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ALDOUS HUXLEY'S SOCIAL CRITICISM

The publication of Aldous Huxley's latest book, *Brave New World Revisited*, marks the completion of the circle his social criticism has been describing for the past thirty-odd years. In the late nineteen twenties, Huxley was primarily concerned with the slow, soft strangulation of life underneath the feather pillow of the democratic social system; in the thirties, his acute perception of the immediate dangers of totalitarianism drove him to the determined pacifism expressed in *Ends and Means*; two years after World War II had been won, he called for an international organization of scientists to insure that science would be used to aid man, not to enslave or destroy him; and now in the late fifties, he has once again outlined the impersonal forces pushing us, in his view, more and more rapidly toward materialization of his chilling vision of the brave new world ahead. From slow death to determined passive resistance to legalism and good will to slow death again, Huxley's social criticism has gone from description of varied calls for action to bitter description.

Of Huxley's novels, *Brave New World* and *Ape and Essence*, it is his fantasies, which make his view of the probable results of our course of action most explicit. These two books present worlds as different as that of 1932 was from that of 1949, when they were published; yet there are striking similarities. In both books humanity is dead; the creatures of *Brave New World*, spawned

in bottles, fed on slogans and drugs, leading an utterly meaningless life whose only purpose is to perpetuate the meaninglessness, are as monstrous as the savage Californians of *Ape and Essence*, blighted physically and spiritually by radiation, and whose consciousness of impending extinction has been developed into worship of the devil. In both books the central figure, the one remaining human, is the product of an accident; and all that man once created, dreamed of, aspired to, have been reduced to what John and Dr. Poole can carry with them. And both books, like George Orwell's *1984*, reflect in fantasy the trends of the times in which they were written. Their horror, however, is not comparable to the fear and revulsion Orwell's fantasy evokes. *Brave New World* and *Ape and Essence* are both convincing attacks on the shape of things; the reader finishes both books persuaded that here indeed are possible shapes of things to come. Yet the sense of urgency that pervades much of Orwell's work is missing both from Huxley's fantasies and his non-fiction. This is not merely due to the time in which the events of the fantasies are placed. Huxley is too much the eclectic intellectual, too interested in forces and causes, too intent on seeing the whole world through too many perspectives to muster sufficient emotion for communicating urgency. It is impossible to guess to what extent Philip Quarles of *Point Counterpoint* is a self-portrait, to what extent Huxley has failed to convince himself that things really do matter. Nevertheless, Huxley's social criticism is extraordinarily detached. His interest in humanity's miseries is that of a scientific observer who can see what the subjects of his study should do and what they should avoid; it is not that of a man himself immersed in those miseries.

It may be that Huxley's coldness is a carefully cultivated pose to lend his views an Olympian quality. It seems more likely, however, that it is the result of a personal deficiency of which, like Philip Quarles, Huxley may be aware, but for which he cannot compensate by unusual talent. With the possible exception of Mark Rampion, it is difficult to think of a major Huxley char-

acter who is even slightly sympathetic. His wise men—Dr. Miller in *Eyeless in Gaza* and Mr. Propter in *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*, for example—are chilling saints who know all the answers, lead Schweitzerian lives, and pontificate as annoyingly as Huxley does in much of his non-fiction. Huxley's novels, as a group, do not leave as a final impression those qualities which his paper-back publishers have insisted upon—penetrating wit, powerful irony, and above all, sophistication—but rather that of a man who has tried very hard not to let his lack of charity for some become malice toward all, and has succeeded only partly.

This conflict between principles and personality is apparent in Huxley's social criticism as well as in his novels. On the one hand, Huxley has argued, in book after book, for procedures which he believes will alleviate the human condition. On the other hand, his distaste, not only for the condition but also for the sufferers from it, occasionally borders on contempt. Were Huxley writing about anything but human beings, distaste for his subjects would not necessarily make suspect his arguments for their amelioration. But surely not the least important qualification a social critic must possess is compassion. Without it, his criticism is dry and mathematical, that of a man upset by the disorderliness and wastefulness of the world, who, instead of compassion for men, has only a passion for forms.

Huxley's social criticism is scattered throughout his books, but five of them—*Proper Studies* (1927), *Do What You Will* (1929), *Ends and Means* (1937), *Science, Liberty and Peace* (1947), and *Brave New World Revisited* (1958)—are more comprehensively concerned than his other writings with aspects of contemporary society. His earlier concern with the weaknesses and vulgarities of democracy, as a theory of government and as an actual social system, has given way to concern with the forces in the free world which, in Huxley's view, endanger that freedom. These threats to freedom, Huxley argues in *Brave New World Revisited*, are composed, on the one hand, of impersonal forces—overpopulation and overorganization—and, on the other,

of technological devices and drugs. Overpopulation is not merely an additional complicating factor in the world's problems; on the contrary, it is the chief problem of them all. Huxley uses one striking comparison after another to illustrate how pressingly full of people our world has become—and how much fuller it will soon be. “At the rate of increase prevailing between the birth of Christ and the death of Queen Elizabeth I,” he writes, “it took sixteen centuries for the population of the earth to double. At the present rate it will double in less than half a century.” (BNWR, 10).¹ The immediate question, of course, is food; but even assuming that means will be found to feed the new billions who will make their appearance before the end of this century, their mere presence will constitute a danger to freedom. For overpopulation entails more responsibility for the government, and overorganization, characterized by hierarchical systems which concentrate power at the top, is a result of this increased responsibility. What this means to the individual is that current pressures to make him conform will soon develop into pressures to make him uniform; the more uniform the individual members of society, the more easily governed the society.

