

## The Antinomies of Huxley Novel "Brave New World"



"What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one.

Orwell feared those who would deprive us information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture, preoccupied with some equivalent of the feelies, the orgy porgy, and the centrifugal bumblepuppy.

As Huxley remarked in 'Brave New World revisited,' the civil libertarians and rationalists who are ever on the alert to oppose tyranny 'failed to take into account man's almost infinite appetite for distractions.'

In 'Nineteen Eighty-Four' people are controlled by inflicting pain. In 'Brave New World' people are controlled by inflicting pleasure.

In short, Orwell feared that what we hate will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us."

**In *Brave New World* people are husks, empty and detached, without ever realising it.**

I can only admire and praise Huxley's genius through the writing. Like all effective dystopian societies, reading and information plays an exceedingly important role. As with Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, all books have been destroyed and made inaccessible. John, one of the few characters who was born away from the new world, stumbles across a volume of Shakespeare and it changes his life. He can only think and feel in Shakespearean language and begins to view the world through a semi-romantic lens and only finds depravity when he walks into the new world.

It's everything he hates. He has been termed the savage, though he knows and understands the real meaning of the term even if those who call him such do not. Naturally, he becomes depressed and isolated in this new space, a space that he cannot be a part of or accepted in (not that he would want to be.) And I found him by far the most interesting and compelling character within the story because he is the only one to really look beyond the boundaries of his own experience and to find it wanting.

Huxley does more than describe a bleak and cynical post-apocalyptic or dystopian world, he looks a dystopian resident in the eye and puts before him a mirror to flesh out what is real and unreal. Further, Huxley has turned that same mirror on the reader and we see in his far future fantasy a reality that could be today. Huxley reveals that the seeds of Mustafa Mond and his ilk have fertile ground in our culture and in our souls.

"No social stability without individual stability."

To some extent, Huxley's prophecies have become a reality, less than a century later: rational, hierarchical, hyper-efficient and optimised capitalism and cheery consumerism have conquered most of the world. The sexual revolution has indeed taken place — although full sexual libertarianism is still a pipe dream. Pharmacopoeia, narcotics, antidepressants, tranquillisers and rejuvenating treatments are broadly available; as well as irrelevant and mind-numbing 3D entertainment, peppered with commercial slogans. Genetic engineering and biotechnology are everywhere (although not used to select humans as yet).

*Brave New World* is a novel structured around a set of (rather crude) characters and plots; there is, however, no clear protagonist. Huxley has a witty tongue-in-cheek sense of humour throughout. Some passages even have a purely poetic or musical quality: particularly through the use of [Shakespeare](#)'s lines for the character of John Savage, or the cross-cutting technique employed in chapter 3. But by and large, the book feels like a philosophical essay or social satire, in the style of Voltaire's [Candide](#) or Swift's [Gulliver's Travels](#).

Obviously, Huxley had Plato's [Republic](#) in mind, when designing his Alpha / Bêta / Gamma / Delta / Epsilon caste system (he was probably also referring to the school grades: A+ to F, already in use when he was a pupil at Eton College, or even to the caste system in India). Certainly, he remembered Nietzsche's "*Letzte Mensch*" from [Zarathustra](#)'s prologue: a human type that has indeed invented happiness, comfort and social stability, but ultimately a petty and lethargic sort of humankind. A type of humanity that might well be appealing to us right now, who knows...

Human beings are cloned in batches... Population is strictly divided into castes... Sexual promiscuity flourishes but love is unknown...

"Oh, wonder! How many goodly creatures are there here! How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world, that has such people in 't!" **William Shakespeare** – *The Tempest*

One fine day, from the Mexican Reservation straight into the brave new world, the Savage is brought... In the total isolation, among the uncivilized natives, he thoroughly scrutinized *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* and now, infected with the unhealthy poetic ideas, he falls in love... However, the old fiction turns out to be incongruous with the new reality.

Consumerism and conformity... It feels so much like today.

In *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley takes on consumerism, the media, genetic engineering, recreational drugs, religion, herd mentality, individualism, and lots of other socially relevant topics, weaving them into a science fiction setting that our world resembles more every day.

The setting and society are the stars of the show in *Brave New World*. The people live in a caste system based on genetics, conditioned from birth and pacified by drugs, living to consume goods and take soma to forget their troubles. Free love is encouraged but free thinking is not. Bernard Marx can't seem to get with the program and winds up nearly causing a revolution.

