

The Powerful Power: A Journey from Abuse of Education to the Corruption of Power in *Animal Farm*

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Abstract: *In a society where an elite class has access of tools that the masses do not, this elite group of people often use these tools to dominate and oppress society. In Animal Farm, Orwell demonstrates that education is a powerful weapon and is a tool that can be used to one's advantage. Besides, this novella tries to show how absolute power with which leaders are invested results in gross corruption because it makes leaders believe they are absolved from responsibility and accountability.*

Key-Words: *elite class, dominate and oppress, absolute power, corruption.*



“Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority”
(Manser 229).

---Stated by English historian Lord Acton in 1887.

Through his artistic use of an allegorical animal farm to stand for the whole world at large, George Orwell depicts a true to life picture of how human beings behave towards their fellow human beings once they assume power. In this respect, *Animal Farm* shows clearly that the very revolutionaries who used to criticize power and the corruption that accompanies it turn into ruthless, megalomaniac dictators once they have access to absolute power. In doing so, George Orwell suggests that leadership and power should involve accountability and responsibility which act as a safety valve for corruption and the misuse of power.

Animal Farm was Orwell's first highly successful novel (the second being 1984). It was published on the heels of World War II, in England in 1945 and in the United States in 1946. Orwell personifies the animals in the tradition of allegory so that they symbolize real historical figures. *Animal Farm* is also a powerful satire. Orwell uses irony to undermine the tenets of totalitarianism, especially that of Stalinism. Though he agreed with many Marxist principles, Orwell was unable to accept the communist interpretation of socialism because he saw many similarities between the communist governments and the czarist regimes in old Russia. Communism, he thought, was inherently hypocritical.

Human nature and man's vulnerability to greed for power has been the concern of many writers in the 20th century, especially after events like the World Wars. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) explores these ideas in fictional setting. This novel portrays contemporary themes like human nature and its vulnerability to greed as well as abuse of education for power. Living in a world where power is easy to gain, the pigs quickly use education to manipulate the rest of the animals on the farm to serve them. This story ultimately reveals the underlying message that first, education is important to all levels of society, next, for when it is not, society is stratified, resulting in the masses suffering.

The pigs are the first to recognize the value of education and use their superior knowledge to take advantage of the other animals in order to assume control of the farm. The pigs make an announcement that seals their leadership on the farm. Surprising the other animals, the pigs "revealed that during the past three months they had taught themselves to read and write" (Orwell 37). Through writing that the pigs have learned to read and write "during the past three months," Orwell shows that the pigs recognize the value of education and keep it a secret

for that reason. Through this education, the pigs intend to gain power and therefore they do not intend on teaching the other animals in order to keep power for themselves. Once they have used their education to gain power, they then use the power to begin manipulation. After animal Farm has been established, “The pigs did not actually work, but directed and supervised the others. With their superior knowledge it was natural that they should assume the leadership”(41). By describing that “The pigs did not actually work,” Orwell shows that the pigs are able to use their superior knowledge as a tool to stay out of work by simply thinking. Instead of the pigs using their education to work to make the farm better, they simply claim that because they have “superior knowledge” it is natural that they “lead.” If education was provided to all, the leadership would be based on who could actually do best for the farm, but that is clearly not the case. Orwell is able to show how when education is not given to all, it is very easy for those with it to abuse it for more power. Now that the pigs have the initial advantage over the other animals, the future holds plans of using it as a personal tool to oppression.

After the pigs have fully educated themselves, they continue to deny the others education and change certain rules to assert their elite dominance. After Napoleon has gotten rid of Snowball to have all power to him; he takes away all power from the other animals as well. Napoleon announces to all the animals:

From now on the Sunday morning Meetings would come to an end...all questions relating to the working of the farm would be settled by a special committee of pigs, presided over by himself. These would meet in private and after communicate their decisions to the others...there would be no more debates. (68)

Through having Napoleon declare that “there would be no more debates,” Orwell is able to portray that the pigs are silencing their subjects in order to maintain power for themselves. Napoleon’s education makes it possible for him to assume all power through manipulation. Napoleon’s complete control and silencing of the animals foreshadows that he may resort to more oppression and take more advantage of the pigs. Through this quote, Orwell reveals the underlying message that in societies where leaders abuse education for power, they will silence their subjects to keep that power. Some animals notice that they are being abused and want to have more say, but because of their lack of education; they struggle to advocate of themselves.

