

Aldous Huxley's Brave New World: A Satirical Examination of Modern Society

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Abstract

Huxley's "Brave New World" marked his first foray into the realm of dystopian science fiction, despite being his fifth novel. The narrative unfolds in a future, entirely fictitious One World State, wherein citizens undergo environmental engineering to establish an intelligence-based social hierarchy. This hierarchy is founded on advanced reproductive technologies, sleep-learning techniques, and psychological manipulation through classical conditioning. This essay interprets the novel as an allegory for contemporary society, drawing parallels to a world grappling with the idea of a radical 'Restart' and the pursuit of an envisioned utopia orchestrated by the New World Order. Huxley's keen awareness of the distinction between science and technology becomes apparent, as he underscores the potential misapplication of cutting-edge scientific knowledge, particularly in the form of perilous technology. He sounds a cautionary

note about the dangers posed by such technology, especially when wielded by an all-powerful technocratic state well-versed in the manipulation of its citizens through psychological means rather than brute force, in stark contrast to Orwell's portrayal of a dystopian society in his famous work, "1984.

Keywords: Aldous Huxley, Satire, Dystopian literature, Modern Society, Consumerism, individuality, conformity, societal critique.

Aldous Leonard Huxley (1894–1963) was an accomplished English writer, novelist, philosopher, and a notable member of the Huxley family. Born in Godalming, Surrey, England in 1894, he received his education at Eton College during his youth and later graduated from the College of Baillieu at Oxford University. However, his early ambition to become a doctor was curtailed due to visual impairments, leading him to embark on a literary career.

Huxley's upbringing was steeped in knowledge, thanks to his father, a biologist, who ensured his well-rounded education from an early age. His profound understanding of human conflicts showcased an almost prophetic insight into the intricacies of life. In the 1920s, he gained widespread recognition as a celebrated writer, primarily for his popular novels, and he soon became a prominent figure in the literary world. In 1937, Huxley made a significant move, relocating to Los Angeles, where he spent the remainder of his life. Throughout his career, he contributed significantly to literature and philosophy, leaving an indelible mark on both fields with his thought-provoking works and intellectual contributions.

The novel "*Brave New World*" commences with a portrayal of the city of London in the World State, set in the year 2540. In this futuristic society, citizens are not born but rather produced through artificial wombs, and their destinies are predetermined through childhood indoctrination programs that assign them to specific castes based on their intelligence and labour roles. Life within the World State is characterized by convenience and ease, with individuals strictly adhering to their predetermined routines. In this society, Fordship, a

reference to the figure of Henry Ford, is worshipped in a manner akin to divinity. The populace has access to Soma, a chemical that can induce joy and pleasure, available in unlimited quantities at any time.

Two central characters, Lenina Crowne, a hatchery worker known for her popularity and desirability, and Bernard Marx, a psychologist, stand in stark contrast. Bernard, shorter in stature than others in his high caste, grapples with an inferiority complex. His sole confidant is Helmholtz Watson, a talented writer who struggles to channel his creativity in a pain-free society. Bernard and Lenina embark on a holiday to the Savage Reserve in New Mexico, a region outside the confines of the World State. Here, they encounter naturally-born people, experience diseases, witness the aging process, encounter foreign languages, and observe religious practices for the first time. During their visit, they encounter Linda, a Beta woman who was accidentally left behind during a previous trip to the Savage Reserve, along with her naturally-born son, John. Bernard's decision to bring Linda and John back to the World State initiates a series of controversies in the ostensibly civilized society.

The ensuing events result in the expulsion of Bernard and Helmholtz, while John ultimately takes his own life, marking a poignant and dramatic conclusion to the narrative. "Brave New World" offers a stark reflection of the numerous societal issues that pervade our present day, both on an individual and structural level. Huxley's nightmarish dystopia provides valuable insights that resonate with contemporary concerns. As Smith (2011) astutely notes, 'Huxley's dystopia is uncomfortably familiar in its unfamiliarity' (p. 349). This paradox of the familiar within the unfamiliar suggests that we are living in an era where Huxley's once inconceivable dystopian society now compels us to ponder questions that are increasingly relevant.

These individual and structural issues, along with their far-reaching consequences, can be effectively scrutinized through a sociological lens that centers on the concept of trust.

Examining trust within the context of "Brave New World" allows us to gain fresh insights into key themes of the novel, such as the role of motherhood, the impact of social conditioning, the structure of families, the influence of technology, and the nature of romance. It offers a novel perspective on a cherished and widely read work of fiction.

Since its publication in 1932, "*Brave New World*" has been subject to extensive analysis and critique. However, its social relevance continues to grow with each passing decade, underscoring the enduring pertinence of its themes and the need for ongoing examination and reflection. In "*Brave New World*," a paradox emerges where individuals share virtually everything in common, yet they are intentionally segregated through a rigid caste system. The natural process of biological birth has been prohibited, giving way to the assembly-line birth of babies in test-tubes. This removal of human life from its traditional, localized context transforms even the most intimate human experience into an impersonal procedure.