The characters are pretty secondary to the setting but it wasn't hard to feel sorry for Bernard, the square peg in a world of round holes. Even when he gets a measure of fame, he still can't manage to shake the feeling that something's wrong. John the Savage provides a nice contrast, an outsider looking in on a world everyone else sees as normal but he sees as hellish.

Huxley may not have thought so at the time but he may have been a futurist. Our culture seems to be moving in the direction of *Brave New World* all the time. The rampant consumerism, lowest common denominator entertainment, and herd mentality all seem a little too familiar. Is the internet our soma? Things to ponder...

In *Brave New World*, Aldous describes a perfect society, possibly located in Europe, that dominated by a single ruler, where the state distributed a drug called SOMA to the citizens, and all had a very calm life, without stress, and that helped in the discipline of all inhabitants. In addition to this collective doping strategy, the state provided cinemas where the audience connected to the sensory terminals and accompanied the films knowing sensations, taste and smell coming directly from the screen. The sex is dividing into two parts, one for pleasure and another for procreation. The latter depended on state authorisation. The first was free since there was no sensual coition, i.e. there was no direct contact between people, which eliminated the carnal intercourse of relationships, connecting to individual terminals, conveying the sensations of sex through the mind and not of the sensual body. Several children were born in a test tube, adapting them to future situations, those working in the basement raised from a fetus in a dark room. Others who would be soldiers were taught by electroshocks not to appreciate nature, flowers and wild animals.

Aldous Huxley, with a satirical tone, introduces us to a society in which masses of embryos and fetuses are developed in artificial surrogate mothers; incubators. Where infants and toddlers, in controlled environments, are

psychologically and emotionally manipulated in order to develop characteristics beneficial for the common good. A society that learns while it sleeps, through hypnopedia, during which the individual is thought to have an intolerance for: family, as they \"stink\" of emotions, monogamous relationships, which are primitive and indecent, as they are based on passion, and a hatred for nature, books, and the lower caste.

A world that employs the practice of eugenics in order to breed a superior alpha human for the sake of maintaining a quintessential community while variations of inferior human offspring's are reproduced, by physically manipulating the development of the unborn during gestation, in the interest of creating a caste system that will maintain all features and elements of this utopian society.

*Brave New World* - the title itself is beautiful, borrowed from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, which was a story reeking of colonialism beneath its enchanting poetry and romance. And so is the future Huxley envisions for us. A merry land where science has conquered reason, comfort has defeated struggle and addiction has replaced the zest to live. The addiction to science, addiction to happiness, addiction to indolence overcoming the *fear* of 'living'.

*Brave New World* is a technological dystopia that has flushed out every trace of struggle from human-life. Doing away with every kind of moral, social and political structure, it also does away with the capacity to think and form opinions, reducing humankind to a drug-induced infantile state, a haze of brief happiness brought on by SOMA pills to be swallowed at the slightest sign of emotional trouble.

I was torn between 1984 and *Brave New World*, they sort of complement each other – they both have failings that the other covers up. I quite agree when Huxley told Orwell that his book was better than 1984:

*Agreeing with all that the critics have written of it, I need not to tell you, yet once more, how fine and how profoundly important the book is [Orwell's:]. May I speak in stead of the thing with which the book deals -- the ultimate revolution? The first hints of a philosophy of the ultimate revolution -- the revolution which lies beyond politics and economics, and which aims at the total subversion of the individual's psychology and physiology -- are to be found in the Marquis de Sade, who regarded himself as the continuator, the consummator, of Robespierre and Babeuf. The philosophy of the ruling minority in Nineteen Eight-Four is a sadism which has been carried to its logical conclusion by going beyond sex and denying it. Whether in actual fact the policy of the boot-on-the-face can go on indefinitely seems doubtful. My own belief is that the ruling oligarchy will find less arduous and wasteful ways of governing and of satisfying its lust for power, and these ways will resemble those which I described in Brave New World.*

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Central to the structure of this society was the complete lack of independent thought. Pills solved all unpleasant emotions and so happiness, acceptance, and peace prevailed. Those who did find fault in this world were unhappy creatures, plagued by their doubts, insecurities, and questions. It deeply disconcerted me that I could not divine my own opinion on whether the freedom of thought was worth the unhappiness it wrought.