Orwell explains the unfortunate truth in that, “Several of them would have protested if they could have found the right arguments. Even Boxer was vaguely troubled...but in the end could think of nothing to say” (68) Orwell shows that because the animals “could think of nothing to say,” the pigs are using their education and the lack of the others to oppress the animals to silence them. The pigs take advantage of the other animals because the other animals know that they lack knowledge, and are gullible. Even if the other animals do have different opinions, they go with what Napoleon is saying because they cannot compare to him. This example further demonstrates the idea that abuse of education, driven by the temptation of power, creates oppression. Ultimately corruption ends with a downfall of that society, but before that devastation is in store for many of the animals. After having power, the pigs oppress the animals even more by using their education and the ignorance of the animals, to use them as means to an end. Boxer, a horse who works the most out of any animal, gets weak and looks forward to retirement, as promised by Animalism; however, he must go to the hospital first. As the animals are crowding around the “hospital” van to say goodbye to Boxer, Benjamin reads the van and shouts:

“Fools! Do you not see what is written on the side of that van?!”... ‘Alfred Simmonds, Horse Slaughterer and Glue Boiler, Willingdon. Dealer in Hides and BoneMeal. Kennels Supplied. Do you not understand what that means? They are taking Boxer to the knacker's!’”(132)

By showing that the animal do not “understand what [it] means,” it becomes clear that the pigs have and use the ability to take advantage of the ignorance of the other animals. It is clear that the pigs do not want to have to pay for Boxer’s retirement. The pigs use the lack of literacy from the other animals to convince them the van just had not been repainted yet, but in reality Boxer was going to his death. This stunt could not have been pulled off if all the animals had equal education. Orwell shows how those who are denied education can be oppressed without even knowing it. The pigs have changed to do anything to be like humans, including having a need for whiskey. It then becomes clear to the reader that the pigs have gone too far in order to get what they want. The day after the death of boxer (and his trip to the “hospital,”) “the word went round that from somewhere or other the pigs had acquired the money to buy themselves another case of

whisky.” Orwell is suggesting that the pigs are transforming into humans through drinking by using “money” and “whiskey.” Money, drinking, and killing are among the main things in which the pigs originally swore to never use. However, the abuse of education for power has caused this society to fail because the pigs are now drinking, killing and using money. Education gave the pigs power, an elite class, and now a society where they can use their subject as means to an end.

In a society where education is not provided equally, the class that receives the most will get power; keep power, and abuse power; ultimately creating a failed society. The whole idea of animal farm is to stay away from human values and actions, as it results in selfishness.

However, the abuse of education for power got in the way and gave the pigs other ideas. It results in the exact opposite of what the initial idea was. Orwell is portraying the many flaws in human by showing how easy it is for a society of animals to become so human like in the way the act, obtain power, and treat their citizens. This story ultimately reveals the underlying message that education is important to all levels of society, for when it is not, society is stratified and the majority of classes suffer.

George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* is a short novel detailing the uprising of the animals on a farm runs by a farmer they view as unfit to be their ruler. The animals rise up in rebellion shortly after an elderly pig stirs them up and convinces them of the evils of human beings against animals. When the opportunity presents itself, the animals drive the farmer, Mr. Jones, and his wife from the property and rename the farm from Manor Farm to animal farm. The pigs eventually rise up as leaders over the other animals. They use their intellect and political clout to become superior to the other. In the end, the pigs become similar to the humans. They exercise authority, consider themselves better than the other animals, and even start walking on two legs. Over the years, *Animal Farm* has been analyzed as a comparison and a satire of the rise of the Soviet Union in the early and mid 20th century. Characters in the tale can be compared to real figures in the rise of the Bolsheviks and their continued reign through the majority of the century. Considering these obvious comparisons, *Animal Farm* is a political satire about much more than simply the rise of the Soviet Union. It is a tale illustrating the corruption that power

causes in an individual and the relative ease of obtaining power in relation to using that gained power correctly.

