

# The Civilization of Aldous Huxley's *Brave World*

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**Abstract:** The paper aims at exploring Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), precisely, his criticism of the civilized rules by which the World State citizens must abide. Those rules are, characteristically, at odds with the normal human ways of life that the writer textually describes as "savage." The paper intends to examine the two concepts of civilization and savageness as far as Huxley's utopian "brave" world is concerned. Moreover, it tries to underscore, by means of juxtaposing the discussion of the two worlds representing each of the two concepts throughout the second and the third sections of the paper, the irony underlying their new inverted meanings.

**Keywords:** Civilization, Oppression, Rights, Individual, Ideal, Savage

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## 1. Introduction

The issues that the twentieth-century British writer Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) addressed in his novel *Brave New World* (1932) seemed urgent during the post-World War era, "when governments sought scientific and technological progress at all costs". [1] Huxley seemed to witness with dismay the sweeping victory of the matter over the spirit, which came as a result of what the eighteenth-century rationalists believed to be the prevalence of Reason. The twentieth-century French writer Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) criticizes the modern Western civilization for having cut its links with the sacred and the numinous. He believes that the triumph of rationalism has led Westerners to neglect the spiritual in favour of the intellectual, "with the result that culture is impoverished and theatre reduced to mere talk." [2]

On writing his novel, Huxley must have in mind the image of Europe left in ruins after the First World War, a world that was torn between nationalistic radicalisms on the left and on the right. Therefore, the book came out to be of a transcendental, visionary outlook though the author insisted that his novel was not a prophetic, but a cautionary one. [3] Huxley's alarming perspective of the future of mankind was obviously nourished by the fact that:

Huxley composed *Brave New World* in 1931, when Europe and America were still reeling—economically, politically, and socially—from World War I. Massive industrialization,

coupled with severe economic depression and the rise of fascism, were the backdrop for the novel. [4]

The vast and rapid scientific advancements perceived against a social background during the second half of the twentieth century - particularly in the field of biology - made Huxley's prophecies about the future seem more real than mere fantasy. [5] In keeping with his view of life as fastidious and vulgar, Huxley's satire, whose main targets are aesthetics, politics, morals, and spiritualism, turns him, for the most part, into a "superb debunker". [6]

Huxley's novel might have been inspired by H. G. Wells's prophetically optimistic book *Men Like Gods* (1923). In a 1962 letter, Huxley explained how the facile optimism of *Men Like Gods* greatly annoyed him. Having the impetus to compose a parody of Wells in 1931, he began writing a novel satirizing the notion of a scientific utopia, a satire that was published the following year and became his most widely read narrative. [7] Unlike Wells's novel, however, Huxley's tale evokes a frightening vision of the future of a society governed by highly developed reproductive technology, biological engineering and sleep-learning. [8] Huxley appears to be extremely concerned about a hygienic, serialized future. Where "everything is mechanical, planned, bottled, dehumanized, and frightful ... the result is a picture from which one recoils with loathing". [9] Whereas a

totalitarian regime implements its malevolent schemes based on its ideology in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948), the evil of the ruling caste in Huxley is felt in the lacking of the democratic spirit necessary for an ideal civilized society. Huxley's originality, therefore, finds expression in humankind's strange but rightful claim of their basic humanity: health and disease; happiness and sadness, comfort and suffering, and so on.

The period of Huxley's pessimism during which he wrote the novel was to continue for more than two decades, particularly when a sequel with the title *Brave New World Revisited* (1958) came out to continue discussing the future society in terms of such matters as overpopulation and the threat of totalitarianism. [10] Here, Huxley appears no less horrified by such massive development in the fields of science and technology; rather, he confirms what he has earlier said in his first book. Yet, the form here is by no means fictional, having neither characters, incidents nor a plot.

