Thoughtcrime

"Crimethink" redirects here. For the anarchist organisation/experiment, see CrimethInc..

A **thoughtcrime** is an occurrence or instance of controversial or socially unacceptable thoughts. The term is also used to describe some theological concepts such as disbelief or idolatry,[1] or a rejection of strong philosophical or social principles.[2]

The term was popularized in the dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell, wherein thoughtcrime is the criminal act of holding unspoken beliefs or doubts that oppose or question the ruling party. In the book, the government attempts to control not only the speech and actions, but also the thoughts of its subjects. To entertain unacceptable thoughts is known as **crimethink** in Newspeak, the ideologically purified dialect of the party.[3] "Crimestop" is a way to avoid crimethink by immediately purging dangerous thoughts from the mind.

1 Summary

Some modern publishers have described people who were being prosecuted and burned at the stake for heresy in various Abrahamic religions, as being victims of thoughtcrime laws. Such victims of thoughtcrime laws would sometimes be offered the chance to repent for their thoughtcrimes.[4]

People were similarly executed, or imprisoned in concentration camps, for thoughtcrime during the 20th century in totalitarian regimes, such as Stalinist USSR, Maoist China, and Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge.

The word is also used in instances where people are prevented from voicing opinions which are politically incorrect or which others may potentially be offended by. This prevention may affect speech, writing, and other forms of expression. The punishment of apostasy in sharia law is sometimes interpreted as being the death penalty, which has been described as a thoughtcrime.[5]

2 *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Main article: Thought Police

The **Thought Police** (*thinkpol* in Newspeak) are the secret police of the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. It is their job to uncover and punish *thoughtcrime*. The Thought Police use surveillance and psychological monitoring to find and eliminate members of society who challenge the party's authority and ideology.[6]

The Thought Police of Orwell and their pursuit of *thoughtcrime* were based on the methods used by the totalitarian states and ideologies of the 20th century.

The term "Thought Police", by extension, has come to refer to real or perceived enforcement of ideological correctness.

2.1 Technology and thoughtcrime

Technology played a significant part in the detection of *thoughtcrime* in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*—with the ubiquitous telescreens which could inform the government, misinform and monitor the population. The citizens of Oceania are watched by the Thought Police through the telescreens. Every movement, reflex, facial expression, and reaction is measured by this system, monitored by the Ministry of Love.

> Any sound that Winston made, above the level of a very low whisper, would be picked up by it; moreover, so long as he remained within the field of vision which the metal plaque commanded, he could be seen as well as heard. There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment. How often, or on what system, the Thought Police plugged in on any individual wire was guesswork.
> — Part I, Chapter I, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

At times, it seems as if the telescreen is constantly watching each citizen. Winston Smith recognises that he has no idea who is behind the technology, watching him or anyone else.

> If you made unexpected movements they yelled at you from the telescreen.
> — Part III, Chapter I, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Because of this system of surveillance, the Thought Police and the Ministry of Love become universally feared

by any member of the Outer Party or any one of the 'Proles' who is capable (or felt by the Party to be capable) of thoughtcrime.

2.2   Crimestop

"Crimestop" means to rid oneself of unwanted thoughts immediately, i.e., thoughts that interfere or disagree with the ideology of the Party. This way, a person avoids committing thoughtcrime.

In the novel, we hear about crimestop through the eyes of protagonist Winston Smith:

> The mind should develop a blind spot whenever a dangerous thought presented itself. The process should be automatic, instinctive. Crimestop, they called it in Newspeak.
> He set to work to exercise himself in crimestop. He presented himself with propositions—'the Party says the earth is flat', 'the party says that ice is heavier than water'— and trained himself in not seeing or not understanding the arguments that contradicted them.

Orwell also describes crimestop from the perspective of Emmanuel Goldstein in the book *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*:

> *Crimestop* means the faculty of stopping short, as though by instinct, at the threshold of any dangerous thought. It includes the power of not grasping analogies, of failing to perceive logical errors, of misunderstanding the simplest arguments if they are inimical to Ingsoc, and of being bored or repelled by any train of thought which is capable of leading in a heretical direction. *Crimestop*, in short, means protective stupidity.[7]

3   See also

- Censorship
- Free will
- Freedom of thought
- Hate crime
- Hate speech
- Institutional knowledge
- Internal sin
- Intrusive thoughts
- Language and thought

- Laws against Holocaust denial
- Laws against Armenian Genocide denial
- Mens rea
- Ostracism
- Political correctness
- Precrime
- Prisoner of conscience
- Thought identification
- Thought suppression

Works:

- *Kallocain*
- *Thoughtcrimes*, a 2003 film

4   References

[1] Papers in Ethics and Social Philosophy: - Volume 3 - Page 107, David Lewis - 2000

[2] Evidence, Policy and Practice: Critical Perspectives in Health and Social Care, Jon Glasby - 2011, p 22

[3] Orwell, George; Rovere, Richard Halworth (1984) [1956], *The Orwell Reader: Fiction, Essays, and Reportage*, San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, p. 409, ISBN 0-15-670176-6.

[4] Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare, Stephen Greenblatt - 2012

[5] Critique: Review of the Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- Page 330, Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1992

[6] McCormick, Donald (1980), *Approaching 1984*, Newton Abbot, Devon, England: David & Charles, p. 21, ISBN 0-7153-7654-3.

[7] Orwell, George (1949). *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd, London, pp 220-1

5   Further reading

- Kretzmer, David (2000), Kershman, Hazan Francine, ed., *Freedom of Speech and Incitement Against Democracy*, The Hague, Netherlands: Kluwer Law International, ISBN 90-411-1341-X Missing |last1= in Editors list (help).

6 External links

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7.1   Text

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