

## Lessons from *Brave New World*

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“Words can be like x-rays if you use them properly—they’ll go through anything. You read and you’re pierced” (Huxley 70). During my sophomore year, I became pierced. In class we had discussed the ethics of situations, such as cloning and cross-breeding, but after reading an excerpt from *Brave New World*, I was forever changed. I had to know more.

In the Forward, Huxley describes his book: “The theme of *Brave New World* is not the advancement of science as such; it is the advancement of science as it affects human individuals” (xi). Huxley goes on to say that we need to “choose to decentralize and to use applied science, not as the end to which human beings are to be made the means, but as the means to producing a race of free individuals” (xvii). At once I began to make the connection: If science were allowed to go unchecked and if the use of technology were not held to ethical standards, think of the horrible universe we would create!

*Brave New World* has since become my favorite book, but I cannot read it without shuddering. The book opens with an explanation of the World State’s motto, “Community, Identity, Stability,” which, in itself seems harmless (Huxley 1). Babies are created in test tubes, and using the Bokanovsky process, ninety-six identical twins could be created. In the name of social stability, a caste system is instituted and babies are conditioned in their test tubes to make the embryos enjoy their lot in life. For example, people who were predestined to become steel workers in hot climates would be conditioned to hate the cold weather by causing the cool tunnels the embryos go through to be uncomfortable. Why? In Huxley’s own words, “That is the secret of happiness and virtue—liking what you’ve got to do. All conditioning aims at that: Making people like their inescapable social destiny” (16).

My mind reeled at this statement. In class Dr. Freier made it clear that experimenting with embryos to do anything of this sort treads close to unethical ground, but what is so wrong with being forced to be content with your lot in life? Some people have to work at McDonald's; otherwise, we could not get Big Macs. Some people have to clean the streets; otherwise, we would be living in a filthy world.

The more I read, the more I understood. Huxley tells us, "They learn to associate topsy-turveydom with well-being; in fact, they're only truly happy when standing on their heads" (17). This statement is on one level a reference to the manner in which airplane repairmen are decanted to like their job, but its double meaning to all lives affected by this process is obvious, especially upon further reading because, while it might be beneficial to be predestined for a job, the process does not stop there. In *Brave New World*, a caste system has been created with embryos conditioned to do exactly what members of their caste should do in all situations. For instance, all children not in the highest class are conditioned to hate flowers and books. To accomplish this end, babies are allowed to play with flowers and books—two objects babies are naturally drawn to—and as they are enjoying them, sirens are turned on to scare the babies, and an electric shock is sent through them. This lesson is repeated two hundred times until the babies obviously associate books and flowers with negative results. As Huxley explains in the text, "What man has joined, nature is powerless to put asunder" (22).

One may recognize this quotation as the exact opposite of a passage from the Bible. Huxley purposely skews several quotes from the Bible throughout his book—for religion, as well as thought and science, are forbidden in this new world. In one instance, the Bible and religious texts are considered pornographic. Huxley explains, "God isn't compatible with machinery and scientific medicine and universal happiness" (234). Instead of religion, inhabitants of Brave

New World are given *soma* tablets, which let them escape reality and pain without any negative repercussions. Huxley describes the effects of *soma* as “Christianity without tears” and “All the advantages of Christianity and alcohol, none of their defects” ( 238, 54).

In this Brave New World, science is considered as pornographic as religion. As the world controller is reading over a new piece of scientific literature, he describes the ideas put forth as “novel and highly ingenious” but ultimately marks the book “Not to be published” due to the heretical views it presents (Huxley 177). Why are these views so heretical? Huxley explains:

Besides, we have our stability to think of. We don't want to change. Every change is a menace to stability. That's another reason why we're so chary of applying new inventions. Every discovery in pure science is potentially subversive; even science must sometimes be treated as a possible enemy. Yes, even science. (225)

In our class we discussed the ethical problems of some scientific discoveries, but this book takes that a step further, even suggesting the idea of hiding scientific knowledge in favor of lies.

In conclusion, one question must be raised: Is the situation of *Brave New World* possible? Could we ever, as “civilized” human beings, convert to Brave New World's “civilized” way? Could the general public ever get to the point where a World Controller dictates what books to read? Eventually will all babies originate in test tubes, conditioned for the life they are bound to lead? Such developments might seem extreme, but one must consider the very real possibilities the world going in this direction. The propaganda campaigns used in *Brave New World* are not too far off from the way Hitler convinced a whole country to slaughter millions. On a smaller scale, here in the United States books are periodically banned and our government has been known in various circumstances not to always give the most accurate information available.

These seemingly minor incidents, if left unchecked and not held to strong standards, could become the norm. The combination of an unchecked government and unchecked scientific progress could easily begin a slippery slope into a world where Huxley's *Brave New World* could become a reality. This book shows the necessity of our social responsibility as citizens to make sure that this does not happen. In addition, Huxley reminds us to be thankful that we can experience passion, anguish, fear, and sorrow, for through these deep emotions, we develop character and become better people. I echo the Savage as he states, "But I don't want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin" (240). Without these, I am convinced we would live meaningless lives, just like the characters in Huxley's *Brave New World*.

#### Work Cited

Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. New York: Harper Collins, 1946.