Pondering chiefly on the rapid changes encouraged by the scientific advancement, Huxley, in an interview, comments on the purpose behind writing his tale:

[Technology could] iron [humans] into a kind of uniformity, if you were able to manipulate their genetic background... if you had a government unscrupulous enough you could do these things without any doubt... We are getting more and more into a position where these things can be achieved. And it's extremely important to realize this, and to take every possible precaution to see they shall not be achieved. This, I take it, was the message of the book—This is possible: for heaven's sake be careful about it. [11]

Huxley's dystopian fable presents a world state in the seventh century A. F.\* The novel is set in London in 2540 A. D. or 632 A. F. Indeed, Huxley saw in the production of more than fifteen million Model T's as a "metaphor that, improperly applied, could transform society into a totalitarian monster". [12]

In keeping with Huxley's nightmarish vision of the envisioned utopian future in *Brave New World*, science and technology are manipulated to curb human freedom, a premonition of what the state of affairs would be by the late 1930s. [13] In his novel, Huxley carefully depicts a society in which Henry Ford (1863-1947), the famous American businessman, becomes a god and life turns to be "intolerably painless." Evidently, the author lashes at contemporary principles by imagining their future development. [14]

Though Huxley, in Arnold Kettle's perspective, most often falls short of presenting a "cross section of English society of the late nineteen-twenties", [15] and though *Brave New World* was hardly acclaimed by critics and reviewers who saw it as a boring and "overly simplistic" tale whose vision, though interesting, was "irrelevant and unoriginal" [16], Huxley's 1932 masterpiece was a success. It basically parodies the utopian novel and portrays a society "where

sexual permissiveness, technological development, selective breeding and the debasement of popular culture are carried to the limit, creating a world of insipid, conformist mediocrity". [17] The world that Huxley intends his readers to envision is invariably materialistic, which may suggest that the book carries some undertones in support of certain spiritual aspects that this world purposefully disregards.

## 2. The Bravery of the New World

The central idea of *Brave New World* is a possible future fantastical world where technology becomes such powerfully dominant that, though it prevents sickness, disease, and wars, it threatens humanity and ultimately crushes it by implication. [18] Consumerism, Ian Milligan asserts, gives rise to the radical elimination of both achievement and suffering from life in a society where individual integrity and respectability are abrogated in favor of collective stability and social control. [19]

The action of *Brave New World* develops round Bernard Marx, a revolting Alpha-plus, who brings John the Savage from a New Mexican reservation back to London. Though the Savage is initially fascinated by the new world, he, too, finally revolts, and his argument with Mustapha Mond, the World Controller for Western Europe, towards the end of the novel "demonstrates the incompatibility of individual freedom and a scientifically trouble-free society". [20]

The transformation of society into a mechanized one finds its best expression in the mass-production of people in test tubes and the creation of social classes through generic manipulations to determine a person's intelligence and body type. Such a seemingly ideal world has no place for "unwanted emotions," which are suppressed by a drug known as *soma*. [21] The *soma*, by definition, is a powerful drug taken to escape pain and bad memories through hallucinatory fantasies. The *soma* addiction, as it were, naturally results in its takers' overwhelming feelings of perfect bliss and content, together with their readiness to perform the assigned tasks of their caste. [22] The best way whereby the controllers manipulate the New World citizens is by controlling their minds and freezing their common senses at the zero points.

In a futuristic society that is unified as World State, the population is strictly classified into five castes: Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, and Epsilon, and these are in turn subdivided into plus and minus members. The categories are largely based on abilities each of these has been bred to possess. In accordance with this breeding system, the highest castes are the smartest, which is why they are assigned jobs as scientists and scholars. These castes are tightly connected together, which yields social involvement and the discouragement of loneliness. [23]

A characteristic feature of Huxley's so-called "brave" world is that the idea of parents as a concept that no longer exists in the World State where all the children are "decanted" and raised in the "Hatcheries" and "Conditioning Centres". [24] For this reason, the word "mother" in the new

\* That is, the history that began with the production of the Ford cars in 1927.

order is merely an obscenity. The sterility of the buildings and the mechanical processes that have supplanted normal human reproduction are symbols of the larger controls that society has over the destinies of human beings. [25] Whereas an Alpha, even after "decanting," remains inside an invisible bottle "of infantile and embryonic fixations", \* an Epsilon is manipulated in such a way as to be always ready to sacrifice. Therefore, the Fordian society has been able to produce, through genetic engineering, standardized humans—a small number of thinkers and a huge number of identical inferior creatures. [26] Hence, the novel, in John Attrian's opinion, "is an indictment of tyranny and technology". [27] Huxley's novel is a terrifying view of a world in which science and technology are used by powerful rulers to control and subdue the masses, making them into mindless automatons. [28] What Huxley was convinced of was that one of the biggest problems in the modern world was that people were willingly giving up their freedom and their essential humanity to governmental control. [29] Technology must have its side effects of which very few are aware. To strangle the stimulus or drive to live and to deny one the sweetness of struggle and triumph are among the considerations totally recommended in Huxley's future utopia.