As overpopulation is a process occurring now, overorganization, the molding of the population into an easily manipulated mass, is also happening in the present. It is not just a matter of propaganda, blatant and insidious, although there is more than enough of both; the passion of our people for entertainment, or, as Huxley calls it, “non-stop distraction,” lends itself to the enemies of freedom. “A society, most of whose members spend a great part of their time, not on the spot, not here and now and in the calculable future, but somewhere else, in the irrelevant other worlds of sport and soap opera, of mythology and metaphysical fantasy, will find it hard to resist the encroachments of those who would

¹ Quotations from *Brave New World Revisited* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), *Science, Liberty and Peace* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1947), *Ends and Means* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1951) by Aldous Huxley, are abbreviated in this essay BNWR, SLP, E&M respectively.

manipulate and control it.” (BNWR, 46). And as to actual attempts to influence a country’s population, “the art of mind-control is in process of becoming a science. The practioners of this science know what they are doing and why.” (BNWR, 49). Hitler proved the correctness of his low opinion of the masses through the efficacy of his propaganda; today television as well as the radio, movies, and the press are at the disposal of the dictators and mind-controllers, and collectiveness through technology is becoming increasingly feasible.

Scientific techniques and discoveries—brainwashing, drugs, and subliminal perception—provide, in the contemporary political context, and especially against the biological background of fantastically increasing population rates, further ominous hints of what we can expect in the future. The discoveries of Pavlov, Page, and Poetzl were, in themselves, simply discoveries in psychology, biochemistry, and physiology. Now their applications are demonstrating the relevance of scientific research to political and human freedom. A brainwashed and properly drugged populace, stimulated subconsciously in directions chosen by their rulers—the thought is now far from absurd. Even hypnopaedia, the cardinal method of education in the brave new world of Huxley’s fantasy, is a sociological possibility, for “under proper conditions, hypnopaedia actually works—works, it would seem, about as well as hypnosis.” (BNWR, 112). And so, in posing the question—“can democratic institutions survive the subversion from within of skilled mind-manipulators trained in the science and art of exploiting the suggestibility both of individuals and of crowds?” (BNWR, 117–118)—Huxley answers it.

What can be done? Obviously, the problems Huxley is dealing with cannot be solved in any real sense. But perhaps the movement toward the brave new world can be slowed, and Huxley mentions education and decentralization as methods to be used for the retention of freedom. Education is to emphasize individual responsibility to counteract the growing tendency to submerge the individual in a more easily manipulated group. And it is to

train the individual in those processes of thought which make manipulation difficult. Decentralization, both of government and of property, is equally important if the individual is to retain some measure of control over his own destiny. But Huxley offers no hope, only a moral imperative. "Perhaps the forces that now menace freedom are too strong to be resisted for very long," he writes in conclusion to *Brave New World Revisited*. "It is still our duty to do whatever we can to resist them." (BNWR, 147).

Huxley had said very similar things in *Science, Liberty and Peace*. This book is an extensive elaboration of a remark of Tolstoy's: "if the arrangement of society is bad (as ours is), and a small number of people have power over the majority and oppress it, every victory over Nature will inevitably serve only to increase that power and the oppression." (SLP, 5). But in 1947 the outlook did not seem as bleak to Huxley as it does now. In a paragraph illustrative of the methodical style he frequently employs, Huxley introduces the reader to his plan for the essay that follows the quotation from Tolstoy:

Applied science touches the lives of individuals and societies at many different points and in a great variety of contexts, and therefore the ways in which it has increased the power of the few over the majority are correspondingly many and various. In the paragraphs that follow I shall enumerate the more obviously significant of these ways, shall indicate how and by what means applied science has contributed hitherto toward the centralization of power in the hands of a small ruling minority, and also how and by what means such tendencies may be resisted and ultimately, perhaps, reversed. (SLP, 5).

