he degenerated into a slavish spokesperson of totalitarian ideology. No one is free in a political community where all have lost their freedom in this sense.

3.5. Evaluation of Rule of Law and Government

The role of law and legislation is "to give it (politic body) movement and will" (Rousseau, 2015: p. 45) after the politic existence and life is given by the social compact. As a representative figure of the school of Natural law, Rousseau underscores the connection between citizens and political community, which can be realized either through participation in political life or through enactment of law by the state. Specifically, Rousseau opposed the separation of powers. He believed that all the power of a country came from the people, and that a power of the same origin could not realize mutual restrictions, and the supervision of the country should be carried out by the people. It can also be seen from the above thought that Rousseau's view is that a law that does not benefit the people should not be called a law, because the legislative power belonging to the political community is itself a power given by the people. Rousseau's seminal treatise on the social contract elucidates the principles of popular sovereignty and the rule of law. His thoughts on law can be generalized as "people-based rule of law". Within his oeuvre *On the Social Contract*, Rousseau consistently underscores that while a state is governed by various legal constructs, the paramount and most esteemed law resides within the collective conscience of the populace. This internalized law is the one that is acknowledged, revered, believed, and adhered to by the citizens, thereby establishing the cornerstone of a society predicated on the rule of law. The populace, as the authors of the law, are also its ultimate arbiters (Rousseau, 2017:

p. 60)⁴. Consequently, the people are empowered to harness the law to safeguard their rights and interests with the capacity to employ the fundamental law as a means of self-regulation, thereby curbing and circumscribing any conduct that may be deemed inappropriate. This reciprocal relationship between the governed and the governing principles underscores the essence of a democratic legal system.

The world delineated in *1984* witnessed a panorama where the people-based role of law is dissolved. Rousseau trenchantly discerned the contractual essence of law are “the acts of general will”, and “unites university of will with universality of object” (Rousseau, 2017: p. 46). In essence, a series of regulations in Oceania should not be deemed as laws, that is, should not have broad binding force for epitomization of hierarchy and subjugation. Execution of rule of law in 1984 has been trapped in the predicament of fundamentalism, which resolutely respond to challenges and compromises and, if necessary, even further demonstrate its inexorability through political and military means. As portrayed in *1984*, the collapse of rule of law bespeaks a renunciation of equity in a hierarchical pyramid society, where “at the apex of the pyramid comes Big Brother. Big Brother is infallible and all-powerful” (Orwell, 2006: p. 98). Along with obliteration of original mission of law, the universality and disinterestedness nature of rule of law was displaced with “imprisonment of traitor, the use of war prisoners as slaves, public executions, torture to extract confessions...” (Orwell, 2006: p. 96). More deplorable, such deterioration even “defended by people who considered themselves enlightened and progressive” (ibid.). Oceanic’s prevailing chaos from disorder of rule of law, is intelligible in a cyclic process from its inception—alienated people, the general legislator, to its performance, thereby justifying the tyranny since the usufruct of law is self-negated.

Government, as the reified embodiment of social contract, emerges because “the public force needs an agent of its own to bind it together and set it to work under the direction of general will” to serve as a means of communication between the State and the Sovereign (Rousseau, 2003: p. 65). Government, in a social contract, is a power to ensure people’s free action. As demonstrated in *On the Social Contract*⁵, Rousseau argues that due to inherent conflicts between the will of all and general will, once there lacks appropriate control of regime, abuse of power with resultant malpractice is inevitable:

As the particular will acts constantly in opposition to the general will, the government continually exerts itself against the Sovereignty. The greater this tension becomes, the more the constitution changes, and, as there is in this case no other corporate will to create an equilibrium by resisting the will of the prince sooner or later the prince must inevitably suppress the Sovereign and break the social

⁴Rousseau also pointed out that in a proper society, citizens are therefore only subject to the laws they voted on. Far from reducing people to the status of slaves, the social contract allows them to develop their abilities and acquire true morality through the exercise of political freedom. See reference to Rousseau, *On Political System*, edited by Liu Xiaofeng, translated by Chongming, Hu Xingjian, Dai Xiaoguang, Beijing: Huaxia Publishing, 2013, p. 4-5.