In this capitalist and consumerist society, our own reality is also called into question. The promotion of new over old eradicated history, literature, mending, and so much more. It was a bleak insight to life devoid of art, emotion, and creativity.

Huxley's satirical utopia is manifest, situated in university halls of residence, where promiscuity is rampant (who can forget the days of swapping partners between lectures, waking up to nubile posh cherubs lapping at your working-class cheeks, ruddy with decades of industrial grime and boyhood labour), and where the morning-after swig of two Nurofen (soma) eliminated any wrongdoing and regret, buoying one up for the further adventures in sex and failing grades to come in the whirligig of life? And those savages, known as parents, preaching on the values of 1930s sexual repression because they can't bear to contemplate their little darlings receiving sustained penetration from varying partners in varying orifices on varying evenings, quoting Shakespeare to try and seem cultured and mask the reality that education, learning, and knowledge are now things closed to them as the years persist, and the

only thing they have to cling to are their own memories of rampant romping in the halls of Eros in the bygone days.

Huxley created a world of genetic design, a world where the only goal is happiness, where there are no families, no marriage, no creativity, and no individuality. It's a world where everyone belongs to everyone else and the common good is all that matters. Mass production is important. Romance, literature, religion have all been abolished. Drown yourself in the drug soma, disposable clothes, free love, and sex hormone chewing gum.

This book expressed concerns about how the world was changing, but it's not our world today. Individuality, freedom, family still matter. But the warnings are there about even the most benevolent dictatorship.

It perhaps has less solidity and depth and the words are less lyrical and poetic than Orwell's. That said I was blown away at several key moments in this book. As far as my journeys in the dystopian genre go if you're trying it out *1984* and *Brave New World* are your first stops. Closely accompanied by [Fahrenheit 451](#).

***"Human beings used to be..." he hesitated; the blood rushed to his cheeks. "Well they used to be viviparous."***

*Utopia* is sometimes said to mean "no place", from the Greek *ou-topos*; others derive it from *eu*, as in "eugenics", in which case it would mean "healthy place" or "good place". Sir Thomas More, in his own 16th-century *Utopia*, may have been punning: *utopia is the good place that doesn't exist*.

*Brave New World* is an engineered paradise. There are no wars. Even the pain of labour has been done away with, for babies are chemically engineered in laboratories and raised to fit their social goals. There is no dissension. Economy is at its height, use of 'soma'-government approved hallucinogenic drug is encouraged, sex with multiple partners is encouraged.

This idea of totalitarianism is achieved through test tube babies, and hypnotism, resulting in a pre-ordained caste system consisting of intelligent humans suited to the highest positions and conversely, serf-like beings genetically programmed to carry out menial works. In this world of Alphas, Betas, Gammas, Deltas and the unfortunate Epsilons, exists drug-induced happiness, caused by what is known as soma. Here, "everyone belongs to everyone else" emphasising the system of forced promiscuity, brainwashed into the people from the moment of birth. At the core of this book is the horrific idea of eugenics and despite being written several decades ago, its message remains valid for our generation.

Overall, *Brave New World* is a scary depiction of what could soon be our future.

Like Orwell's *1984* and Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, there's just enough truth within *Brave New World* for it to be real. It's a cruel mirroring of our own existence, should we follow a certain path too strongly. And that's the wonder of speculative science fiction, though unlike the other two books, there's no violence involved in Huxley's world. It's just as controlling and scary, but it's done in a more indirect way.

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Like all effective dystopian societies, reading and information plays an exceedingly important role. As with Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, all books have been destroyed and made inaccessible. John, one of the few characters who was born away from the new world, stumbles across a volume of Shakespeare and it changes his life. He can only think and feel in Shakespearean language and begins to view the world through a semi-romantic lens and only finds depravity when he walks into the new world.

It's everything he hates. He has been termed the savage, though he knows and understands the real meaning of the term even if those who call him such do not. Naturally, he becomes depressed and isolated in this new space, a space that he cannot be a part of or accepted in (not that he would want to be.) And I found him by far the most interesting and compelling character within the story because he is the only one to really look beyond the boundaries of his own experience and to find it wanting.

