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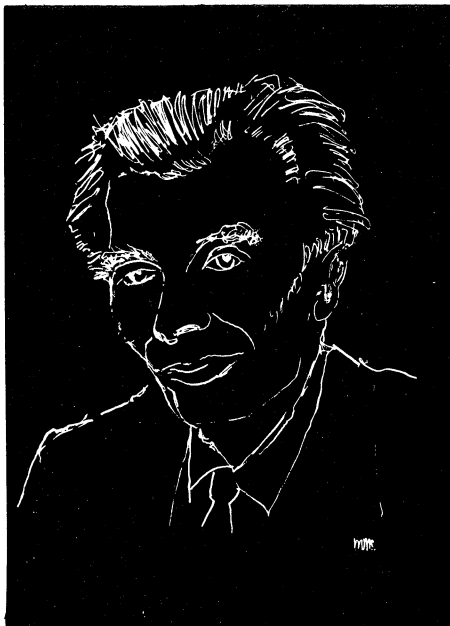
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GLENN SMITH

## ALDOUS HUXLEY

### Analyst and Prophet for Twentieth Century Man

Since the beginning of World War I, a small but important number of intellectuals and writers have expressed apprehension over the direction in which Western civilization is tending. Of all the voices of concern heard during the last generation, that of Aldous Huxley was one of the most insistent, informed, and articulate. Huxley devoted 30 years to discovering as much as he could about man's tragic experiment, and in his search he described and clarified with such vividness the alternatives to our predicament that his work is more important today, four years after his death, than at any time while he was writing. The closer the human community comes to the yawning abyss of total annihilation, as we stagger aimlessly between all-encompassing totalitarianism in many parts of the planet and complete chaos and disintegration in other areas, the more poignant become Huxley's warnings.

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#### The Huxley Heritage

Born on July 6, 1894, in Godalming, Surrey County, England, Aldous Leonard Huxley was a member of one of the most distinguished families in Western intellectual history. His grandfather, Thomas Henry Huxley, made the family name famous as Darwin's colleague and champion. His father, Leonard Huxley, was editor of the influential English review, *Cornhill Magazine*. His mother was the niece of the noted Victorian poet, critic, and inspector of schools, Matthew Arnold. His brother, Sir Julian, a distinguished biologist, poet, essayist, and first director-general of UNESCO, has been the best-known Huxley in recent years. Aldous' half brother, Andrew Fielding Huxley, shared the 1963 Nobel Prize in physiology and medicine.<sup>1</sup>

Aldous himself would probably have continued the family's traditional interest in the biological sciences had an eye disease not stopped his study of medicine when he was 17. With the aid of a magnifying glass, he turned to literature, graduating in 1919 from Oxford. A short time later, while working on a literary magazine, he married his secretary, a Belgian war refugee

named Maria Nys. She became his eyes, reading to him, doing research, and taking dictation until she died of cancer in 1955.<sup>2</sup>

Success as a poet and novelist in the 1920's gave Huxley both a literary reputation and enough money to leave England's damp climate. For the next seven years he lived in Italy and France, where he wrote *Brave New World*—the book for which he is still best known, though it is not his most important work. In the Thirties, with Maria and a specially packed set of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in tow, he traveled. To help finance the trips, he wrote travelogues—full of exotic and amusing material—but he did not turn out any more biting satires such as *Point Counterpoint* and *Brave New World*. Much of the criticism of Huxley, and there has been a good deal of this, has come from literary writers who never forgave his failure to produce more satire.<sup>3</sup>

Huxley forfeited a promising career as novelist and poet because his vision of the building tragedy of modern man was too penetrating to allow him to waste time being merely satirical. The sight of "those endless columns of uniformed boys, white, brown, black, yellow, march-

ing toward a common grave" impelled him to spend his creative energies looking for solutions to our most pressing social, economic, and political problems.<sup>4</sup> He became, in the words of one of his friends, "not a caustic entertainer but a concerned if almost despairing prophet."<sup>5</sup> Because he relentlessly sacrificed literary popularity for integrity, Huxley's life could well serve as an inspiration to those contemporary intellectuals who talk about self-honesty rather than live it. Unfortunately, a complete biography will probably never be written because all his papers were destroyed when his home burned in 1962. He was then already losing his battle with cancer. He died the day after President Kennedy's assassination.

Out of his burning house, Huxley salvaged only the manuscript of his last novel, *Island*—a description of man's alternatives and of the fictional realization of the best of these in the mythical island kingdom of Pala. As a novel the book was justly accused of being too cerebral, too moralistic, and too nearly plotless.<sup>6</sup> But taken as a final testament by one of the clearest-sighted and most concerned analysts of the twentieth century, it is a very timely book which, along with *Brave New World Revisited*, *Science, Liberty and Peace*, and *Literature and Science*, should be read by both teachers and educational administrators in all the industrialized and would-be industrialized nations. The reader should turn to *Island* itself for Huxley's solutions; space permits nothing more than a brief look at some of the problems here.

