



From Utopia to Dystopia: The Cyclical Nature of Power in Orwell's *Animal Farm*

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<https://doi.org/10.69760/adgtgb51>

Abstract: This article explores the cyclical nature of power as depicted in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, focusing on the progression from utopia to dystopia. Initially a critique of the Russian Revolution and Stalinist Russia, Orwell's novella illustrates the corrupting influence of centralized authority and the betrayal of revolutionary ideals. Through the characters of Napoleon and Snowball, Orwell reflects the historical figures of Stalin and Trotsky, showing how revolutions driven by ideals of equality often devolve into new forms of tyranny. The article examines Orwell's use of allegory and symbolism to convey his broader critique of totalitarianism and the universal dangers of unchecked power. The final transformation of the pigs into human-like oppressors underscores the tragic cycle in which the oppressed become indistinguishable from their former rulers. Orwell's message remains relevant today, offering a timeless warning about the fragility of freedom and the corrosive effects of absolute power.

Keywords: Orwell, *Animal Farm*, totalitarianism, power, revolution

1. Introduction

In *Animal Farm*, George Orwell offers a powerful allegory of revolution, idealism, and the cyclical nature of power. The novella, originally conceived as a satire of the Russian Revolution and its aftermath, provides a profound commentary on the fragility of utopian ideals when confronted with the corrupting force of centralized authority. Orwell's portrayal of the animal-led rebellion begins as an inspiring vision of equality and shared prosperity but eventually collapses into a dystopian reality where the new rulers—once revolutionaries themselves—become indistinguishable from the tyrants they overthrew.

At the start of the novel, the animals, led by Old Major's vision of a utopian society, overthrow the oppressive rule of Mr. Jones, their human owner. The revolution promises a future where "all animals are equal" and where the farm operates under the principles of fairness and collective good. However, as the story progresses, the pigs, particularly Napoleon, begin to consolidate power and gradually betray the original ideals of the rebellion. The Seven Commandments, once symbols of equality, are altered to justify the pigs' increasing dominance, culminating in the infamous amendment, "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" (Orwell, 1945, p. 112). This shift marks the transformation of the utopian society into a dystopia where the new leaders replicate the very structures of oppression they initially sought to dismantle (Relotić, 2015).



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The cyclical nature of power is further illustrated by the ultimate indistinguishability between pigs and humans, as noted in the final scene where the other animals observe the pigs dining with humans and realize, "it was impossible to say which was which" (Orwell, 1945, p. 141). This realization underscores Orwell's central thesis: that unchecked power inevitably corrupts, and revolutions that seek to establish utopias often devolve into systems of oppression. As critics have noted, Orwell's use of animal metaphors and imagery emphasizes the loss of moral values and the dehumanizing effect of totalitarian rule, creating a vivid parallel between the fictional world of the farm and real-world political systems (Sun, 2015).

Through *Animal Farm*, Orwell not only critiques the Soviet regime but also presents a timeless warning about the dangers of political idealism and the inherent fragility of revolutionary movements. This article will examine the cyclical progression from utopia to dystopia in *Animal Farm*, analyzing how Orwell's use of allegory and symbolism reflects the broader patterns of power, corruption, and betrayal in both the fictional world and our own.

2. The Vision of Utopia in *Animal Farm*

2.1 *The Origins of the Revolution*

The revolution in *Animal Farm* begins with Old Major's speech, which plants the seeds of rebellion among the animals. Old Major's vision of a society free from human oppression captures the imagination of the farm animals, who see the revolution as a pathway to equality and freedom. This early phase represents the hopeful and idealistic beginning of the revolution, where the animals rally together under the promise of a better future. Their collective action to overthrow Mr. Jones, the oppressive farmer, symbolizes the rejection of exploitation and the desire for self-determination. The uprising is swift and seemingly inevitable, as the animals, galvanized by Old Major's vision, drive Mr. Jones from the farm and seize control of their destiny (Orwell, 1945).