An important aspect of the book is the animals' rebellion that takes place at the beginning of the story. The rebellion takes place after the animals have been neglected and not fed for a while. This gives them feelings of frustration towards their leader and farmer, Mr. Jones. As a result of this neglect and frustration, they break into the feed house in order to eat. The farmer sees them and responds by taking a whip to them. The animals react by fighting back for the first time and driving Mr. Jones from the farm. The author, George Orwell, does not spend a lot of time describing this rebellion. Although one would think this would be a significant part of the book, it is not detailed carefully or focused on for a large portion of the novel. This gives the reader the sense that the power was gained quite easily by the animals. No major injuries occur, and the entire rebellion happens in the space of a couple of minutes. The pigs seem to take power effortlessly. There is not even a discussion or debate on this subject of leadership, and the pigs simply rise up as leaders. The effortless seizure of power gives the reader the idea that power is not difficult to gain if it is truly desired and there is support for it. Once the idea of the rebellion and seizing power took root in the hearts of the animals, they were able to take over the farm quite easily.

With the animal rebellion taking place in the first few pages of the book, the rest of the novel is dedicated to the fate of the farm under animal and, ultimately, pig control. It describes how the pigs become corrupted and changed by the power they have as the primary leaders of the farm.

The comparison that is made by Orwell to Soviet Russia is valuable in understanding his emphasis on the relative ease of obtaining power in relation to correctly using that gained power. It is well known and accepted that *Animal Farm* is a political satire about the seizure of power and eventual control of the Soviet Union in the early twentieth century in Eastern Europe. In 1917 in Russia, the revolution took place under the direction of Lenin. "The seizure of power in October 1917 was followed by years of chaos in the government, the economy, and foreign relations. Only gradually was effective control built up over Soviet Russia"(Mawdsley and White 1). This fact supports Orwell's point that power is easier obtained than maintained and

used correctly. The Soviet leaders under Lenin were able to organize the people enough to revolt against the current aristocracy and the Romanovich rulers in Russia at the time, but that did not mean they were able to immediately have an organized, well running system of leadership. This is illustrated in *Animal Farm* as the animals are able to take over the farm with relative ease, but for the next couple years there is chaos that dominates the entire farm. The fact that Orwell compares the animals on the farm to this specific revolution gives insight into the idea that the power is easier obtained than correctly used. This was the exact situation in Soviet Russia.

Along with it being an argument for the idea that power is easier obtained than used correctly, the very fact that there is an animal rebellion that takes place is, in itself, also an argument about the corruption of power. Farmer Jones is portrayed at the beginning of the book as a “drunkard.” He is portrayed as someone who is unfair, treats his animals poorly, and only cares about himself. This is both expressed by the animals on the farm and shown in the descriptions by the narrator of the farm. Orwell, as the narrator supports the animals in their rebellion. “There is absolutely no doubt whatsoever that Orwell's sympathies are with the working class (the farm animals) in their revolutionary overthrow of Farmer Jones and establishment of a workers' state (*Animal Farm*)” (Newsinger). Orwell is showing, from the very beginning of the book, that it is not only the pigs that are subject to the corruption that is brought by power. He shows the reader that even the humans have become evil in their positions of power. At the end of the book, after the pigs have completely taken over, become like the humans, and started living in the farmhouse, Newsinger remarks, “that as far as Orwell was concerned the pigs had become as bad as, indistinguishable from, not worse than, the humans” (Newsinger). The pigs were not simply poor leaders because they were animals or pigs; instead, they were corrupted by the power in the exact same way Mr. Jones had been. They did not become worse. They became just like him.