The world Huxley portrays here is "brave"; humanity is carefree and technologically advanced, warfare and poverty have been entirely eliminated and everyone is permanently happy. All these things, ironically, have been accomplished at the expense of many things that humans hold to be central to their identity, such as family, culture, art, literature, science, religion, and philosophy. This life is generally of a hedonistic nature, basically pursued through free promiscuous sex and drug use. Stability has been maintained through carefully engineered and rigidly enforced social stratification. [30] This world is brave in the sense that it challenges the conventional norms of how things really should be. It breaks all such rules, bringing in new ones to be put into effect. In effect, it has met the public demands for freedom of any constraints, for comfort, and for satisfaction but failed in being brave in the sense of allowing its individuals chances for true heroism in time of hardship and adversity.

### 3. The Other Side of Huxley's Paradise

People who do not fit into this new society have to live in a non-sterile environment known as "Savage Reservation," where normal humans or, as textually referred to as "savages", reproduce naturally away from the new means of technology. This yields different reactions in two of the main characters in the novel: it fills Bernard Marx with fascination and Lenina with disgust. [31] In explaining the nature of the Reservation to Lenina, the warden says that it is inhabited by:

Absolute savages ... no communication whatever with the civilized world... still preserve their repulsive habits and

customs... marriage... families... no conditioning ... monstrous superstitions ... Christianity and totemism and ancestor worship .... Extinct languages ... pumas, porcupines and other ferocious animals ... infectious diseases ... priests ... venomous lizards .... (103)

The Reservation, as a place of "old age, disease, filth, generation, and savagery," has come into being in response to the new order [32]; it is, according to the Provost of a New World university, "a place which ... has not been worth the expense of civilizing" (162). Those who are born in the Reservation are "destined to die there" (102). It is their graveyard out of which no chances of escape have ever been imagined. The isolation of the Reservation inhabitants, the electrified fences, the strange languages, customs, religion, traditions and peoples in this place delineate it as wholly different from the World State or the "Brave New World". [33] The Reservation is the normal place where outcasts and exiles have freedom to practice what they believe in with no fear of contaminating the highly conditioned minds of the new world's citizens.

A nightmarish vision of a world that is devoid of any authentic belief and spiritual values, Huxley's novel finds in the character of John the Savage, with his passion for Shakespeare, a victim or a scapegoat rather than a willful figure with "an alternative to a choice between an insane utopia and a barbaric lunacy". [34] The issue of savageness, as suggested by the Savage's name and as opposed to the World State's civilization, runs as a motif all the way through the second part of the novel where John's revolting side shows up to be dimensional to the novel's central conflict. In the light of this rendering, John becomes a prototypical embodiment of man's desire to get the simplest of his rights, that is, to be human. He is, in a way, the Rousseauian *Noble Savage*, a figure "stifled by the constraints of civilized society", [35] in a constant quest for primitive purity.

Being educated by his mother and raised among people who had some religion outside the World State, John, with his "most peculiar way of talking" (139), gains access to censored literature such as Shakespeare's plays which are prohibited because people desire to learn new things rather than old ones. [36] By contrast, John experiences greater freedom, original thoughts and natural feelings unknown to the new world citizens. [37] The enormous gap between John's mood of thought and that of the rest of the community leaves him in danger of antagonizing not only individual members but also the entire community that is addicted to a certain way of life and is by no means willing to give it up. As a result, the individual is helpless and vulnerable. In literature, John, evidently, enjoys this sense of restoring part of his lost identity and humanity.

John's imaginative interaction with reading defines his separateness and his alienation from society. Thus, any attempt at communication between John, who represents the world of imagination, philosophy, literature, and so on, and his beloved Beta, Lenina, who represents the perfectly organized World State, to understand one another proves to be of no avail. [38] The essential problem of Huxley's

\* Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (Perennial Classics, 1998), p. 222. Subsequent references to this novel will take the form of page numbers put between brackets.

standardized world is its emphasis on the material aspect of civilization and its utter dismissal of the equally significant spiritual one.