⁵In Chapter X “The Abuse of Government and Its tendency to Degenerate”, Volume 3.

treaty. This is the unavoidable and inherent defect which, from the very birth of the body politic, tends ceaselessly to destroy it, as age and death end by destroying the human body. (Rousseau, 2003: p. 92)

This statement bespeaks the nature of Oceanic state when its Sovereignty power is usurped. As we have discussed before, the government in *1984*, is in the guise to govern more orderly, is a semiotic incarnation by a minority central party group represented by O'Brien. This indicates the power "passes from the many to the few" (Rousseau, 2003: p. 92), just a natural propensity prophesied by Rousseau, a "contraction" underwent by the State. In such context, the great State is dissolved and another is formed within it, composed solely of the members of the government. As depicted in this story, the social compact is broken, for the few members have become the master and tyrant for the rest of the people. The abuse of government, is incisively pointed by Rousseau, is a kind of "anarchy" (Rousseau, 2003: p. 93), where "the democracy degenerates into ochlocracy; aristocracy into oligarchy, and royalty degenerates into tyranny" (ibid.). In 1984, the thoughtless turbulence of the people who are watching the TV speech of Goldstein, reduced into a mob with frenzied fidelity to the Big Brother. While, according to Rousseau, the moment the government usurps the Sovereignty, "all private citizens recover by right their mutual liberty, not bound to obey" (ibid.). As it goes in this narrative, Winston and Julia, who are lucid about this nature of Oceanic state, detached from the requests upon an inveterate freedom, but clandestinely criticized Oceanic's governance and held their own viewpoints towards it, struggling to recapture their rights. Despite of a failed and tortured outcome, what they had conducted exactly responded what Winston wrote in his diary: "If there is hope, it lies in the proles" (Orwell, 2006, p. 32). Lamentable the result is, it inspires us that in a dystopia where its government abuse, there always be burgeoning for the people to redefine it, for a veracious, equitable social contract heralding for a prospective utopia in default of any oppression and rigorous hierarchy.

4. Conclusion

Social contract theory by Jean-Jacques Rousseau represents an archetypal utopian political construct, positing a populace endowed with the requisite cultural literacy to engage in contemporary political discourse on an equal footing with the political community. While the practical realization of this ideal remains challenging, its insights into political freedom, assumptions regarding societal structure components and their functions, as well as its basis views on sovereignty have laid a political framework that inspired the governance of modern states. By seeking recourse to such political model, the dystopia depiction and political satire in George Orwell's *1984*, the underlying mechanism of a totalitarian regime is elucidated. The destruction of legitimacy of social contract is attributed to the zero game between general will and the will of all, the causal inversion of the political priority in power and rights, as well as the departure from rationality in rule of

law and government. Pertinent factors resulted in a spectrum of inherent ironies, contradictions and paradoxes, for instance, the absurd unity of freedom and slavery. All those catalyzed a dystopian society that “perpetuating unfreedom and inequality” (Orwell, 2006, p. 96). Such a construction of dystopia world serves not only as a portrayal of such a regime but also as a resounding admonition that the proletariat holds the potential for global emancipation in the masses. Social contract is for a people-oriented equal, well-operating administration in a state, therefore a totalitarian governing regime that hypocritically represents “will of all” rather than “general will” should be put in vigilance. Only by circumscribing the scope of government can citizens be guaranteed free enough economic and political choices to avoid servitude. In a nutshell, although Rousseau hasn’t articulated specific ways to check the abuse of power efficiently, his social contract theory extrapolates the basic analytical logic for us to critique the underlying insidious inclinations in modern national politics, to alarm ourselves of the piercing wail of sirens, warning of danger, the pendulum swing between the progress and retrogression in the path to communism.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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