From the moment of their conception, infants are predestined to occupy a specific caste based on their predetermined physical and intellectual attributes. This highly controlled and regimented system effectively eliminates the element of individual choice and freedom, as each person's role and status within society is preordained. This approach serves to maintain social stability and control by ensuring that everyone has a designated place and function within the World State. However, it also underscores the loss of personal autonomy and the mechanization of the human experience in this dystopian society.

In the World State of "*Brave New World*," society is meticulously structured into five distinct castes: Alphas, Betas, Gammas, Deltas, and Epsilons. The division is primarily based on inherent intelligence and cognitive capabilities. Alphas, exemplified by characters like Bernard and Helmholtz, are the intellectual elite of the society, possessing high levels of intelligence. In contrast, Epsilons, at the opposite end of the spectrum, are only capable of performing menial and straightforward tasks that require minimal intellectual effort.

The process of conditioning doesn't end with birth but continues throughout an individual's life, particularly through the use of a sleep-teaching technique known as hypnopaedia. This method is employed to instruct children on various aspects of society, including class distinctions and instilling a deep-seated love for the community, science, and Ford. In this society, "Ford" serves as a deity, based on the iconic industrialist and assembly line pioneer, Henry Ford. This further underscores the manipulation and control of individual beliefs and values, ensuring that each caste member remains loyal to the World State's principles and structure.

In the World State depicted in *"Brave New World,"* the strict division into castes results in a profound sense of individuals understanding their place as integral components within a larger societal framework. This arrangement generates a high degree of what Anthony Giddens (1990) refers to as "ontological security." Ontological security can be described as the feeling of being secure in one's place in the world, a sense of fundamental "being." According to Giddens, 'a sense of the reliability of persons and things, so central to the notion of trust, is basic to feelings of ontological security; hence the two are psychologically related' (p. 92). This helps explain why citizens of the World State generally experience elevated levels of ontological security. They live in a socially and materially predictable and stable community, which typically fosters a strong sense of ontological security. This feeling is often reinforced by the structured routine of everyday life, as opposed to the chaos and anxiety that would accompany a loss of a sense of reality.

However, not all characters in the novel experience the same degree of ontological security. Bernard Marx, the story's protagonist, and John the Savage are arguably the least ontologically secure characters in the narrative. They wrestle with feelings of dissatisfaction and a sense of chaos in relation to the ordered nature of the World State, leading to a fundamental discontent with their roles within this highly controlled society. In dystopian

literature, representations of motherhood is a recurring theme, as seen in works like Margaret Atwood's *"The Handmaid's Tale"* (1985) and Marge Piercy's *"Woman on the Edge of Time"* (1976). These dystopias are renowned for their often-grim portrayals of motherhood. However, *"Brave New World"* takes a strikingly different approach by portraying motherhood antithetically. In this society, the traditional roles of mothers and fathers have been supplanted by the World State itself, which serves as the primary caretaker and guardian of its citizens' fundamental interests.

As Kohn (2008) suggests, "trust may be unconditional too – but rarely so outside the special relationship between parents and young children" (p. 9). In this context, it is reasonable to assert that, much like a child's unconditional trust in their parents, the citizens in *"Brave New World"* place their complete trust in the World State. The World State functions as the citizens' primary provider of care, essential goods and services, and the source of ontological security. By fulfilling these vital needs, the World State establishes and maintains a level of trust among its citizens, similar to the trust one might place in a biological parent. This trust is underpinned by the World State's role as both guardian and provider, shaping the citizens' allegiance to the system.

In *"Brave New World,"* the perpetual state of childhood is not only maintained through hypnopaedia and biological conditioning but is also heavily reliant on the use of Soma, a recreational drug. Diken (2011) contends that this lifelong dependence on the pleasure-inducing drug, coupled with a permanent state of infantile behavior, signifies that the novel serves as an allegory of regressive evolution, wherein childhood and playtime extend indefinitely

The constant availability of Soma, the unceasing state of childhood, and the ongoing demand for infantile behavior contribute to an environment in which the World State firmly establishes itself as the nurturing caregiver of its citizens. As Diken (2011) aptly puts it, '...the

conduct of the nursery becomes generalized throughout the society. So the governmental imperatives in the brave new world are the same as those of the nursery: play, learning, stability, and happiness' (p. 154). This approach envelops the citizens in a state of permanent infantile behavior, fostering an unconditional trusting relationship akin to the trust that a child has in their parents. The World State, much like a parent, fulfills the role of ensuring the contentment, stability, and wellbeing of its citizens while retaining their perpetual state of dependence and infantile trust.

Conflict of Interest: The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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