Another obvious sign of the way leadership and power corrupts is seen in the evolution of the commandments of the farm. Shortly after the rebellion and the expulsion of Mr. Jones, the pigs, Napoleon and Snowball established a set of rules or commandments for the farm to live by. These commandments are very fair to all animals, and they are very well accepted by all the animals at the time of their institution. They state that all animals are equal and they protect the

rights of the animals in general. There is nothing in the commandments indicating that one animal is better than another or giving specific power and authority to the pigs or to another species on the farm.

Throughout the book, these commandments undergo subtle changes. The pigs, due to their level of literacy, have the ability to be persuasive in convincing the other animals that they are right. When these subtle changes occur, they are able to persuade the other animals that this is how it has always been. The changes that occur in the commandments are not changes that benefit all the animals, but instead benefit solely the pig leadership or justify the actions they have already completed. The rule changes specifically justify their wrongdoings and their breaking of the previous commandments. This evolution of commandments shows how power corrupted the pigs. They were the ones who originally established the commandments. If they had wanted the commandments to unfairly benefit them, they could have established them in such a way originally. They instead established rules that gave the same rights to everyone. It was only after they were corrupted by the power and authority that they changed the rules to benefit themselves.

Another one of the most obvious examples of the way power can corrupt a leader is shown in the way Napoleon, the eventual supreme leader, uses the dogs. Shortly after the animal rebellion, the dogs have a litter of puppies. Napoleon takes those newborn puppies and hides them somewhere. No one else on the farm has any idea what has happened to them. Napoleon's intentions, at the time of taking the dogs, were not known. The dogs, due to their aggressive nature and physical dominance, represent power. The fact that they are under the control of Napoleon gives him a lot of authority. It becomes clear later how this authority has corrupted Napoleon, and caused him to use it in a way that hurts the others. First, he uses the dogs, not fully grown, to chase off his competitor, Snowball the pig, from the farm. The power that is gained by having the dogs causes Napoleon to do something that, from an outsider's point of view, is evil and he would not do otherwise. The second example of the way the dogs corrupted Napoleon is when he uses them to slaughter the animals that he says have committed treason.

These dogs and the power they give Napoleon, along with the success of the first exploit involving the dogs, give Napoleon the idea that he can do anything and get away with it. This power-high causes him to do more evil.

Animal Farm has been labeled by some as a dystopia or anti-utopia. “It is obvious that Orwell in *Animal Farm* set out with positive hopes of creating utopia. However, instead of projecting a utopia, he has projected an anti-utopia, a nightmarish world of Stalinist regime clothed in the beast fable of *Animal Farm*” (Sawant 115). This idea of trying to create a utopia and instead creating an anti-utopia is the key in understanding the concept of leadership corruption illustrated by *Animal Farm*. The animals did not go into the rebellion wanting to create a Stalinist regime. All the animals, including the pigs, wanted to create a better living situation for all the creatures on the farm. The animals, including the pigs, wanted to create a utopian society for themselves. Instead, in the end they created an anti-utopia that benefited no one except for the highest leadership.

There was one vital event that happened in the process of *Animal Farm* changing from an equal society into this Stalinist regime. The event that happened was the pigs started to rise to power. The pigs began to think they were better than the rest of the animals on the farm. From this rise to power, results the change in the entire function of the farm. The whole farm stopped being about the equality of the animals and started being about the well being of the pigs. This says a lot about the changes that can occur in an individual as the result of an increase in political power. It was this simple shift of power that ended up changing the entire political identity of the whole farm. The pigs went from wanting the best for the farm to wanting the best for only themselves in an extremely short amount of time. This increase in power changed their entire political ideology. The whole purpose of the rebellion was undermined by the fact that certain animals no longer valued the good of the entire society as much as they valued themselves.

