

Homeschooling in Britain's "Nanny State"

Bruce Garrison

It all started one night while I was driving with my 9-year-old daughter from Nottingham toward Newark in England. As we left Nottingham, within 400 yards of each other, we passed two sets of Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras recording our departure. As we entered the next residential area, another CCTV noted our entrance, and moments later yet another CCTV marked our exit from that suburban village.

Seeing the camera lens staring directly at our car, I muttered the comment, "Who says there's no such thing as Big Brother these days?" (On average a person in Britain is recorded by CCTV 300 times a day.) Being more than a little inquisitive, my daughter immediately asked, "Daddy, who's Big Brother?" I answered her with a short review of George Orwell's classic anti-utopian book, *1984*, and explained that many aspects of England's society today reminded me a lot of the "fictional" world in Orwell's novel.

All of this caused me to start thinking about the way that life in England, as well as Britain's government, currently branded "the Nanny State" by the British media, is moving ever closer to the world that is portrayed in the books *1984*, and *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, and *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley. I have always regarded these books as "dark prophecies" that, although containing fictitious places and settings, give us very real glimpses into modern society and what we may face as we draw ever closer to the new Dark Ages.

My reflections raised some questions: What has created the Nanny State? What challenges does it hold for children and families today? How do we as homeschoolers address these issues? Although I was thinking specifically about England, I realize that the questions and answers are universal and will impact all who are living in our increasingly technologically and ideologically controlled world.

Politically Correct Newspeak

In Orwell's world of *1984*, in the region of Oceania, "Newspeak" is the official language. The whole purpose of Newspeak is to reduce the vocabulary of average people and thereby shape the way that they think. Although written nearly 60 years ago, Orwell's "Newspeak" sounds alarmingly like much that is termed "politically correct" language these days. Many words come to have new meanings, and a lot of undesirable words are simply removed from everyday use.

In a revealing study of the principles of Newspeak at the end of his book, Orwell explains, "The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc [the ideology of the totalitarian government], *but to make all other mode of thought impossible*" [italics mine]. The purpose of the new language was to control both the way people thought and

what they thought! “Thoughtcrime” becomes impossible when there are no words in which to express it.

In our present “newspeak” situation, there are times when we are almost dumbfounded by the absurdity of the way people speak, which is a direct result of the way they now think. Almost daily we are confronted by some new legislation (England’s latest is a threat by the government to force parents to take lessons on how to read and sing nursery rhymes to their children—hence the term “Nanny State”!), or some new terminology that renders normal language almost irrelevant. Recently I heard one speaker comment that soon we will no longer be able to say that people are “short” but we will have to describe them as “vertically challenged.”

It is easy to see how Orwell’s main character, Winston, could reflect that in such a world, “The heresy of heresies was common sense.” As we get further from a world of absolute truth, where people are allowed and even encouraged to follow their every moral whim and fancy, simple common sense is made to look more and more nonsensical.

How is it possible for things to get into such a disturbing condition?

Conditioning the Masses

Although he wrote *Fahrenheit 451* in 1953, Ray Bradbury had an almost uncanny sense of what was coming in our world of high-tech entertainment. In the opening pages, he describes the wife of his main character as one who seems to have lost all sense of contact with the “real world.” How has this happened?

“And in her ears the little Seashells, the thimble radios tamped tight, and an electronic ocean of sound, of music and talk and music and talk coming in, coming on the shore of her unsleeping mind.” This scene, created over 50 years ago, could describe thousands of young people today whose minds are gently, or not so gently, lulled into a state of unquestioning passivity by the constant drone of downloaded tunes.

Along with the “electronic ocean of sound,” the wife had a three-walled interactive television that enabled her to “have company” in the house all the time. To her the unreal, unfeeling, uncaring animated objects had become her “family.” But from her enlightened husband’s perspective, they were “the uncles, aunts, the cousins, the nieces, the nephews, that lived in those walls, the gibbering pack of tree-apes that said nothing, nothing, nothing and said it loud, loud, loud.”