Huxley's argument is constructed along the following lines. "In the past," he writes, "personal and political liberty depended to a considerable extent upon governmental inefficiency." (SLP, 6). Today, however, technology has eliminated inefficiency (not, of course, in an absolute sense, but comparatively), and personal liberty has consequently been diminished. Nor are the old techniques of popular revolt practicable any longer. The police and the army cannot be seriously challenged by the citizenry. There is only one effective way to combat oppression: Gandhi's

so-called *satyagraha*. Huxley does not think that passive resistance is by any means certain to accomplish the desired ends, but his faith in it is apparent from the following passage:

It is often argued that *satyagraha* cannot work against an organization whose leaders are prepared to exploit their military superiority without qualm or scruple. And of course this may very well be the case. No more than any other form of political action, violent or otherwise, can *satyagraha* guarantee success. But even though, against an entirely ruthless and fanatical opponent, non-co-operation and what Thoreau called 'civil disobedience,' coupled with a disciplined willingness to accept and even to court sacrificial suffering, may prove unavailing, the resulting situation could not be, materially, any worse than it would have been if the intolerable oppression had been passively accepted or else resisted unavailingly by force; while, psychologically and morally, it would in all probability be very much better—better for those participating in the *satyagraha*, and better in the eyes of spectators and of those who merely heard of the achievement at second hand. (SLP, 8–9).

Technology has increased the power of the state not only through tanks and tear gas but also through the press and radio. Persuasion is obviously preferable to coercion. Huxley finds the faith of nineteenth-century liberals like James Mill in universal education contradicted by historical fact, for "the spread of free compulsory education, and, along with it, the cheapening and acceleration of the older methods of printing, have almost everywhere been followed by an increase in the power of ruling oligarchies at the expense of the masses." (SLP, 10). Similarly, the radio has enlarged the street mob which can be inflamed by a rabble rouser to include the entire nation. "Never," writes Huxley, paraphrasing Winston Churchill, "have so many been so much at the mercy of so few" (SLP, 11). And there is only one answer to propaganda: self-denial. Radios must be turned off and newspapers tossed aside.

In indirect ways, too, applied science has been a contributing factor in the increase of power held by the ruling minority. Along with other forces, it has deprived most individuals of the chance, the means, and the knowledge of how to sustain themselves. Industry and agriculture alike employ the methods of mass pro-

duction and distribution, and every year there is less room for the independent skilled worker or small farmer. Further, technological unemployment is as much a result of every new, more efficient technique or device as is the increased profit of the owner. Consequently, social and economic insecurity, attributable at least in part to the progress of applied science, forces the masses to rely more and more on the state or on the owners for psychological as well as material sustenance.

Huxley is not concerned, in this essay, to make any elaborate distinctions between ruling minorities. The power of the oligarchies in the democracies has been increased in the same way by technology as the power of the dictators in one-party states. Thus he can state, without bothering to give the "popular mind" he talks about a local habitation and a name, that "at the present time the horrors of insecurity, as exemplified above all in mass unemployment, have impressed themselves so deeply upon the popular mind that, if offered the choice between liberty and security, most people would almost unhesitatingly vote for security." (SLP, 20). But since, ideally, no such choice should be forced upon the popular mind, since, in fact, liberty and security are necessary to one another, the trend toward centralization must be reversed. Huxley names a writer whose studies have shown, he says, "that mass-producing and mass-distributing methods are technologically justified in about one-third of the total production of goods." (SLP, 24).² Local production is more economical for the remainder, and decentralization is therefore desirable economically as well as socially.

Intellectually, the influence of applied science has been similarly disastrous. It has been a major contributing factor to the notion of progress, in whose name all sorts of iniquities are committed: ". . . all modern dictators, whether of the Right or of the Left, talk incessantly about the golden Future, and justify the most

² The writer is Ralph Borsodi. Huxley's arguments frequently rest on one-sentence references to books which, one suspects, he is fairly certain his readers have not read.

atrocious acts here and now, on the ground that they are means to that glorious end.” (SLP, 26). And its successes have led to the adoption of the aim of theoretical science—“the reduction of diversity to identity” (SLP, 27)—by politicians. If society is to be handled scientifically, it must first be reduced to something sufficiently simple and orderly to permit such handling. Thus we have witnessed “widespread indifference to the values of human personality and human life.” (SLP, 29). Totalitarianism is something new under the sun:

In the past despots committed the crimes that despots always do commit—but committed them with a conscience that was sometimes distinctly uneasy. They had been brought up as Christians, as Hindus, as Moslems or Buddhists, and in the depths of their being they knew that they were doing wrong, because what they were doing was contrary to the teachings of their religion. Today the political boss has been brought up in our more enlightened and scientific environment. Consequently he is able to perpetrate his outrages with a perfectly clear conscience, convinced that he is acting for humanity’s highest good—for is he not expediting the coming of the glorious future promised by Progress? is he not tidying up a messily individualistic society? is he not doing his utmost to substitute the wisdom of experts for the foolishness of men and women who want to do what they think (how erroneously, since of course they are not experts!) is best for them? (SLP, 31).³