### Huxley's Analysis

No subject was off limits to Huxley's searching intelligence. He ranged across the intellectual landscape from art to Zen, including along the way biology, mysticism, faith-healing, handwriting analysis, psychic research, electric automobiles, and scores of other topics both exotic and mundane. We can do little more here than suggest a few of the areas in which storms

are brewing with ominous threats for mankind and mention Huxley's analyses of them.

One of the main centers of Huxley's attention has long been the relationship of advancing science to the maintenance of democracy. This was the underlying theme of *Brave New World*, and it remained an important preoccupation throughout the last three decades of his life. "Progressive science," he wrote in 1946, "is one of the causative factors involved in the progressive decline of liberty and the progressive centralization of power, which have occurred during the twentieth century."<sup>7</sup> American liberals have been very slow to concede this point because they have been so long engaged in the frustrating effort to mitigate the worst features of excessive commercial-industrial power by increasing the regulatory force of the American government. To be fearful of centralization has marked one in this country as a naive conservative. But Huxley was right, as the increasing parade of mergers and consolidations in contemporary business, religion, journalism, and education eloquently testifies; and the sooner we recognize this inexorable concentration of power, the better the chances of democracy's survival.

Scientific sophistication is partially responsible for the accelerating concentration of power; it is also, Huxley saw, producing a snowballing rate of change in all areas of life which is best represented by an exponential curve and which is too rapid for optimum human accommodation.

The practical consequences of this change can be seen most easily in a heretofore isolated area such as American Samoa. When the U.S. Navy took over the islands in 1900, it brought along scientific

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medicine. By 1948 the crude death rate was only nine per thousand and is now about five. During the same period birthrates stayed over 40 per thousand, where they still are, and population zoomed. The tiny area now has four times as many people as it had in 1900, and if everyone born on the island had stayed, there would now be six times as many. Population pressure is very severe, but instead of encouraging birth control the American government is tacitly smiling at large families while creating an artificial boom by pouring in large amounts of money—about \$40 million over a five-year period for a population of 24,000. Both the incidence of juvenile delinquency and the number of automobile wrecks are rising dramatically. Traditional Samoan culture is breaking down. Many Samoans are discarding long-established value patterns, but they are rarely able to replace them with better ones. All Samoans, and especially the younger ones, are caught up in cultural crosscurrents which they do not understand. Meanwhile we are assured by several sources, such as the *Reader's Digest*, American Samoa's Governor H. Rex Lee, and an international team of educators led by Wilbur Schramm, that American style ETV is solving Samoa's problems.<sup>8</sup> Many older Samoans are already asking whether the blessings of technology are worth the price, but they are powerless to stop or control the changes.<sup>9</sup> Even advanced societies find change difficult to cope with, as increasing violence, pollution, congestion, and mental illness in the United States clearly show.

The rise of science also has made it possible to realize degrading and immoral objectives on a much wider scale than previously. Nowhere is this more apparent than in warfare, where technologists have given us, in Huxley's words, "bombers that can fly nonstop for 8,000 miles, incendiaries that nobody can put out, and atomic missiles that are guaranteed to do to whole cities what a quart of boiling water does to an ants' nest."<sup>10</sup> Our

real malaise, however, lies not so much in the quantum jump in destructive power as in our frenzied belief that democracy may be preserved by the preparation for and exercise of war. Huxley saw much earlier than most—at the very beginning of World War II—that an Allied victory on the battlefield would ensure, not the triumph of peace and democratic living, but accelerated militarism. He saw the likelihood of a ruinous military-industrial complex two decades before America's military-hero President called it to the attention of his technologically bemused flock.

But the cultivation of improved means to unimproved ends, to use a phrase which Huxley borrowed from Thoreau, is apparent in many areas other than defense. It is especially noticeable at present in education, where we seem to be adopting James B. Conant's suggestion that our main problem is to do more efficiently what we have been doing all along. Huxley knew that the systematic corruption and dehumanization of students to make them fit the needs of mass consumption and the cold war, even if it is done with video tape, programmed instruction, and guidance counselors, is not progress of a desirable sort.

