

Vote: The Scariest Word in Orwell's 'Animal Farm'

To the first-time reader, George Orwell's 1945 fable [*Animal Farm*](#) might appear to be the story of a grand experiment that began as a veritable utopia before its betrayal by an authoritarian hijacker.

That's certainly how many leftists, including one of my former professors, view the Russian Revolution on which Orwell's animal revolution is based. It's probable that even Orwell himself saw the Soviet Union in this way. In his memoir [*Homage to Catalonia*](#), Orwell describes a revolutionary Barcelona in which private property had been violently seized, "almost every church had been gutted and its images burnt," priests and business owners had been slaughtered, and "every wall was scrawled with the hammer and sickle."

Orwell calls this Communist nightmare "a state of affairs worth fighting for."

For Orwell, the Spanish Left transformed Barcelona into a noble "workers' State" that fell from grace only when Stalin, who prioritized Russian national security over international Communist expansion, imposed his own self-serving agenda. In *Animal Farm* Orwell emphasizes the contrast between the days of peace and plenty the animals enjoyed under [*Snowball \(Trosky\)*](#), and the sufferings they endured under Napoleon (Stalin). In both Spain and Russia, it is Stalin who acts as Orwell's villain, not Communism itself.

Yet hidden away in an early chapter of *Animal Farm*, before the reader has caught even a whiff of Napoleon's totalitarian ambitions, a single word reveals the moral rot at the core of Communism.

That word, and all the horrors it implies, slips out as Old

Major (Marx/Lenin) introduces the animals to Communist ideology, and lays the foundation for the coming revolution. That word is “vote”:

‘All men are enemies. All animals are comrades,’ [Major said.]

At this moment there was a tremendous uproar. While Major was speaking four large rats had crept out of their holes and were sitting on their hindquarters, listening to him. The dogs had suddenly caught sight of them, and it was only by a swift dash for their holes that the rats saved their lives. Major raised his trotter for silence.

‘Comrades,’ he said, ‘here is a point that must be settled. The wild creatures, such as rats and rabbits—are they our friends or our enemies? Let us put it to the vote. I propose this question to the meeting: Are rats comrades?’

The vote was taken at once, and it was agreed by an overwhelming majority that rats were comrades.

Old Major begins by dividing all living beings into two categories: enemies and comrades, oppressors and oppressed, evil and good. Marxism depends on this division. Utopia, it promises, will arrive only when everyone in the “enemy” category is wiped out. Immediately, however, it becomes obvious to Orwell’s four-footed revolutionaries that it is not self-evident who belongs in which category. Are rats comrades to be defended, or vermin to be exterminated?

Or, in real-world terms, is the owner of a small family farm who employs a pair of field hands a proletarian ally or a bourgeois oppressor?

In his [foreword](#) to Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s *Gulag Archipelago*, Jordan Peterson comments on the horrifying implications of this method of categorization:

It is... necessary to pose the question: 'Who, precisely, belonged to that hypothetical entity, "the bourgeoisie"?' It is not as if the boundaries of such a category are self-evident, there for the mere perceiving. They must be drawn. But where, exactly? And, more importantly, by whom—or by what?

These are life-and-death decisions, and the animals make them by simple majority vote. Enemies have no rights and can be killed without hesitation, and anyone can be arbitrarily designated an enemy at any time. Such a system is a double-edged sword: many of the animals who voted to include the rats as comrades are later executed as enemies.

The United States Constitution protects individual rights that no majority, no matter how large, can overrule. Under Communism individuals do not matter, the collective has unlimited power to destroy all who oppose it.

The animals' democratic system eventually gives way to Napoleon's dictatorship, but the method of categorization is of secondary importance. What matters is the existence of the power to designate and eliminate enemies at will, not who exercises that power. By wielding this power, Napoleon continues to rely on the ideology he inherited from Major and Snowball.

It is precisely because the animals believe in their own moral purity as the oppressed class that Napoleon is able to massacre his opponents and pacify the survivors with fearmongering propaganda. If the only thing standing in the way of utopia is the oppressor class, then the slaughter must continue until utopia arrives. If things aren't perfect yet, it's because enemies still lurk somewhere, and it becomes the responsibility of every good comrade to spy on his neighbors. The "enemy" category can be extended as many times as is necessary. The whole system is a dictator's dream.

Contrary to what Orwell would have liked to believe, Stalin and Napoleon did not represent the corruption of Communist ideology, but rather its inevitable result. Orwell failed to see this truth because he did not understand what Solzhenitsyn [learned](#) so painfully in one of Stalin's gulags:

If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.

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