The character Old Major, the old pig that gave the animals the idea that a revolution was possible shows that the pigs did not intend to take over power for their own benefit in the first place, but instead desired the same utopia that the other animals wanted. Old Major speaks about the change in power from humans to animals knowing that he is not going to live very much longer. He does not have any incentive to set up a revolution in which the pigs will become

leaders, because he is about to die. The pigs did not have this intention of becoming a replacement for the humans before the revolution started. Instead, they obtained a bit of power and were corrupted and changed by this power to desire domination over the other animals. Old Major sets the stage so it is clear that a change takes place in the pigs once they have taken over as the leaders and the animals in charge on the farm instead of this being their design.

The ending scene of the book also gives valuable insight into the idea that power causes corruption. “Conservatives who hailed *Animal Farm* as an attack simply on communism interpret it too narrowly” (Hollis 150). Instead, it is a political satire showing how “history cannot consist of anything other than the overthrow of old tyrants in order that new tyrants may be put in their place” (Hollis 150). This is shown by the fact that the pigs turn into human beings. The entire animal revolution is based on the fact that humans are evil. The pigs convince all the other animals that the humans are tyrants using the animals only for their own good. By the final scene of the book, the pigs have started living in the farmhouse, walking on two legs, and spending time with other humans. The animals cannot even tell the difference between the pigs and the men. The influence of the power on the pigs has turned them into exactly the group that was overthrown in the first place. The pigs have become corrupted in a way that they have become tyrants just as much as the original tyrant Mr. Jones.

This evolution is also valuable in understanding the corruption of power because of what the animals as a whole represent in the comparison being made by Orwell to the Soviet Union. In the book, “the animals are designed to represent working people in their initial social, economic, and political position not just of animal farm, but of England in general” (Letemendia 128-29). The pigs are included in this representation. Though they may be smarter than the other animals, at the beginning of the novel, they are simply members of the farm representing working class people. They are on the same level of society as any of the other animals. “Just because all have been subjected to human rule, this does not mean that they will act as a united body once they take over the farm” (Letemendia 129). All the animals, though they began on one level do not end in the same way. By the end of the book, the pigs are exercising authority over the other animals, and even consider themselves to be “more equal” than the other animals on the farm. They do not simply take a leadership role in running the farm. Instead, the power they have

obtained has led them to the point where they consider themselves to be better than the other animals. They are using their power to have control and dominion over those other working class members of the society that they were once numbered amongst.

Animal Farm has been regarded over the years since it was written as a political satire comparing the Soviet Union to a farm of Animals. It is important to understand that while Orwell uses the Soviet Union as a clear comparison, *Animal Farm* is a witty tale about leadership in government in general. Orwell's portrayal of the animals' revolution shows the reader that the obtaining of power is not necessarily the most difficult part of becoming a leader, but instead, the difficult part is using that power correctly once it is obtained. The transformation of the commandments, the evolution of the commandments, and the story's anti-utopian nature show how power corrupts a leader and causes that leader to act in a way they did not intend on acting before the power was obtained.

In conclusion, it can safely be argued that George Orwell's *Animal Farm* is an attack on megalomaniac revolutionary leaders who come to power by virtue of their brotherly cooperation with the public along with their noble goals and aspirations but fall victim to the charm and lure of absolute power. Under the influence of such tempting power which is above any law, revolutionary leaders tend to forget their promises of making their countries better places for their country fellows and unfortunately start behaving like the former leaders whom they have revolted against and overthrown. Orwell might want to suggest that people are people all over the world and throughout history because when they are invested with absolute power they are most likely to commit the most unimaginable atrocities and crimes against their fellow human beings. Napoleon in *Animal Farm* stands for a revolutionary leader who transforms into a ruthless dictator, corrupted by absolute power, which he enjoys by dint of his self appointed post as the one and only leader of the farm. As such, he violates not only the constitution he once vowed to adhere to, but also all kinds of human codes only to satisfy his insatiable hunger for power and sustain his position as the sole leader. In the course of the novella, Napoleon is depicted as a despotic ruler who distorts facts, falsifies history, fabricates stories and has all public utilities named after him just to satisfy his brutal desires for fame, power and personal aggrandizement.

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