Huxley goes even further in analyzing the tools which science is making available to man for the destruction of democracy. One of these, in many ways the most devious, will serve as an illustration. Huxley saw with preternatural clarity what Madison Avenue hopes the average man will never perceive: that the most effective techniques of modern advertising, public relations, and motivational research depend for their effectiveness on fear, anxiety, insecurity, and other personality weaknesses. By clever exploitation of the "hidden forces" of the human psyche, the admen convince us that automobiles and cigarettes are so immediately satisfying as to make the seriously increased possibility of an early and painful demise worth any risk. They are now doing the same thing for us with

respect to politicians and political parties.

Of all the difficulties which science has created for democratic living, one seems almost preeminent in Huxley's writings. This is the population explosion. The facts are as simple as they are frightening. By suddenly and dramatically lowering the death rate on the planet without offering a corresponding diminution in birthrates, modern medicine unleashed an exponential growth in the population. From the birth of Christ, it took 16 centuries for the population to double. Then in the 150 years from 1750 to 1900 it doubled again. In the next 65 years it

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doubled again, and today's three-plus billion people will have doubled to more than six billion by 2000. Huxley detailed the consequences very plainly 10 years ago, and the February, 1966, *UNESCO Courier* has confirmed them: Half the earth's people are today ill-housed, poorly clothed, inadequately educated, and improperly fed. In the next 33 years the number will double. The poorest areas have and will continue to have the highest birthrates, resulting in an ever-widening gap between the affluent and the poor, which in turn will increase the impetus to war and will feed the totalitarian propensity to overorganization.<sup>11</sup>

#### **Needed: A Changed Perception**

Science, of course, is not the only curse plaguing man; in any case it has brought many blessings. Huxley understood this well, and he never suggested that there was any possibility or desirability of returning to a prescientific style of

existence. He did call for a partial shift away from the natural sciences to the sciences of life. He did hope that enough people would come to understand the negative aspects of science to produce a slowdown to a manageable rate of change. And finally, he hoped for a new perception of morality, ethics, and religion, for he thought the crisis, ultimately, was ethical and religious, using the terms in their broadest senses. Huxley believed that Western man must abandon his Wholly Other god for an immanent one (or ones) and adopt a less Calvinistic, more mystical and totemistic view of the world before an acceptable ethics can be worked out. His view of Mind might be mistaken and his affinity for chemically assisted visions unacceptable—especially in our society with its present state of hysteria over marijuana and LSD—but his insistence upon an immanent Divine Ground makes some sense, and it continues the tradition of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Paul Tillich, among others.

In light of our growing environmental crisis, Huxley's approach to ecology is worth citing as a practical application of his unorthodox religious view:

In the light of what we know about the relationships of living things to one another and to their inorganic environment—and also of what, to our cost, we know about overpopulation, ruinous farming, senseless forestry, and destructive grazing, about water pollution, air pollution, and the sterilization or total loss of once-productive soils—it has now become abundantly clear that the Golden Rule applies not only to the dealings of human individuals and human societies with one another, but also to their dealings with other living creatures and the planet upon which we are all traveling through space and time.

"For the ecologist," he added, "man's inhumanity to Nature deserves almost as strong a condemnation as man's inhumanity to man. Not only is it profoundly wicked, and profoundly stupid, to treat animals as though they were things, it is also wicked and stupid to treat things as though they were mere



things."<sup>12</sup> Is this going too far? Perhaps, though most of Huxley's ideas seemed extreme when he first wrote them. "He was," as one writer has said, "at almost every step, ahead of his time."<sup>13</sup>

But even if all his solutions should prove invalid, there remains his penetrating, sometimes brutal and agonizing, insight into man's condition. His books are not always pleasant reading. Indeed, many critics, on the theory that if one can't say something nice one shouldn't say anything, have dismissed them for being too alarming. But Huxley's pessimism is one of the reasons why he should be read, for the choice is no longer between pessimism and optimism; it is rather between the realistic despair of Huxley crying a warning and the apocalyptic reign of terror which will follow if we fail to heed it. Aldous Huxley, so blind he needed Braille to read a book, saw far more clearly than most of us that the Four Horsemen are impatient, and that while we should be exerting every effort to restrain them, we are instead throwing at their horses' feet ever-larger firecrackers made by our advancing technology.

The lesson is plain. Pestilence, bereavement, famine, and fire are now ravaging parts of the globe. If our misapprehension of reality and inappropriate responses to the changes brought by science continue, their spread to all areas will be not only imminent but inevitable. Huxley has spoken as a prophet. The question is: Are we listening?

<sup>1</sup>John Walsh, "Aldous Huxley: The Late Author Felt Scientists Tend to Search for Truth, Ignore Consequences," *Science*, December 13, 1963, pp. 1445-46.

<sup>2</sup>"Aldous Huxley Dies of Cancer on Coast," *New York Times*, November 24, 1963, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Richard Church, *British Authors*. London: Longmans Green and Co., 1948, pp. 123-24; Frank Swinnerton, *The Georgian Scene*. New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1934, pp. 439-47.