The second and concluding part of *Science, Liberty and Peace* is a consideration of modern war—its causes, its horrors, and its prevention. Huxley does not ignore economic reasons for war, but his emphasis here is on the mentality which makes it possible for human beings to use all their ingenuity and energy to murder as many other human beings as they can. It is a religious mentality, for “(having repudiated all belief in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man) we have set up nationalism as our idolatrous religion.” (SLP, 34). Huxley finds modern nationalism particularly fanatic, and he is not very hopeful that a

³ This contempt for experts is not consistent with Huxley’s usual reliance on them. Later in the essay (SLP, 53), he calls for a group of experts to formulate a policy designed to apply science for “the welfare, liberty and peace of the individuals composing the human race.” And he must think of such men as Borsodi as experts.

rational perspective of the unity of the race can be substituted for it. However, since war is fought with weapons and devices invented and developed by scientists, scientists are in an excellent position to take action against war. "There is, first, the possibility of negative action in the form of a refusal, on conscientious grounds, to participate in work having as its purpose the killing, torture, or enslavement of human beings." (SLP, 45). Secondly, scientists should form an international organization whose purpose would be to use science as a peaceful means to obtain what is usually one of the central aims of an aggressive nation: more food and more raw materials. The San Francisco Conference, Huxley points out, was concerned with problems of power. But "the basic problem of mankind" is that "of getting enough to eat," (SLP, 54), and if the leaders of nations will not concern themselves with it (Huxley comments that leaders are notoriously well-fed), others must. Scientists can deliberately choose to concentrate their research in areas in which their findings cannot be used by politicians for anything but real and tangible improvement of the human condition. They can do much to bring about regional self-sufficiency in food and in power for industry, agriculture, and transportation. In the meantime, scientists and technicians would do well to consider a suggestion made by the author of an article published in *Scientific Monthly* in 1945, that they should take an oath to work for the benefit of mankind similar to the Hippocratic oath taken by physicians.

Ten years earlier, Huxley had written what is perhaps his most ambitious book, *Ends and Means*. It remains, at any rate, his most systematic attempt to present his political, social, and ethical philosophy in one volume. The book displays an astonishing awareness, for an English intellectual of 1937, of what was really happening in the Germany and Russia of that time, and marks the shift in Huxley's criticism of contemporary society from concern with democracy to concern with totalitarianism. Huxley thus shares with George Orwell the distinction of having understood totalitarianism from the first. But nowhere in the book is

there the moral force and human sympathy which animates Orwell's work. Orwell, writing about the Spanish Civil War, describes his personal experiences in immediate, concrete terms; Huxley concludes *Ends and Means* by saying that "in the present volume I have tried to relate the problems of domestic and international politics, of war and economics, of education, religion, and ethics, to a theory of the ultimate nature of reality." (E & M, 330). The sentence typifies Huxley's mentality. The concrete, the particular, the specifically human become so much fodder for his ultimates. And yet his initial perspectives are almost always those of the moralist.

What I have called the conflict between Huxley's principles and his personality has been apparent to many of his critics since his first rise to literary prominence. "To care because one doesn't care, and to be a mocking spectator to the paradox—a mortal coil of moralist, skeptic, and artist—that is Mr. Huxley's baffling pattern," wrote Raymond Weaver in 1924. Two years later, Edwin Muir said of him that "he has the moral rage, without the morality, of a satirist, and although the effect is unintentional, sometimes he gives the impression of sitting on the fence, of a little irresolutely trying to make the worst of both worlds." And as late as 1954, Jocelyn Brooke wrote: "though by temperament a sceptic, Mr. Huxley has always, one imagines, recognized within himself the need for some kind of religious approach to the universe. . . ." But the result of this conflict between moralist and sceptic, Huxley's fundamental distaste for the concrete facts of human existence, has rarely been commented upon with much perspicacity. A notable exception is a short essay by D. S. Savage, *Mysticism and Aldous Huxley*, which is primarily an attack on that theory of the ultimate nature of reality which is the culmination of *Ends and Means*. The following passage from this essay is a hostile but nevertheless excellent summary of the assumptions on which Huxley's metaphysics and ethics are based.

Throughout the chapters of *Ends and Means* . . . there runs this ubiquitous and unexamined assumption of the existence of the universe as a totality,

a whole, superior to, and independent of, the perceiving individual consciousness. And since, in effect, Huxley's abstract spiritual universe is nothing but an attenuated shadow of the material one, we find, explicably enough, that he conceives of the individual existence as a sort of estranged separate emanation of a fragment of the Whole, whose end consists in reunion with, or re-immersion within, the totality. In harmony with this he defines Good as that which makes for unity, Evil as that which makes for separateness. Since ours is a plural world, then, it is by nature evil: goodness will be achieved when the diversity of the world, of separate individual personalities, is immersed in the undifferentiated, primal Whole.