For a start, soma is a very one-dimensional euphoriant. It gives rise to only a shallow, unempathetic and intellectually uninteresting well-being. Apparently, taking soma doesn't give [Bernard Marx](#), the disaffected sleep-learning specialist, more than a cheap thrill. Nor does it make him happy with his station in life. John the Savage



commits suicide soon after taking soma [guilt and despair born of [serotonin](#) depletion!?!]. The drug is said to be better than (promiscuous) sex - the only sex brave new worlders practise. But a regimen of soma doesn't deliver anything sublime or life-enriching. It doesn't catalyse any mystical epiphanies, intellectual breakthroughs or life-defining insights. It doesn't in any way promote personal growth. Instead, soma provides a mindless, inauthentic "imbecile happiness" - a vacuous escapism which makes people comfortable with their lack of freedom. The drug heightens suggestibility, leaving its users vulnerable to government propaganda. Soma is a narcotic that raises "a quite impenetrable wall between the actual universe and their minds."

If Huxley had wished to tantalise, rather than repel, emotional primitives like us with the biological [nirvana](#) soon in prospect, then he could have envisaged utopian wonderdrugs which *reinforced* or enriched our most cherished ideals. In our imaginations, perhaps we might have been allowed - via chemically-enriched brave new worlders - to turn ourselves into idealised versions of the sort of people we'd most like to be. In this scenario, behavioural conditioning, too, could have been used by the utopians to sustain, rather than undermine, a more sympathetic ethos of civilised society and a life well led. Likewise, biotechnology *could* have been exploited in BNW to encode life-long fulfilment, information-sensitive gradients of bliss, and super-intellecets for everyone - instead of manufacturing a rigid hierarchy of genetically-preordained castes.

Huxley, however, has an altogether different agenda in mind. He is seeking to warn us against scientific utopianism. He succeeds all too well. Although we tend to see *other* people, not least the notional brave new worlders, as the hapless victims of propaganda and disinformation, we may find it is we ourselves who have been the manipulated dupes.

For Huxley does an effective hatchet-job on the very sort of "unnatural" hedonic engineering that most of us so urgently need. One practical consequence has been to heighten our already exaggerated fears of state-sanctioned [mood-drugs](#). Hence millions of screwed-up minds, improvable even today by clinically-tested mood-boosters and anti-anxiety agents, just suffer in silence instead. In part this is because people worry they might become zombified addicts; and in part because they are unwilling to cast themselves as humble supplicants of the medical profession by taking state-rationed "antidepressants". Either way, the human cost in fruitless ill-being is immense.

Fortunately, the Net is opening up a vast trans-national free-market in psychotropics. Online pharmaceutical markets will eventually sweep away the restrictive practices of old medical drug cartels and their allies in the pharmaceutical industry. The liberatory potential of the Net as a [global drug-delivery](#) and information network has only just begun. Of course, Huxley can't *personally* be blamed for prolonging the pain of the old Darwinian order of natural selection. Citing the ill-effects of *Brave New World* is not the same as impugning its author's motives. Aldous Huxley was a deeply humane person as well as a brilliant polymath. He himself suffered terribly after the death of his adored mother. But death and suffering will be cured only by the application of bioscience. They won't be abolished by spirituality, prophetic sci-fi, or literary intellectualism.

So what form might this cure take?

In the future, it will be feasible *technically* - at the very least - for [pharmacotherapy](#) and [genetic medicine](#) to re-engineer us so that we can become - to take one example among billions - a cross between [Jesus](#) and [Einstein](#). Potentially, [transhumans](#) will be endowed with a greater capacity for [love](#), [empathy](#) and emotional [depth](#) than anything neurochemically accessible today. Our selfish-gene-driven ancestors - in common with the cartoonish brave new worlders - will strike posterity as functional [psychopaths](#) by comparison; and posterity will be right. In contrast to *Brave New World*, however, the death of [ageing](#) won't be followed by our swift demise after a sixty-odd year [life-span](#). We'll have to reconcile ourselves to the prospect of living happily ever after. Scare-mongering prophets of doom notwithstanding, a life of unremitting bliss isn't nearly as bad as it sounds.