The ideology that emerges from this rebellion, known as "Animalism," is a clear stand-in for Marxist/Communist ideologies, echoing the ideas of equality, shared labor, and the abolition of class distinctions. In *Animal Farm*, Animalism represents the utopian belief that all animals can live in harmony, with each contributing according to their abilities and receiving according to their needs. The animals are united by a common cause—freedom from the tyranny of human rule—and believe that this unity will ensure their prosperity and peace. However, just as the Russian Revolution was idealistic in its early stages, the animals' revolution is built on fragile foundations. As the story progresses, the principles of Animalism begin to unravel, foreshadowing the dystopian future that awaits them (Relotić, 2015).

2.2 *The Creation of the Utopian Society*

In the aftermath of the revolution, the animals establish their own governance and seek to create a utopian society based on the ideals of equality and cooperation. Initially, the farm operates under a sense of unity and purpose, with all animals working together to improve their collective living conditions. The Seven Commandments, painted on the barn wall, serve as the foundational principles of this new society. They emphasize core values like equality and the rejection of human traits such as tyranny and greed. For example, the commandments proclaim, "All animals are equal," and "No animal shall wear clothes" (Orwell, 1945, p. 34), marking a clear distinction between the animals and their former human oppressors.

The utopian vision is reinforced by the collective belief that the revolution will result in shared prosperity and peace. The animals initially demonstrate a sense of camaraderie, as seen in the way they divide labor and share the fruits of their work. Their early successes, such as the bountiful harvests and the absence of human interference, foster a belief that their society is on a righteous and sustainable path.



The principles of equality seem achievable, and the animals feel empowered by their ability to govern themselves (Gonçalves, 2017).

However, even in this early stage, Orwell plants the seeds of the society's eventual decline. The pigs, particularly Napoleon and Snowball, begin to assume leadership roles, which slowly introduces a hierarchy within the supposedly classless society. The creation of committees and the pigs' control over education foreshadow the corruption of the original revolutionary ideals. The Seven Commandments, meant to safeguard equality, soon become tools for justifying the pigs' privileges. While the utopian vision is alive in these early chapters, the subtle shifts in power dynamics signal the beginning of its inevitable unraveling.

3. The Gradual Shift Towards Dystopia

3.1 *The Rise of Napoleon: Power Consolidation*

As *Animal Farm* progresses, Orwell vividly illustrates the consolidation of power by Napoleon, a pig who emerges as the leader following the revolution. Initially, Napoleon and Snowball share leadership, both portraying themselves as defenders of the revolutionary ideals. However, Napoleon's ambition leads him to undermine Snowball, eventually driving him off the farm through the use of force and deceit, effectively eliminating his only real rival. This mirrors Stalin's rise to power in the Soviet Union, where Stalin similarly marginalized and exiled Trotsky, his revolutionary counterpart (Relotić, 2015).

Napoleon's consolidation of power is marked by his strategic use of fear, manipulation, and coercion. He forms a secret police force—the dogs—who serve as enforcers of his authority, a clear parallel to Stalin's use of the NKVD. Through this consolidation of power, Napoleon abandons the principles of equality that once underpinned the revolution. Orwell demonstrates how, under Napoleon's leadership, the farm's governance shifts from collective decision-making to totalitarian rule. Napoleon takes control of all decision-making, invoking the idea that the pigs, as the most intelligent animals, must guide the others, just as Stalin claimed to act in the best interests of the proletariat while consolidating dictatorial power. Orwell effectively portrays how leaders, under the guise of protecting the revolution, betray its core ideals for their own gain (Gumiel Correa, 2015).