Savage has here recognized not only the value system implicit in *Ends and Means*, but also Huxley's predilection for abstractions, for attenuated shadows. Huxley seems to be able to think concretely only about what he rejects. For example, varieties of sexual behavior play a relatively large part in his novels and stories, and almost always the sexual life of his characters is futile, sordid, stupid, even mechanical—illustrative of the futility and stupidity of the whole of their lives. And this is portrayed with considerable skill. But in *Ends and Means*, Huxley considers sex as a potentially positive force—not in relation to individuals but to society! Once again he turns to an expert and summarizes a book; the assertions of J. D. Unwin's *Sex and Culture* are quickly condensed, declared to rest on historical evidence, and another plank is nailed onto the Huxley platform: "the . . . only satisfactory solution of the problem of sex is that which combines the acceptance, at least by the ruling classes, of pre-nuptial chastity and absolute monogamy with complete legal equality between women and men and with the adoption of a political, economic, educational, religious, philosophical and ethical system of the kind described in this book." (E & M, 319). The mere notion of *the* problem of sex, as if whatever it might be were of the same abstract sort as "the economic problem" or "the political problem," is typically Huxleyan. *The* problem of sex, according to Huxley on the basis of Unwin, is how to employ energy accumulated through sexual restraint for moral purposes. It is a notion a man would entertain only if he were uninterested in real, specifically sexual problems or were deliberately trying to avoid thinking about them.

Ends and Means begins with an explanation of the significance of non-attachment, an idea which, Huxley makes plain, he has derived from Buddhist teaching. Non-attachment is the ideal state because “the ideal man is the non-attached man” (E & M, 3)—non-attached to what have been considered vices by traditional Christianity as well as by Buddhism, and non-attached to worldly things even like art and science. The non-attached man, who practices all virtues, is attached only to ultimate reality, an attachment incompatible with attachment, in whatever form, to self. For ages thinkers of all leading cultures have agreed both on the desirability of non-attachment and on what it constitutes. Yet the present age has witnessed rapid regression from the ideal. Instead of charity (and Huxley quotes Dr. R. R. Marett: “Real progress is progress in charity”), there is torture; instead of truth, there is organized lying; instead of the monotheism or pantheism necessary for the progress of charity toward universality, there is idolatry of the nation, class, or deified leader.

Large-scale social reform is a kind of preventative ethics; that is, if the temptation to do evil is in some way removed, evil cannot be done. Huxley’s faith in preventative ethics is limited, for removal of temptation is deflection, not abolition, of evil. Although social reform is necessary, nothing, Huxley constantly insists, can be accomplished except through the proper means. He offers three principles for reform: “only strictly necessary changes shall be carried out”; “no reform, however intrinsically desirable, should be undertaken if it is likely to result in violent opposition”; and “desirable changes should be made, wherever possible, by the application to wider fields of methods with which people are already familiar and of which they approve.” (E & M, 46–48). These principles receive far more emphasis and elaboration from Huxley than do the few reforms he does mention, chief of which is decentralization in production and government. But even more important than the principles is what Huxley calls the context of the reform. In other words, collective ownership of the means of production in a democratic country and in a totalitarian one

differ in context and therefore (always keeping in mind the ideal of non-attachment) in desirability.

The larger part of *Ends and Means* is analysis and rejection of the activities and motivations for those activities of the modern state. Huxley's statement in the first chapter that the bulk of the work constitutes "a kind of practical cookery book of reform," containing "political recipes, economic recipes, educational recipes, recipes for the organization of industry, of local communities, of groups of devoted individuals," (E & M, 9), is a description likely to mislead the reader looking for a social program in the sense that Communists, Fascists, and democratic humanitarians have social programs. Huxley's program, insofar as he can be said to have one, is probably epitomized in the following passage.

Existing methods of government and existing systems of industrial organization are not likely to be changed except by people who have been educated to wish to change them. Conversely, it is unlikely that governments composed as they are to-day will change the existing system of education in such a way that there will be a demand for a complete overhaul of governmental methods. It is the usual vicious circle from which, as always, there is only one way of escape—through acts of free will on the part of morally enlightened, intelligent, well-informed and determined individuals, acting in concert. (E & M, 59–60).

The passage raises obvious questions: what are Huxley's criteria for the determination of the necessary qualities these individuals must possess? and how can they act freely when it is clear from the book as a whole that Huxley is convinced of the persuasive powers of the modern state? Although Huxley does give examples of individuals and their actions of the sort he has in mind—Gandhi and passive resistance, for instance—and although his chapter on education does contain specific suggestions for improvement, *Ends and Means* does not exhibit sufficient consistency to permit even the extraction of a coherent political philosophy. Huxley goes to some pains to demonstrate that human nature is not a constant, but to a large extent a product of circumstances. At the same time he refers to psychological factors in and causes of these circumstances as if psychological attributes were constant. In the

passage quoted above, he talks of acts of free will; later he says that man's will is free only "to some extent." He urges the adoption of an examination system to separate out at least the mentally incompetent from the mass of candidates for political office, but has little use for examinations in schools. He recognizes that "society" is an abstraction, and insists on the necessity of talking about "the facts of concrete experience," and two pages later writes that "the body politic is subject to two grave diseases in the head, madness and imbecility." (E & M, 173). These are perhaps minor inconsistencies separately, but their number and recurrence in the book, together with the number of assumptions the reader is asked to accept unquestioningly, do much to vitiate Huxley's claim that *Ends and Means* is a "practical cookery book of reform."