The good news gets better. Drugs - not least the magical trinity of [empathogens](#), [entactogens](#) and [entheogens](#) - and eventually genetic engineering will open up revolutionary new *state spaces* of thought and emotion. Such modes of consciousness are simply [unimaginable](#) to the drug-innocent psyche. Today, their metabolic pathways lie across forbidden gaps in the evolutionary fitness landscape. They have previously been hidden by the pressure of natural selection: for Nature has no power of anticipation. Open such spaces up, however, and new modes of selfhood and introspection become accessible. The Dark Age of primordial [Darwinian life](#) is about to pass into history.

In later life, Huxley himself modified his antipathy to drug-assisted paradise. *Island* (1962), Huxley's conception of a *realutopia*, was modelled on his experiences of [mescaline](#) and [LSD](#). But *until* we get the biological underpinnings of our emotional well-being securely encoded genetically, then psychedelia is mostly [off-limits](#) for the purposes of paradise-engineering. Certainly, its [intellectual significance](#) cannot be exaggerated; but unfortunately, neither can its ineffable [weirdness](#) and the unpredictability of its agents. Thus drugs such as [mescaline](#), and certainly LSD and its congeners, are not fail-safe euphorants. The possibility of nightmarish bad trips and total emotional Armageddon is latent in the way our brains are constructed under a regime of selfish-DNA. Uncontrolled eruptions within the psyche must be replaced by the precision-engineering of emotional tone, if nothing else. If rational design is good

enough for inorganic robots, then it's good enough for us.

In Brave New World, of course, there are no freak-outs on soma. One suspects that this is partly because BNW's emotionally stunted inhabitants don't have the imagination to have a bad trip. But mainly it's because the effects of soma are no more *intellectually* illuminating than getting a bit [drunk](#). In BNW, our already limited repertoire of hunter-gatherer emotions has been constricted still further. Creative and destructive impulses alike have been purged. The capacity for spirituality has been extinguished. The utopians' ["set-point"](#) on the [pleasure-pain axis](#) has indeed been shifted. But the axis is flattened at both ends.

Brave New World is a benevolent dictatorship: a static, efficient, totalitarian welfare-state. There is no war, poverty or crime. Society is stratified by genetically-predestined caste. Intellectually superior Alphas are the top-dogs. Servile, purposely brain-damaged Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons toil away at the bottom. The lower orders are necessary in BNW because Alphas - even soma-fuelled Alphas - could allegedly never be happy doing menial jobs. It is not explained why doing menial work is inconsistent - if you're an Alpha - with a life pharmacological [hedonism](#) - nor, for that matter, with genetically-precoded wetware of invincible bliss. In any case, our descendants are likely to automate menial drudgery out of existence; that's what robots are for.

Notionally, BNW is set in the year 632 AF (After Ford). Its biotechnology is highly advanced. Yet the society itself has no historical dynamic: ["History is bunk"](#). It is curious to find a utopia where knowledge of the past is banned by the Controllers to prevent invidious comparisons. One might imagine history lessons would be encouraged instead. They would uncover a blood-stained horror-story.

Perhaps the Controllers fear historical awareness would stir dissatisfaction with the ["utopian"](#) present. Yet this is itself revealing. For Brave New World is not an [exciting](#) place to live in. It is a sterile, productivist utopia geared to the [consumption](#) of mass-produced goods: ["Ending is better than mending"](#). Society is shaped by a single all-embracing political ideology. The motto of the world state is ["Community, Identity, Stability."](#)

In Brave New World, there is no depth of feeling, no ferment of ideas, and no artistic creativity. Individuality is suppressed. Intellectual excitement and discovery have been abolished. Its inhabitants are laboratory-grown [clones](#), bottled and standardised from the hatchery. They are conditioned and indoctrinated, and even brainwashed in their sleep. The utopians are never educated to prize thinking for themselves. In Brave New World, the twin goals of happiness and stability - both social and personal - are not just prized but effectively *equated*.

This surprisingly common notion is ill-conceived. The impregnable well-being of our transhuman descendants is more likely to promote greater diversity, both personal and societal, not stagnation. This is because greater happiness, and in particular enhanced [dopamine](#) function, doesn't merely extend the depth of one's [motivation](#) to act: the hyper-dopaminergic sense of *things to be done*. It also broadens the *range* of stimuli an organism finds rewarding. By [expanding](#) the range of potential activities we enjoy, enhanced dopamine function will ensure we will be *less* likely to get stuck in a depressive rut. This rut leads to the kind of learned helplessness that says nothing will do any good, Nature will take its revenge, and utopias will always go wrong.