3.2 *The Role of Propaganda in Shaping Reality*

Squealer, another pig, plays a crucial role in consolidating Napoleon's power by acting as the regime's propagandist. Through Squealer, Orwell explores the manipulation of language and truth—a key tool in the regime's control of the farm. Squealer constantly reassures the animals that Napoleon's decisions are in their best interest, even when those decisions directly contradict the original ideals of the revolution. Squealer uses euphemism, distortion, and outright lies to convince the animals that their worsening conditions are actually signs of progress.

For instance, when the pigs begin hoarding milk and apples for themselves, Squealer justifies this inequality by claiming that the pigs need these resources to think clearly and lead the farm. He insists that if the pigs fail to remain healthy, Mr. Jones might return—an argument designed to play on the animals' fears (Orwell, 1945, p. 52). This manipulation of language reflects Orwell's critique of totalitarian regimes, which often use propaganda to rewrite history and suppress dissent, ensuring that the population remains loyal even in the face of obvious corruption. As the farm's conditions deteriorate, the animals' belief in the revolution's ideals is slowly eroded through Squealer's constant manipulation of reality (Abass, 2021).

3.3 *The Corruption of Ideals: Changing the Commandments*

The corruption of the revolution's ideals is most clearly symbolized by the gradual alteration of the Seven Commandments. As the pigs begin to indulge in luxuries and adopt the behavior of humans, the



commandments, which were once the foundation of the utopian society, are revised to justify their actions. One of the first commandments to be altered is "No animal shall sleep in a bed," which is changed to "No animal shall sleep in a bed with sheets" (Orwell, 1945, p. 67), allowing the pigs to enjoy the comfort of beds in the farmhouse while still claiming adherence to the revolution's principles.

This systematic corruption reaches its peak with the final commandment change: "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" (Orwell, 1945, p. 112). This phrase captures the complete betrayal of the original revolutionary ideals, as it blatantly contradicts the founding principle of equality. By the end of the novel, the pigs have fully adopted the behaviors and privileges of the humans they once rebelled against, walking on two legs, wearing clothes, and engaging in trade with neighboring farms. Orwell's portrayal of this transformation underscores the cyclical nature of power—what began as a rebellion against oppression has become a new form of tyranny, indistinguishable from the old.

The changing of the commandments symbolizes the loss of revolutionary purity and highlights how those in power manipulate ideologies to maintain control. Orwell's use of this gradual corruption demonstrates how the ideals of any revolution can be subverted when those in power prioritize their own interests over the collective good (Keating, 2021).

4. The Establishment of Dystopia

4.1 *The Final Transformation: Animals vs. Humans*

In the final chapters of *Animal Farm*, Orwell brings the transformation of the pigs into sharp focus, illustrating their complete metamorphosis into the very humans they once overthrew. This transformation is most evident during the infamous final scene in which the other animals, peering through the farmhouse window, observe the pigs playing cards and drinking with human farmers. At this moment, the animals outside realize that "it was impossible to say which was which" (Orwell, 1945, p. 141). This moment is the culmination of Orwell's dystopian vision, symbolizing the complete erosion of the original revolutionary ideals.

The blurring of distinctions between pigs and humans is a powerful symbol of the corruption of power. The pigs, who once led the fight against human oppression, have adopted not only the humans' behaviors but also their values, greed, and exploitative tendencies. This final transformation highlights Orwell's message: revolutions that seek to overturn tyrannical systems often replace one form of oppression with another. In the case of *Animal Farm*, the pigs become indistinguishable from humans because they have embraced the same hierarchical, exploitative structures. Orwell's use of animal imagery underscores this theme, as the pigs, once symbols of rebellion and progress, now serve as representations of the corruptibility of power (Sun, 2015).

The scene also holds broader implications regarding the nature of leadership and governance. The fact that the other animals, who initially trusted the pigs to lead them toward a better future, can no longer tell them apart from their former human oppressors reflects the futility of their hopes. The initial belief that the pigs would create a fair and equal society is replaced by the stark realization that their new leaders are as oppressive as the old ones. This final image encapsulates Orwell's critique of totalitarian regimes and the ways in which revolutionary leaders can betray the very ideals they once championed (Relotić, 2015).