But if *Ends and Means* is disappointing as a cookery book, it is interesting as a document illustrating the development of its author. "Human nature does not change, or, at any rate, history is too short for any changes to be perceptible," Huxley had written in an essay called "Fashions in Love" (published in *Do What You Will*, 1929). In *Ends and Means* he deduces exactly the opposite lesson from history. In *Proper Studies* (1927) and *Do What You Will* Huxley is still very much the rationalist; he then maintained that value was something men attributed to an object as a result of their emotions about it. Ten years later he writes of the non-attached man with the clear implication that value is to be sought outside the self. Again, in an essay on Swift (also in *Do What You Will*), Huxley writes that "the purpose of life, outside the mere continuance of living (already a most noble and beautiful end), is the purpose we put into it: its meaning is whatever we may choose to call the meaning." But in *Ends and Means* this is called the philosophy of meaninglessness. "I had motives," Huxley says, looking back, apparently, on his work of the twenties, "for not wanting the world to have a meaning; consequently assumed it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption. . . . Those who detect no

meaning in the world generally do so because, for one reason or another, it suits their books that the world should be meaningless.” (E & M, 270). By 1937 Huxley had found the meaning and purpose of life: “direct intuition of, and union with, an ultimate spiritual reality that is perceived as simultaneously beyond the self and in some way within it.” (E & M, 286).

Along with these major changes of opinion, there is a passage in *Ends and Means* that indicates an attempt at a change of heart. Huxley’s interest in human differences, manifested in *Proper Studies* in the chapters called “The Idea of Equality,” “Varieties of Intelligence,” “Education,” and “Political Democracy,” was undiminished when he wrote *Ends and Means*; indeed, many of the arguments from the earlier book are repeated in the later. But in 1927 Huxley’s emphasis was on irreconcilable differences. “That people should be able to live without privacy and solitude,” he wrote in *Proper Studies*, “strikes me as extraordinary. And how repulsive, how incomprehensible I find the philosophy which is the rationalization of these people’s outward-looking passion for their fellows!” And speaking of genius, he does not consider what constitutes a bond between ordinary men and men of genius, but what the degree of difference is. “As a dog is to me, so am I musically to Beethoven and mathematically to Einstein.” The emphasis in *Ends and Means* is not on differences but on similarities—on what Huxley calls bridge building. His example is Blake:

The Prophetic Books are, of course, symbolical descriptions of psychological states. What must have been the mentality of a man for whom thunder, lightning, clouds and screams seemed the most appropriate figure of speech for describing his ordinary thoughts and feelings? For my own part, I simply cannot imagine. I observe the facts, I record them—but only from the outside, as a field naturalist. What they mean in terms of actual experience, I don’t even pretend to know. There is a gulf here, an absence of communication. Nevertheless, if I had known Blake, I should certainly have found that there was a common ground between us, that there were ways in which we could have established satisfactory human relations. If, for example, I had behaved towards him with courtesy, he would almost undoubtedly have behaved towards me in the same manner. If I had treated him honourably, the chances are that he would have treated me honour-

ably. If I had displayed confidence in him, it is highly probable that he would sooner or later have displayed an equal confidence in me. The solution of the problem of natural (and, where it exists, of acquired) inequality is moral and practical. (E & M, 167).

This passage brings to mind a comment of George Orwell's on Gandhi:

. . . the assumption that served Gandhi so well in dealing with individuals, that all human beings are more or less approachable and will respond to a generous gesture, needs to be seriously questioned. It is not necessarily true, for example, when you are dealing with lunatics. Then the question becomes: who is sane? Was Hitler sane? And is it not possible for one whole culture to be insane by the standards of another?

Surely Huxley is implying that "all human beings are more or less approachable and will respond to a generous gesture"—and surely Orwell is right in saying that this assumption "needs to be seriously questioned." However, it is not necessary to take Huxley very seriously here. The passage, as has been said, seems to indicate an attempt at a change of heart, but judging from Huxley's later novels—*After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*, *Time Must Have A Stop*, *Ape and Essence*, and *The Genius and The Goddess*—the attempt was not successful. Nothing in these novels suggests that there is "common ground" between all human beings, nor that "satisfactory human relations" can be established through a sort of determined, unilateral program of good manners. The significance of the passage, when it is contrasted to what Huxley said in his earlier non-fiction as well as to what he has done as a novelist before and since, is that it illuminates the conflict between his principles and his personality. It is doubtful that Huxley ever believed what he is saying here, but apparently he feels that it is right to believe it.

