George Orwell's 1984 did not prophesy a nightmare society but, rather, warned us that fascism or Stalinism could be perfected into an irreversible and complete totalitarianism. What made the warning so powerful is that Orwell's anti-utopia is a very plausible representation of what life would be like if a central authority were permitted to abuse technology and language to pervert the past and create an unending tyranny. We identify with Winston Smith and Julia; and, as a generation that stared into the Holocaust's ovens, we find O'Brien a more believable Satan than Dostoevski's Grand Inquisitor, and Oceania a perfectly logical extension of Hitler's Europe, Stalin's Russia, Mao's China.

Why has Orwell's nightmare society failed to come about. Not because we heeded his warning, but because corrosive forces sapped the revolutionary zeal of totalitarianism from within—something Orwell did not foresee. Nevertheless, in 1984 we live with another nightmare vision: the horrifying immediacy of total war. The threat of nuclear incineration, of the Big Bang that would signal the end of life on earth even as it may have begun, has day-to-day effects that are interesting reflections of Orwell's novel. Turned fatalistic about our doubtful future, we become inured to man's inhumanity to man, today more widespread than ever. As we play for time against the awful apocalypse, we seem willing to narrow our freedoms and discard our aspirations for social justice. Out of fear we may be ready to give up more—perhaps much more—edging closer and closer to accepting forms of authoritarianism that bear the earmarks of the authoritarianism into which the former totalitarian powers have sunk.

Winston Smith's journey from rebellion to absolute submission to a dialectic of power in which power is sought for its own sake is, given our present sense of helplessness, at least as understandable as it was in 1949 when Orwell published his chilling work. What are the objectives of today's political leadership? Communist ideology is dead; Soviet Russia's power is in its military arsenal. The vision of the democracies has dwindled to a flash of doomsday light. We bristle with arms to deter or participate in the mayhem; our purposes for living are eroded, and we are prepared to accept harsh disciplines that make living less worthwhile. Terrified ourselves, Winston carries us along in his terror, right up to his horrifying conversion to O'Brien's dictum: "One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution to establish the dictatorship. The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power."

The touchstone of this wildly disparate collection of thirteen essays under Irving Howe's editorship is not really Orwell's brilliant book, whose title was chosen more by chance than as a significant deadline, but a desire to take stock: What has become of the totalitarianism Orwell warned us of? What are its prospects now that 1984 has arrived?

Each of the thirteen contributors has different points to make. Some hold that "1984" has already materialized or is well on the way to realization. For Mark Crispin Miller, political totalitarianism is merely "one more celebrated ugliness" in our insatiable appetite for horrors, among which he lumps together nuclear destruction, child abuse, the Holocaust, toxic waste, and—uncountably and obscenely—the works of Samuel Beckett. For Germany's Johanno Strasser, the symptoms of "1984" are in scientific and technological advances that are not resolutely tied to advances in democracy and social justice. He warns us to beware of "technoanatics" who beguile us with a science-fiction future in which political systems will become increasingly distant from the citizenry. Professor James B. Rule of SUNY at Stony Brook sees signs of actual and potential political repression everywhere, especially in the state's total power to investigate, therefore to control, every recess of private life. Electronic dossiers on each of us, linked by a network of computers, have terrible potential. Rule cites Nixon's use of IRS files to hound political opponents; today the scope and scale of such abuse is much greater. Mass communication can lead to mass surveillance. Two-way television exists; so far we can still turn it off.

Other of the essayists point out the changes in social relations that could result not only from the abuse of new technology but also from the perversion of language. The term "Newspeak" has entered our vocabulary, and examples of it have entered our lives. The Defense Department's description of the invasion of Grenada by U.S. paratroopers as a "vertical insertion" would be comical if it did not have the frightening purpose of dulling the average citizen's awareness that it was an invasion, a unilateral act of aggression. In Orwell's Oceania one of the party's slogans was "War is Peace." That seems to have been what many Americans wanted to believe at the time of Grenada. It was the official line, and those who expressed an opinion overwhelmingly supported barring the press from being there and offering a different version. Why did so few speak up for the once-cherished freedom of the press? According to a recent poll, four out of five Americans believe it would be easy to assemble files on their lives that would violate their privacy, and many of those assumed that government agencies and banks were already doing so. Eighty-six per cent of the sampling believed it possible that "a government in Washington will use confidential information to intimidate individuals or groups it feels are its enemies."

The mix of complacency and fear, and the approval of totalitarian techniques in our society, is worrisome indeed, but this is not what Orwell warned us of. He did not envision incremental mind control. Rather, he warned of a shattering and total "qualitative transformation, and ultimate change," as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., put it in a recent review, "an act of creative daring to carry the inner logic of Nazism and Stalinism to the end of night." It is this understanding of theoretical totalitarianism at its ultimate realization and then of what, in contrast with Orwell's fears, has actually happened in the principal totalitarian powers of the 1940s, that occupies the authors of the most important essays in this volume: Howe in his introduction, Michael Walzer in an acute piece on "Failed Totalitarianism," and Richard Lowenthal in his astonishingly comprehensive historical interpretation of the evolution of Communist Russia and Communist China.

The conception of totalitarianism in these three essays differs mostly in emphasis. For Walzer, a professor at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, "totalitarianism...
is the idealization of authoritarian rule." Howe stresses its ideological fanaticism, a kind of frenzy that forces the individual into total identification with the state. All three define totalitarianism in terms of the tyranny of a ruthless, single-party dictatorship that is decisively distinguished from other dictatorships by its ideological compulsion to achieve total and ultimately worldwide transformations of the structure of society.