4.2 *The Failure of the Revolution*

The failure of the revolution in *Animal Farm* serves as a potent commentary on the cyclical nature of power. Orwell suggests that revolutions often follow a predictable pattern: they begin with high ideals of equality and justice but ultimately devolve into new forms of tyranny. In *Animal Farm*, the revolution, which was intended to free the animals from exploitation, ends up reinstating a new hierarchy, where the



pigs hold absolute control over the other animals. The early vision of Animalism, in which all animals would share in the farm's prosperity, has been reduced to a system where the pigs enjoy all the benefits while the rest of the animals are subjected to increasing hardship.

The cyclical nature of power is further emphasized by the repeated alterations of the Seven Commandments, which once embodied the revolutionary ideals of fairness and equality. As the pigs consolidate their power, these commandments are changed to suit their growing privilege and control. The final commandment, "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" (Orwell, 1945, p. 112), starkly illustrates how the original goal of equality has been completely undermined. What began as a movement to eliminate oppression has come full circle, with the pigs becoming the new oppressors.

Orwell's critique of centralized power is clear: when power becomes concentrated in the hands of a few, it inevitably leads to corruption and the betrayal of revolutionary ideals. The pigs' gradual rise to power, and the corresponding decline in the living conditions of the other animals, mirrors the historical trajectory of many revolutions, particularly the Russian Revolution, where Stalin's regime betrayed the socialist ideals that inspired the initial uprising (Keating, 2021). Through *Animal Farm*, Orwell highlights the inherent danger of power itself, suggesting that even the most well-intentioned revolutions can result in tyranny when power is unchecked and centralized.

The ultimate failure of the revolution in *Animal Farm* serves as a warning about the fragility of utopian ideals and the ease with which they can be subverted by those who seek to manipulate them for personal gain. Orwell's dystopian conclusion underscores the futility of attempting to establish a truly equal society when the structures of power remain unchanged. The revolution, rather than liberating the animals, has only entrenched them deeper in a system of oppression, reinforcing Orwell's belief in the cyclical nature of power and the inevitable betrayal of revolutionary ideals.

5. The Cyclical Nature of Power: Historical and Political Implications

5.1 Orwell's Critique of Totalitarianism

One of the central themes of *Animal Farm* is Orwell's sharp critique of totalitarianism, particularly in the context of the Russian Revolution and the rise of Stalinist Russia. Orwell, a democratic socialist, was deeply disillusioned by the way in which the Russian Revolution, which initially promised equality and freedom for the proletariat, had devolved into an oppressive regime under Stalin. His anger and disappointment with the betrayal of revolutionary ideals are palpable throughout the novella. In *Animal Farm*, Orwell uses the pigs' betrayal of Animalism to mirror Stalin's corruption of Marxist principles, showing how those who lead revolutions often become indistinguishable from the oppressors they overthrow.

Orwell was particularly critical of how Stalin manipulated the ideals of socialism to establish a totalitarian state. The character of Napoleon symbolizes Stalin, while Snowball represents Trotsky, who was ousted in a similar fashion. The expulsion of Snowball from the farm and the consolidation of power by Napoleon parallels the exile of Trotsky and the brutal elimination of Stalin's political rivals. Orwell was angered by the fact that what was once a revolution of the masses quickly became a dictatorship where power was concentrated in the hands of a few elites (Relotić, 2015).

This shift from idealism to dictatorship is not unique to Stalinist Russia but is a recurring pattern in history. Orwell's critique extends beyond the Russian Revolution to totalitarian regimes worldwide, which use propaganda, fear, and violence to maintain control. Through the character of Squealer, Orwell illustrates how propaganda is used to reshape reality and justify the regime's actions. Orwell's portrayal of the pigs rewriting the farm's history and altering the commandments reflects the way Stalin rewrote Soviet history to legitimize his rule and suppress dissent. The use of fear, exemplified by the threat of



Jones' return, mirrors Stalin's purges and the atmosphere of fear that characterized his regime (Gonçalves, 2017).