The repetition of certain arguments from *Proper Studies in Ends and Means*, the passage in *Science, Liberty and Peace* about the connection between the spread of education of the masses and the increase of power of the ruling minority, and a statement Huxley made during a television interview with Mike Wallace in the spring of 1958—that, in the dictatorships of the future,

“people will be happy where they shouldn’t be happy”—these reveal feelings which, unlike his beliefs, have remained with Huxley through the years. It has already been asserted that Huxley is a social critic with considerable distaste for certain facts of human life. These facts include not only the physical aspects of being human, but also, in the democracies in which Huxley has lived, political, sociological, and economic ones: stupid people are allowed to vote, society is not organized into a hierarchy of merit, and the encouragement and exploitation of vulgarity are often highly profitable. Behind this is what distresses Huxley most: there is no logic in what system there is. “A desirable social order is one that delivers us from avoidable evils,” Huxley writes in *Ends and Means*; “a bad social order is one that leads us into temptations which, if matters were more sensibly arranged, would never arise.” (E & M, 59) And the cardinal principle of a sensibly arranged social order—a principle which Huxley stated in *Proper Studies*, and which his later books do not contradict—is “that every human being should be in his place.” The statement reveals Huxley’s lack of comprehension of the mysteriousness of human beings who don’t happen to be Blake or Beethoven or Einstein. That the universe is intractably mysterious, that science can offer only limited explanations of how a limited number of things occur, that we impose unity on diversity not for the sake of truth but for the sake of being able to think—these are points which Huxley never tires of repeating. But a social order based (however unconsciously) on the recognition of mysteriousness, and which therefore refuses to assign individuals to “their places” (places determined by other individuals in other places), is not “sensibly arranged.” It is, in fact, democracy as it has evolved in favorable circumstances, and if totalitarianism offends Huxley’s principles, democracy offends his personality.

Huxley’s objections to democracy are theoretical as well as cultural and esthetic, but his analysis of what he considers the basic assumptions of the theorists of democracy is marked more by personal hostility than by genuine intellectual disagreement. Even

Alexander Henderson, who published the first full-length study of Huxley in 1935, and whose book is almost entirely eulogistic, became impatient with the stiff, literal arguments against democracy in *Proper Studies*. Henderson writes:

If one takes the remark of Locke that man is “by nature free, equal and independent” simply as a statement of absolute fact, as though it were a statement in physics or chemistry, then of course it is untrue. And in his examination of the idea of equality Huxley does take such statements in such a way. The thinking is, as Lawrence so very aptly says, “dry-minded.” With a perverse obstinacy, and against the natural fluidity of his mind, Huxley uses an almost pompous logic towards these eighteenth-century philosophers. He limits his vision to the words in front of him. He recognizes that the equalitarian philosophy was a wish-fulfillment philosophy but does not take the obvious step of enquiring why the *philosophes* should have wanted man to be “free, equal and independent.”

Huxley’s position is that democratic institutions are based on the false assumptions of eighteenth-century philosophers concerning human nature;⁴ that we must fit social institutions to what men are; that men are manifestly unequal in all mental, moral, and physical traits; and that therefore, as we go to the best doctor when we need medical aid, we should go to those best qualified to lead when we need leaders. In short, the ideal state is the aristocratic state, whose ideal, in turn, is “that every human being should be in his place.” *Ends and Means*, with its emphasis on decentralization as the means and non-attachment as the end, seems at first glance to indicate that Huxley’s opinion of democracy had become much more favorable by 1937, for there is no necessary conflict between the ideal man as described by Huxley and the ideal man of democracy’s theorists. But *Ends and Means* is ad-

⁴ “. . . The original assumptions are these: that reason is the same and entire in all men, and that all men are naturally equal. To these assumptions are attached several corollaries: that men are naturally good as well as naturally reasonable; that they are the product of their environment; and that they are indefinitely educable. The main conclusions derivable from these assumptions are the following: that the state ought to be organized along democratic lines; that the governors should be chosen by universal suffrage; that the opinion of the majority on all subjects is the best opinion; that education should be universal, and the same for all citizens.” (*Proper Studies*, p. 24.) To attack democracy on this basis is to battle with air. What Huxley calls assumptions are, of course, ideals.

dressed to a select audience, to “morally enlightened, intelligent, well-informed and determined individuals.” The chapters called “Nature of the Modern State” (in which Huxley describes “the patience of common humanity” as “the most important . . . fact in history”—a patience compounded of ignorance, fear, inertia, and belief), “Inequality,” and “Education” are evidence that Huxley still saw humanity in the lump as something to be sifted, sorted, classified, and placed accordingly—that the aristocratic ideal was still his. He turned his attention from democracy to totalitarianism because by 1937 totalitarianism, not democracy, was the form of government posing the most urgent questions. Besides, totalitarianism was, in his eyes, an outcome of democracy, an outcome he had in a way anticipated in *Do What You Will*,⁵ he was convinced that “‘the defence of democracy against Fascism’ entails inevitably the transformation of democracy into Fascism” (E & M, 36); and the few kind words he says for democracy in *Brave New World Revisited* merely reflect his fear of what the world will be when democracy has ceased to exist.