<sup>4</sup>Quotation from *Brave New World Revisited*. New York: Bantam Books, 1960, p. viii.

<sup>5</sup>Gerald Heard, "The Poignant Prophet," *Kenyon Review*, Winter, 1965, p. 60.

<sup>6</sup>William Barrett, review of *Island*. New York: Harper & Row, 1962, in *Atlantic*, April, 1962, p. 155; also reviewed by Richard Mayne in *The New Statesman*, March 30, 1962, p. 459, and C. J. Rolo in the *New York Herald Tribune Book Review*, March 25, 1962, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup>Aldous Huxley, *Science, Liberty and Peace*. New York: Harper & Row, 1946, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup>Clarence W. Hall, "Samoa: America's Showplace of the South Seas," *Reader's Digest*, November, 1965, pp. 157-68; H. Rex Lee, "Education in American Samoa," an address to the Third International Conference in Educational Radio and Television, Paris, France, March 16, 1967; Wilbur Schramm *et al.*, *The New Media: Memo to Educational Planners*. Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning, 1967, pp. 13-21.

<sup>9</sup>Robert Langdon, "All That Glitters Isn't Gold in America's South Seas 'Showplace,'" *Pacific Island Monthly*, September, 1966, pp. 31-40.

<sup>10</sup>Huxley, *Science, Liberty and Peace*, p. 45.

<sup>11</sup>The January, 1967, number of *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* supports Huxley's insight of 10 years earlier.

<sup>12</sup>Aldous Huxley, "The Only Way To Write a Modern Poem About a Nightingale," *Atlantic*, August, 1963, p. 63; also, *Literature and Science*. New York: Harper & Row, 1963, p. 109.

<sup>13</sup>Ross Parmenter, "Aldous Huxley: Style Was the Man," *Saturday Review*, December 21, 1963, p. 13. □

## Sex Education for Doctors

► "Sex behavior is intimately involved with the psychological and emotional aspects of life, and in at least that sense, doctors seem to be woefully ignorant about sex," says Dr. Harold I. Lief, professor of psychiatry and director of the Division of Family Study, University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine.

Future physicians come to medical schools with "the same conceptions and misconceptions, the same information and misinformation, the same confidences and anxieties regarding sex that any group of similarly educated people have," he adds. "Then in medical school little is done to inform the students or to teach them new attitudes."

Physicians have knowledge of anatomy, conception, and procreation, but this "does not include methods of handling the problems of young married couples who are sexually frustrated; knowing how to deliver a baby does not mean that a doctor can rescue a middle-aged man who is panicky because of failing sexual powers."

Dr. Lief has been in the vanguard in urging sex education in medical schools. Five years ago, only a few schools had such courses or lectures. Now, he reports, 32 of the nation's 88 schools have advised him they are conducting or plan to conduct sex education courses.

► "The little rift between the sexes is astonishingly widened by simply teaching one set of catchwords to the girls and another to the boys."

—Robert Louis Stevenson

## SIECUS Objectives

► "SIECUS has refused to prepare or to recommend any specific sex education curricula, although it has been involved in a consultative capacity in the development of not a few. Its first study guide, however, did set down in concise form what the multidisciplinary SIECUS board considered to be the nine primary objectives for sex education and also six broad areas of emphasis that should be included in a comprehensive sex education program. The nine objectives are:

"1. To provide for the individual an adequate knowledge of his own physical, mental, and emotional maturation processes as related to sex.

"2. To eliminate fears and anxieties relative to individual sexual development and adjustments.

"3. To develop objective and understanding attitudes toward sex in all of its various manifestations—in the individual and in others.

"4. To give the individual insight concerning his relationships to members of both sexes and to help him understand his obligations and responsibilities to others.

"5. To provide an appreciation of the positive satisfaction that wholesome human relations can bring to both individual and family living.

"6. To build an understanding of the need for the moral values that . . . provide rational bases for making decisions.

"7. To provide enough knowledge about the misuses and aberrations of sex to enable the individual to protect himself against exploitation and against injury to his physical and mental health.

"8. To provide an incentive to work for a society in which such evils as prostitution and illegitimacy, archaic sex laws, irrational fears of sex, and sexual exploitation are nonexistent.

"9. To provide the understanding and conditioning that will enable each individual to utilize his sexuality effectively and creatively in his several roles, e.g., as spouse, parent, community member, and citizen."

The above is excerpted from "Sex Education and the Roles of School and Church," by Mary S. Calderone, executive secretary of the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States, writing in a special issue of *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, March, 1968, titled "Sex and the Contemporary American Scene."