In Brave New World, things do occasionally go wrong. But more to the point, we are led to feel the whole social enterprise that BNW represents is horribly misconceived from the outset. In BNW, nothing much really changes. It is an alien world, but scarcely a rich or inexhaustibly diverse one. Tellingly, the monotony of its pleasures mirrors the poverty of our own imaginations in conceiving of radically different ways to be happy. Today, we've barely even begun to conceptualise the range of things it's possible to be happy about. For our brains aren't blessed with the neurochemical substrates to do so. Time spent counting one's blessings is rarely good for one's genes.

BNW is often taken as a pessimistic warning of the dangers of runaway science and technology. Scientific progress, however, was apparently frozen with the advent of a world state. Thus ironically it's not perverse to interpret BNW as a warning of what happens when scientific inquiry is suppressed. One of the reasons why many relatively robust optimists - including some dopamine-driven transhumanists - dislike Brave New World, and accordingly distrust the prospect of universal happiness it symbolises, is that their primary source of everyday aversive experience is boredom. BNW comes across as a stagnant civilisation. It's got immovably stuck in a severely sub-optimal state. Its inhabitants are too contented living in their rut to extricate themselves and progress to higher things. Superficially, yes, Brave New World is a technocratic society. Yet the free flow of ideas and criticism central to science is absent. Moreover the humanities have withered too. Subversive works of literature are banned. Subtly but inexorably, BNW enforces conformity in innumerable different ways. Its conformism feeds the popular misconception that a life-time of happiness will [somehow] be boring - even when the biochemical substrates of boredom have vanished.

Controller [Mustapha Mond](#) himself obliquely acknowledges the *dystopian* sterility of BNW when he reflects on Bernard's tearful plea not to be exiled to Iceland: ["One would think he was going to have his throat cut. Whereas, if he had the smallest sense, he'd understand that his punishment is really a reward. He's being sent to an island. That's to say, he's being sent to a place where he'll meet the most interesting set of men and women to be found anywhere in the world. All the people who, for one reason or another, have got too self-consciously individual to fit into community life. All the people who aren't satisfied with orthodoxy, who've got independent ideas of their own.](#)

Everyone, in a word, who's anyone..."

Admittedly, Huxley's BNW enforces a much more benign conformism than [Orwell's](#) terrifying *1984*. There's no Room 101, no torture, and no war. Early child-rearing practices aside, it's not a study of *physically* violent totalitarianism. Its riot-police use *soma*-vaporisers, not tear-gas and truncheons. Yet its society is as dominated by caste as any historical Eastern despotism. BNW recapitulates all Heaven's hierarchies (recall all those angels, archangels, seraphim, etc.) and few of its promised pleasures. Its satirical grotesqueries and fundamental joylessness are far more memorably captured than its delights - with one pregnant exception, [soma](#).

Unlike the residents of Heaven, BNW's inhabitants don't worship God. Instead, they are brainwashed into revering a scarcely less abstract and remote community. Formally, the community is presided over by the spirit of the apostle of mass-production, Henry Ford. He is worshipped as a god: Alphas and Betas attend *soma*-consecrated "solidarity services" which culminate in an orgy. But history has been abolished, salvation has already occurred, and the utopians aren't going anywhere.

By contrast, one factor of life spent with even mildly euphoric hypomanic people is pretty constant. The tempo of life, the flow of ideas, and the drama of events speeds up. In a Post-Darwinian Era of universal life-long bliss, the possibility of stasis is remote; in fact one can't rule out an ethos of permanent revolution. But however great the intellectual ferment of ecstatic existence, the nastiness of Darwinian life will have passed into oblivion with the molecular machinery that sustained it.