The vulgarities which have accompanied democracy have aroused Huxley to comments scattered throughout his books, comments usually merely sarcastic, but sometimes bitter, disgusted, even hopeless. Two essays—“Comfort” in *Proper Studies* and “Silence is Golden” in *Do What You Will*—are entirely devoted to cultural aspects of modern democracy. “Comfort” is an entertaining, witty piece on the connection between the emphasis a society puts on comfort and its politics, morals, and

⁵ “The time is not far off when the whole population and not merely a few exceptionally intelligent individuals will consciously realize the fundamental unlivability of life under the present regime. . . . The revolution that will then break out will not be communistic—there will be no need for such a revolution, . . . and besides nobody will believe in the betterment of humanity or in anything else whatever. It will be a nihilist revolution. Destruction for destruction’s sake. Hate, universal hate, and an aimless and therefore complete smashing up of everything. And the levelling up of incomes, by accelerating the spread of universal mechanization (machinery is costly), will merely accelerate the coming of this great orgy of universal nihilism. The richer, the more materially civilized we become, the more speedily it will arrive. All that we can hope is that it will not come in our time.” *Do What You Will*, pp. 225–226.

religion, while "Silence is Golden" is an angry denunciation of "talkies," jazz, and the decay which Huxley finds expressed in movies and the music of Irving Berlin. Both essays are variations on the theme most forcefully expressed in "Revolutions" (also in *Do What You Will*), that "the present social and industrial system," by which he means democracy, "makes life fundamentally unlivable for all. . . . Existence has become pointless and intolerable." Huxley ends "Comfort" by suggesting that "one day, perhaps, the earth will have been turned into one vast feather-bed, with man's body dozing on top of it and his mind underneath, like Desdemona, smothered." "Silence is Golden" concludes with a question by no means wistful: "Ours is a spiritual climate in which the immemorial decencies find it hard to flourish. Another generation or so should see them definitely dead. Is there a resurrection?" Sinclair Lewis might have been capable of the first statement; the bitterness and despair of the second, however, is all Huxley's.

No attempt to outline Huxley's social criticism would be complete without noting that Huxley has sharply criticized the very processes of reasoning he himself all too frequently employs. Some indication of this has already been given in connection with his tendency to deal with abstractions of questionable validity, and with his reliance on "experts." A further example is a passage in the chapter on education in *Ends and Means*.

. . . Even the accomplished intellectual is a far from satisfactory person. His involvement with the world is only cognitive, not affective or conative. Moreover, the framework into which he fits experience is the framework of the natural sciences and of history as though it too were one of the natural sciences. He is concerned mainly with the material universe and with humanity as part of the material universe. He is not concerned with humanity as human, as potentially more than human. One of the results of this preoccupation with the material universe is that, on the rare occasions when the intellectual does become affectively and conatively involved with the world of human reality, he tends to exhibit a curious impatience which easily degenerates into ruthlessness. Thinking of human beings "scientifically," as parts of the material universe, he doesn't see why they shouldn't be handled as other parts of the material universe are handled—dumped

here, like coal or sand, made to flow there, like water, “liquidated” (the Russians preserve the vocabulary of the intellectuals who prepared and made their revolution), like so much ice over a fire. (E & M, 198).

Huxley then goes on to argue in favor of a new principle of integration in education, something that will integrate isolated bits of knowledge into a humanly meaningful and valuable system designed through its own completeness to help human beings become complete themselves. And indeed the concept of integration—of political, social, economic, religious, scientific, and artistic activities as well as of educational ones, in themselves and into a genuine communal life—has always been dear to Huxley. The aristocratic ideal, that everyone should be in his proper place, is probably just another way of saying the same thing. But in *Science, Liberty and Peace*, which, as an antidote to the way things are going (the way described by Tolstoy), offers an argument for the integration of science into the communal life, there is a passage in which Huxley makes what is, after all, the obvious objection. After quoting from an article in favor of integrating “the scientific approach to the human problems of production and the political approach of the administrator,” Huxley comments:

... In any discussion of economic or political problems, the word “integration” is always a danger signal; for it is always tacitly assumed that the work of integration is carried out by somebody standing above the processes and persons to be integrated. In other words, whenever people call for “integration” they are always calling for the exercise of centralized governmental power and for yet another extension of the process of institutionalization. But power is always corrupting, and no human being or group of human beings is to be trusted with too much of it for too long. (SLP, 52).

Huxley’s social criticism thus presents problems of consistency unusual in the light of the subjects of his criticism. Yet there is one note one finds repeated again and again in his books: the sense of impending destruction. “One thing alone is absolutely certain of the future,” he wrote in *Proper Studies*, “that our Western societies will not long persist in their present state. Mad ideals and a lunatic philosophy of life are not the best guarantees of survival.” What is to come is the brave new world.