5.2 The Universality of Orwell's Message

While *Animal Farm* is a direct allegory of the Russian Revolution, Orwell's message about the corrupting nature of power is universal. He was not merely concerned with the specifics of Soviet history but with the broader dynamics of political power. Orwell believed that unchecked power, whether in the hands of revolutionary leaders or dictators, leads inevitably to oppression. His critique applies to any regime where power becomes centralized, and leaders prioritize their own interests over those of the people they claim to represent.

Orwell's broader point is that revolutions often fail to achieve their utopian aims because power corrupts even the most well-intentioned leaders. This dynamic is not limited to Stalinist Russia; it can be observed in other revolutions, such as the French and Chinese Revolutions, where revolutionary ideals were similarly betrayed by those who rose to power. Orwell's insight is that the structures of power themselves often determine the outcomes of revolutions, leading to cycles of oppression, regardless of the ideology that underpins them.

The transformation of the pigs in *Animal Farm* is emblematic of the universal tendency for power to corrupt. As Napoleon consolidates control and the pigs begin to mirror the humans they once rebelled against, Orwell warns that this is not just a Russian problem but a human problem. The cyclical nature of power—where one form of tyranny replaces another—reminds readers that without checks and balances, revolutions often end in the same systems of exploitation and control they sought to eliminate. The pigs' final transformation into human-like figures, indistinguishable from their former oppressors, is a powerful symbol of how absolute power erases the line between oppressor and liberator, rendering the revolutionary ideals meaningless (Keating, 2021).

Orwell's message, therefore, extends beyond the historical context of *Animal Farm* and offers a timeless warning about the nature of political power. His work speaks to the inherent dangers of centralized authority, the manipulation of truth, and the betrayal of ideals. In today's world, where authoritarianism and the erosion of democratic norms remain pressing concerns, Orwell's *Animal Farm* continues to resonate as a critical commentary on the fragility of freedom and the ease with which power can corrupt those entrusted with it.

6. Conclusion

In *Animal Farm*, Orwell masterfully illustrates the cyclical nature of power, portraying the gradual shift from a utopian vision of equality to a dystopian reality of oppression. The novella begins with the animals' rebellion against their human oppressors, fueled by the ideals of Animalism, which promises a future of shared prosperity and freedom from tyranny. However, as Napoleon consolidates power, aided by propaganda and the manipulation of truth, the principles of equality are systematically betrayed. The Seven Commandments, once symbols of unity, are altered to justify the growing privileges of the pigs, ultimately resulting in a new hierarchy that mirrors the one they initially sought to overthrow. The final scene, where the pigs are indistinguishable from humans, underscores the inevitability of this tragic cycle, highlighting Orwell's warning about the corrupting influence of power.

Orwell's *Animal Farm* is not only a critique of Stalinist Russia but also a broader warning about the dangers of idealism in politics. Orwell recognized that revolutions often begin with noble intentions but are susceptible to corruption when power becomes centralized and unchecked. The pigs' rise to power and their transformation into oppressors reveal the fragility of revolutionary ideals when placed in the



hands of leaders who prioritize their own interests. Orwell's message is clear: the desire for power can lead even the most well-meaning individuals to betray the very principles they once fought for.

In today's political landscape, Orwell's insights remain profoundly relevant. The global rise of authoritarianism, the manipulation of truth through propaganda, and the increasing centralization of power in both government and corporate structures remind us of Orwell's cautionary tale. The need for vigilance in the face of centralized authority is critical if societies are to safeguard their democratic ideals. *Animal Farm* serves as a timeless reminder that the fight for freedom and equality is ongoing and that without checks on power, even the most idealistic movements can give rise to new forms of tyranny.

7. References

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