BNW is a benevolent dictatorship - or at least a benevolent oligarchy, for at its pinnacle there are ten world-controllers. We get to meet its spokesman, the donnish Mustapha Mond, Resident Controller of Western Europe. Mond governs a society where all aspects of an individual's life, from conception and conveyor-belt reproduction onwards, are determined by the state. The individuality of BNW's two billion hatchlings is systematically stifled. A government bureau, the Predestinators, decides a prospective citizen's role in the hierarchy. Children are raised and conditioned by the state bureaucracy, not brought up by natural families. There are only ten thousand surnames. Value has been stripped away from the person as an individual human being; respect belongs only to society as a whole. Citizens must not fall in love, marry, or have their own kids. This would seduce their allegiance away from the community as a whole by providing a rival focus of affection. The individual's loyalty is owed to the state alone. By getting rid of potential sources of tension and anxiety - and dispelling residual discontents with *soma* - the World State controls its populace no less than Big Brother.

Brave New World, then, is centred around control and manipulation. As ever, the fate of an individual depends on the interplay of Nature and Nurture, heredity and environment: but the utopian state apparatus controls both. Naturally, we find this control disquieting. One of our deepest fears about the prospect of tampering with our natural (i.e. selfish DNA-driven) biological endowment is that we will ourselves be controlled and manipulated by others. Huxley plays on these anxieties to devastating effect. He sows the fear that a future world state may rob us of the right to be unhappy.

It must be noted that this right is not immediately in jeopardy. Huxley, however, evidently feels that the threat of compulsory well-being is real. This is reflected in his choice of a quotation from Nicolas Berdiaeff as BNW's epigraph. "Utopias appear to be much easier to realize than one formerly believed. We currently face a question that would otherwise fill us with anguish: How to avoid their becoming definitively real?" Perhaps not all of the multiple ironies here are intended by BNW's author.

Huxley deftly coaxes us into siding with John the Savage as he defends the right to suffer illness, pain, and fear against the arguments of the indulgent Controller. The Savage claims the right to be unhappy. We sympathise. Intuitively but obscurely, he shouldn't have to *suffer* enforced bliss. We may claim, like the Savage, "the right to grow old and ugly and impotent; the right to have syphilis and cancer; the right to have too little to eat; the right to be lousy; the right to live in constant apprehension of what may happen tomorrow; the right to catch typhoid; the right to be tortured by unspeakable pains of every kind". Yet the argument against chemical enslavement cuts both ways. The point today - and at any other time, surely - is that we should have the right *not* to be unhappy. And above all, when suffering becomes truly optional, we shouldn't force our toxic legacy wetware on others.

Yet what will be the price of all this happiness?

It's not what we might intuitively expect. Perhaps surprisingly, freedom and individuality can potentially be *enhanced* by chemically boosting personal well-being. Vulnerable and unhappy people are probably more susceptible to brainwashing - and the subtler sorts of mind-control - than active citizens who are happy and psychologically robust. Happiness is empowering. In real life, it is notable that mood- and resilience-enhancing drugs, such as the selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, tend to reduce submissiveness and subordinate behaviour. Rats and monkeys on [SSRIs](#) climb the pecking order, or transcend it altogether. They don't seem to try and dominate their fellows - loosely speaking, they just stop letting themselves be messed around. If pharmacologically and genetically enriched, we may all aspire to act likewise.

Admittedly, this argument isn't decisive. It's a huge topic. Humans, a philosopher once observed, are not [rats](#).

Properly-controlled studies of altered serotonin function in humans are lacking. The intra-cellular consequences of fifteen-plus serotonin [receptor sub-types](#) defy facile explanation. But we do know that a dysfunctional serotonin system is correlated with low social-status. Enhancing serotonin function - other things being equal - is likely to leave an individual *less* likely to submit to authority, not docile and emasculated. Brave New World is exquisite satire, but the utopia it imagines is sociologically and biologically implausible. Its happy conformists are shallow cartoons.

Of course, *any* analysis of the state's role in future millennia is hugely speculative. Both minimalist \"night-watchman\" states and extreme totalitarian scenarios are conceivable. In some respects, any future world government may indeed be far more intrusive than the typical nation-state today. If the [ageing process](#) and the inevitability of death is superseded, for instance, then decisions about [reproduction](#) - on [Earth](#) at least - simply cannot be left to the discretion of individual couples alone. This is because we'd soon be left with standing room only. The imminence of widespread human cloning, too, makes increased regulation and accountability inevitable - quite disturbingly so. But challenges like population-control shouldn't overshadow the fact that members of a happy, confident, psychologically robust citizenry are far less likely to be the malleable pawns of a ruling elite than contented fatalists. A chemically-enslaved underclass of happy helots remains unlikely.