If conflict is said to exist within John between accepting unwillingly the massive advancements made to perfect humans' life, and getting back to the simple, old, undeveloped ways of life, which, though keeping one's essential human virtues intact, set one apart, irrevocably, from the mainstream, he is definitely able to resolve it. John's negative response to all the comforts provided by the perfect sterilized civilization is indicative of his unconformity and his high sense of individualism. It is evident that he abhors such a civilization that poisons and defiles more than improves. Therefore, if that civilized society does provide its people's with real happiness, John confronts Mond with the paradoxical claim of his (John's) right to be unhappy, to be anywhere as long as this may secure his individualism. Near the lighthouse with its positive connotations, John comes to purify himself away from the evils of such a fake civilization and its incurable diseases. His final suicidal act signifies his utter failure to get along with even the place which has been his chosen exile. He achieves no success in attaining his long lost peace of mind.

The policy of the World State's rulers bans people's use of their minds and imagination, much the same way as the "Big Brother" does in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In fact, it is not only imaginative literature that has been banned in the World State, but also the intellectual and cultural aspects of people's life. History has been wiped out and all forms of past culture (including art and history) have been irrevocably effaced. [39] Social classes are divided in accordance with their intelligence, with a variety of colors used to identify them. The experiments made at what is called "hypnopaedia" or "sleep-teaching" to educate intellectuals result in that the students could only repeat their lessons verbatim without understanding them at all. [40] To emphasize their state of happiness, they are in need of repeating the phrase "we are happy" one hundred and fifty times every night for fifteen years. They do so under the influence of soma and with the sky always covered in blue screens, so that they can never see the dark night sky. They are never taught to feel because, as Lenina once tells John, "when the individual feels, the community reels". [41] The graduates of such schools which provide the training of the best minds of this society are well aware that how people react to a "feely" – something that is equal to a movie - defines their tastes and sensibilities. [42] Hence, it is no wonder that John's substitute for "sleep-teaching" is his love for reading Shakespeare.

Another main character who finds himself at odds with the rules and codes which the "brave" new order imposes on individuals is Bernard Marx. Bernard is a member of what is supposed to be a highly intelligent class, yet, because of some decanting miscalculation, he is deformed in shape and attitudes, which renders him sensitive and self-conscious. He both is against the soma and is attracted to the Reservation. [43] As a reaction to his conditioning, Bernard wishes to be free in his own way, "not in everybody else's way" (91).

Marx's attempts to express how he feels stifled and how he wants to break free from the enslavement of his conditioning find no satisfactory answers in Lenina who thinks him to be in need of some soma to sedate his disappointment. [44] For this reason, Bernard always feels "like a man pursued ... by enemies he doesn't wish to see, lest they should seem more hostile even than he had supposed, and he himself be made to feel guiltier and even more helplessly alone" (63). No sound relationships can be made in such an atmosphere lacking in any mental or emotional stimulation.

It is quite natural, therefore, that Bernard finds in the Reservation some sort of self-expression. The area where the savages live makes Bernard "feel as though ... I were more me ... more on my own, not so completely a part of something else. Not just a cell in the social body" (90). With his revolting attitude against the new order, Bernard proves himself "an enemy of Society, a subverter ... of all Order and Stability, a conspirator against Civilization itself" (149).

People in the World State are taught to hate solitude so as not to have time to believe in God and think about death. The revolting individuals, however, find exile necessary to preserve their identities. Any valid claim to perfection in this new utopian world is undermined by some characters' physical disabilities marking them as ineligible citizens. Bernard's physical defect yields an "incapacity to melt with the group". [45] In like manner, Helmholtz Watson, his friend, has an intellectual or mental excess making him conscious of his alienation and isolation from his colleagues and peers. As they are misfits and outsiders, both find heroism in the new order completely impossible. [46] The technological civilization, in effect, has no need for nobility and heroism, which are "symptoms of political inefficiency." No wars are fought currently in the World State since there is no such thing as a "divided allegiance," and there are not any "temptations to resist" (237). Helmholtz's desire is to bridge the gap or at least find a common ground between the old order and the new one which he believes it to be "stupid and horrible" (219).