With such a steady stream of input, people never take time to develop their own thoughts and opinions and perspectives. They simply believe what they are told and happily march along through life—as long as their material needs and wants are provided for, and as long as there is some new reality TV program to mesmerize them for the next twelve weeks.

If you think that I'm exaggerating the problem, it is said that more people voted for last year's UK "Pop Idol" than voted in Scotland's national elections. The majority of people in Western society are becoming easily controlled as they become more and more receptive to whatever sensory input comes their way. And as Bradbury so poignantly observes, "The most dangerous enemy of truth and freedom—the solid unmoving cattle of the majority."

Disconnecting Truth from Its Historical Foundation

In his futuristic yet frighteningly prophetic work, *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley demonstrates that once truth is cut loose from its historical foundation, the only thing to believe is what one is told at any given moment. In fact, the Controller Mustapha Mond cites one of the government's fundamental precepts: "'History is bunk. History,' he repeated slowly, 'is bunk.'"

Huxley continues the narrative: "He waved his hand; and it was as though, with an invisible feather whisk, he had brushed away a little dust, and the dust was Harappa, was Ur of the Chaldees; some spiderwebs, and they were Thebes and Babylon and Cnossos and Mycenae. Whisk, whisk—and where was Odysseus, where was Job, where were Jupiter and Gotama and Jesus? Whisk—and those specks of antique dirt called Athens and Rome, Jerusalem and the Middle Kingdom—all were gone. Whisk—the place where Italy had been was empty. Whisk, the cathedrals; whisk, whisk, King Lear and the Thoughts of Pascal. Whisk, Passion; whisk, Requiem; whisk, Symphony; whisk ..." This could be a commentary on modern philosophies of education as we discard historical foundations and classical roots as mere intellectual ballast.

Our 24/7 information-gorged society lives on the seeming reality of up-to-the-minute news, but most of us are losing all connection with the past, whether it be church history, governmental policy, or otherwise. When this begins to happen, the thoughts and opinions of men are too easily open to manipulation and control. Orwell also uncovers this serious threat when he observes, "Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past."

Such a subjective view of truth introduces a complete shift in what constitutes our foundation for living. It also means that there is a categorical change in what is considered to be our highest good. Again, Huxley describes the progression of just such a shift through his primary spokesman, Mustapha Mond:

"Knowledge was the highest good, truth the supreme value; all the rest was secondary and subordinate. ... [The government] did a great deal to shift the emphasis from truth and beauty to comfort and happiness. ... People were ready to have even their appetites controlled then. Anything for a quiet life. We've gone on controlling ever since. It hasn't been very good for truth, of course. But it's been very good for happiness."

A Considered Response

With such conditions developing, or deteriorating, all around us, it is vital that we know how we are to respond. In *Fahrenheit 451*, the old book lover, Faber, indicates that three things are necessary to respond to those who try to control our minds and actions: “1. The information we take in must be of a high quality. 2. Leisure time to correctly digest that information. 3. The right to carry out actions based on what we learn from the interaction of the first two.”

As homeschoolers we should strive to be like the “*children of Isaachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do*” (1 Chronicles 12:32). Educate your children with material that sets forth the timeless truth of God and every aspect of His universe, give them lots of time to reflect and learn, and encourage them to live lives that are an appropriate response to that truth in the light of our present times.

Biographical Information

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Bruce Garrison is husband to homeschooling mom Pippa and dad to Josiah (12) and Bethany (10). Bruce and Pippa are involved in Living Heritage, a new organization for Christian homeschoolers in the United Kingdom. Bruce is also editor of Searchlight Magazine, which publishes classic Christian writers in languages and dialects around the world. Bruce blogs on www.HomeschoolBlogger.com/garrisongang and Livingheritageuk. His missions website is www.searchlight-missions.org.