First Lenin and Hitler, then Stalin and Mao failed in this effort. The pivotal reason for this, as Lowenthal so clearly points out, is "the dynamic nature of actual totalitarianism which, devoted to unending, totally planned change, ultimately falls victim to unplanned change." In this connection, attention is usually focused on problems of succession—replacing Big Brother. The essays by Robert C. Tucker and, to a lesser extent, by the Yugoslav dissident Milovan Dijas stress "the cult of the individual" as a key problem for one-party dictatorships.

Walzer and Lowenthal, on the other hand, point out that the inherent flaw in even the most virulent, Stalinist totalitarianism is that, ultimately, a choice must be made between two goals, Utopia or gradual modernization; and the latter will invariably prevail, engendering a weakening of ideology. Losing its utopian rationale, it petrifies. Despite the terror by which Stalin tried to impose permanent revolution from above, Russia's devitalization of purpose was discernible even before his death. Stalin used the secret police; Mao used a mass movement of youth backed by the army to control the country and revitalize revolutionary zeal. Following the death of these two tyrants, the Party in both countries reassessed its central role, though with a stronger influence from the military than before.

If institutionalized revolution is the essence of totalitarianism, then it has failed; it has withered away in both Russia and China. The failure of revolution and the channeling of energies into forced-wage economic change still leaves individuals suffering under the yoke of tyranny. Orwell foresaw the time when fanatic belief in the total state would crumble but its power and dominance survive. Walzer calls this condition "failed totalitarianism," which consists of a relatively stable "dominance of repression, censorship, torture, and murder, all of the largely traditional kind though the traditionalism is sometimes masked by ideological pretensions." Authoritarian rule is the dominant fact today in most societies, and not only where it is the legacy of totalitarian movements and parties. Walzer delivers a stinging attack on contemporary conservative intellectuals who distinguish rigorously between the devitalized Communist authoritarian states, whom they reject, and the authoritarian regimes such as those that dominate Central and South America, whom they regard as acceptable and even desirable allies. Those who defend anti-Communist authoritarian regimes under the cynical banner "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" have, as Walzer concludes, "failed to grasp the historical connection between what they defend and what they destroy."

Is there any escape for those forced to live under the awful banalities of contemporary authoritarian regimes, whatever their origin? Orwell answers in terms of the claims of the body. Winston finally succumbs to the horrors of O'Brien's torture chamber, Room 101, and understands what O'Brien means when he says: "If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face—forever." But before he suffers this ultimate humiliation, Winston finds both a place and a mode for establishing his individuality. Four of the essayists chose to point out that in the countryside, away from the city, where traditionally human freedoms evolve and social justice is attained, Winston discovers Julia's sexuality. Following Freud's understanding that "the libido is a means of liberation," Orwell—through Julia's boldness in arranging the tryst—is saying that love, the dignity of our emotions, annihilates tyranny. In 1984 sexual freedom is a political act. Irving Howe tells us he was moved—and we are moved because he was—upon rereading 1984 by "the unabashed celebrations of the body" when Winston and Julia meet in the world of nature and discover one another "with charming indifference to all ideologies."

Though we have escaped the 1984 Orwell warned us of, we face a countdown to even more devastating results. Our imminent peril lies in the inability of two superpowers to find common ground based on mutual self-interest to bind them in an accommodation with one another. The United States and the Soviet Union, their principal allies, and also China share—if nothing else—equally good reasons to dread the rise of a messianic revolutionary fervor that may be exacerbated by racism among the countries of the developing continents. Iran today is an example. Some of these countries will become nuclear powers, either by acquiring weapons on the international market or through technological developments of their own. It does not take another Orwell to warn us of what the consequences might be. /WW://

**WOMEN, REASON AND NATURE**
by Carol McMillan
(Princeton University Press; 156 pp.; $17.50)

**WOMEN OF IDEAS (AND WHAT MEN HAVE DONE TO THEM)**
by Dale Spender
(Routledge & Kegan Paul; 531 pp.; $9.95 [paper])

*Margery Fox*

Seasoned feminists sense a loss of momentum, especially among a younger generation that takes for granted the gains of the past two decades. The radical core is discredited by bypassing children and the family, and organizations like NOW are trying to occupy the middle ground, hence to dilute or mute radicalism. The moment is propitious for philosophy, since, as some wag once said, the task of philosophers is to reassure men that what they are already doing is all right. Arriving on cue in his Arcadian mantle is social philosopher Ivan Illich, whose *Gender* presents a historical and archaeological resurrection of the notion of separate and autonomous spheres of activity for men and women. Such separation would obliterate the gender competition at which women always come off second best.

Carol McMillan boards the conservative bandwagon with a different satchel of disciplinary tools but similar objectives. She argues that there are erroneous assumptions about the nature of reason and of women's reasoning capacities common to feminists and antifeminists alike.

In a nearly always lucid style, McMillan charts a promising course. She reviews the Hegelian and Kantian rationalist concept of human progress as resting on difference rather than on romantic, intuitive union with the natural world. "The upshot of this is that only those activities from which there is no counterpart in the animal world and which are not contaminated by feelings can be truly human and therefore based on reason." Her attack on the feminists is based on this somewhat overstated dichotomy between nature and the human.