A part of the characters' one-dimensional nature is their inclination to remain the forms they are rather than running the risks of venturing out of their fragile formulae. Lenina is typically one of those characters who show complete inability to comprehend the essence of neither their existence nor their actions. While seeking out crowds, she unabashedly sees no value in being alone with someone unless she is making love to him. She sees marriage as a "horrible idea", particularly because it is based on love rather than on liking. Similarly, Linda, John's mother, is primarily occupied with nothing except self-pity as a result of her culture's limitation of her to menial work. She is ashamed to have born her son naturally. On the other hand, Tomakin, John's father, pretends to be a pious judge while in reality he is a hypocrite. [47]

The World State motto– "Community, Identity, Stability" obliterates such concepts as individualism and freedom. *Brave New World* depicts a technologically advanced, minutely organized world state whose inhabitants are

programmed to eliminate individual differences in order to enforce a stable society. [48] Mustapha Mond declares that human misery has come to an end because of the new order. For this reason, the World State is stable, and people, as Mond asserts, are happy because they:

get what they want, and they never want what they can't get. They're well off; they're safe; they're never ill; they're not afraid of death; they're blissfully ignorant of passion and old age; they're plagued with no mothers or fathers; they've got no wives, or children, or lovers to feel strongly about; they're so conditioned that they practically can't help behaving as they ought to behave. And if anything should go wrong, there's soma. (220)

As long as the happiness that is obtained with a mere drug is "never grand" (221), it is to be achieved through material but not spiritual progress, which is conditioned by the abolition of the love of nature. As "primroses" and "landscapers" are merely "gratuitous," they, practically, "keep no factories busy" (22-23). Truth and beauty, that are no more needed, are to be replaced for the sake of infinite sensual pleasure and comfort. This can be analogous to Gradgrind's and Bounderby's utilitarian teachings in Dickens's *Hard Times*.

Likewise, old men, unlike in the bad old days, "work ... have no time, no leisure from pleasure, not a moment to sit down and think ..." (55). Similarly, old things, including religious books and the classics, are to be completely abandoned. Such prohibition is to prevent any attraction to them on the side of people. For Mustapha Mond, the old books, including the religious ones, speak of truths that no longer apply because society is totally different from the one from which they came out. This illustrates the total loss of faith in God in favor of technology which again fails to solve problems and improve the quality of human life. John, in contrast, finds that verities never change with every human age but persist until the end. [49]

In like manner, pure scientific discoveries are to be curbed as they are "potentially subversive." Since art and science are "incompatible with happiness" (225), and since science may lead to stability threatening change, it can sometimes become a "possible enemy" (225).

Securing progress, as it is seen by the Controller, requires independence of God and religion. As long as people are everlastingly youthful and prosperous, they are never ruled by fear of old age and death. The Controller declares the inefficacy of God who "manifests himself as an absence" as though "he weren't there at all" (234). This must therefore designate God's incompatibility with "machinery and scientific medicine and universal happiness" (234). One implication is that Huxley wonders whether science had the capability of producing new gods for humanity to worship, [50]

Uniform comfort is in no way a sufficient compensation for the loss of truth and beauty. Shutting out religion tends to empty life of meaning. The population remains young and energetic, but no one ever matures or achieves wisdom. [51] The result is inevitably a horrifying future promising nothing but the destruction of such a seemingly idealistic image of

society.

In sum, life becomes intolerable once it is emptied of its most fundamental ingredients, a feeling experienced by John who wishes to communicate it to those around him. What crucially aggravates John's pain under oppression is the inner and outer isolation he and his like are forced to suffer from, simply because they, unlike others, choose to attach a certain meaningful definition to their existence.

## 4. Conclusion

When he wrote his *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley must have had in mind the idea of dramatizing how a world without sickness, disease, pain, or any other human limitation, looks like. In terms of this idealism comes civilization as a supreme principle according to which rules and norms must be enacted and strictly observed. The principal question often asked is: why should utopian idealism involve tyranny, oppression, and the lust for power?

The world delineated in *Brave New World* is of two opposing facets. On the one hand, it is magnificently brilliant, shining, hedonistic, and full of all that which renders man's life there as comfortable and pleasant as it ought to be. When pain and suffering are predominantly forgotten, or so easily relieved with a drug, and when one effortlessly finds all the comforts of life at hand anytime and anywhere, this means that one has come to Huxley's "Brave New World" where the utmost type of perfection is said to have been accomplished.

On the other side of this world, however, is a gloomy image of a life that is dominated by strict World Controllers whose main responsibility is conditioning the human race into castes based on essential differences in qualities and body abilities. This is a horrid, nightmarish life that goes on a routine basis; it is so organized that it turns almost all the activities done by humans into insipid processes that are void of any essence or substantial value. The novel is an attack on oppressive regimes practicing their malevolent schemes in the name of civilization and freedom.

Altogether, the novel's redeeming quality lies in John and his companions' revolting spirits, which, though thwarted at the end, can guide humanity out of the New World's unbearable dystopia.

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