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A DARK ANGEL AND HIS MASTERPIECE: ALDOUS HUXLEY AND *BRAVE NEW WORLD*

M.D. AESCHLIMAN

It ill profits a man to gain the whole world if by there doing he loses his own soul.

St. Mark 8:36

Nor give up for life what alone gives life its worth.

Juvenal

1. *The Man*

Aldous Huxley is probably the most important English-language satirist since Swift, and his satire *Brave New World* is arguably the greatest, most troubling and valuable novel of the 20th century. Its antiseptic, educational value is very great. The novels of Solzhenitsyn and George Orwell's *1984* are probably its only real competitors for moral power, intellectual insight, and contemporary relevance¹. Orwell had been a student of Huxley's at Eton College in 1917-1918 and later sent his former teacher a copy of his satirical anti-utopia *1984* when it was published in 1949. Huxley responded with an appreciative letter praising Orwell's anti-totalitarian novel but remarking that he still felt that the longer-term future was more likely to resemble the dystopian world that he himself had described seventeen years earlier in *Brave New World*. The "ultimate revolution" that he dreaded was briefly alluded to in the letter to Orwell and had been identified earlier in the 1946 Preface to *Brave New World*. According to Huxley this revolution had been initiated in the behavior and writings of the sexually perverted French Marquis de Sade (1740-1814) and aimed at "the total subversion of the individual's psychology and physiology" through a kind of desacralization or desecration of human beings, a "really revolutionary revolution... in the souls and flesh of human beings" whose "bodies were henceforth to become the common sexual property of all and whose minds were to be purged of all the natural decencies, all the laboriously acquired inhibitions of traditional civilization"². Huxley depicted and pre-

¹ H.G. Wells is an important precursor of Huxley. For commentary on his great early novels and his subsequent career as 'educator', see M.D. Aeschliman, *The Decline and Fall of H.G. Wells*, "The World and I", November 1993, pp. 306-311. On the importance of Solzhenitsyn, see M.D. Aeschliman, *Solzhenitsyn and Modern Literature*, "First Things", August-September 1990.

² For Huxley's letter to Orwell, 21 October 1949, see Grover Smith ed., *Letters of Aldous Huxley*, Harper and Row, New York 1969, pp. 604-605. For Huxley's more expansive comments, see the 1946 *Preface to Brave New World* (there are various editions), paragraph 9. For further commentary on Sade's relevance, see M.D.

dicted a mindless, consumerist ‘pornotopia’ that might well be prepared and welcomed by a kind of democratic acclamation – through technological enthusiasm and optimism and a ‘democratic’ faith in ‘market outcomes’ – that whatever is popular or can be sold and sells is good: “Vox populi vox Dei est” (the voice of the people is the voice of God).

Without embarking on a summary of Huxley’s biography, a few salient facts about his heritage, background, and life experience ought nevertheless to be mentioned. Born in 1894, Aldous Huxley was a grandson of the English Victorian Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-1895), a great biologist, a fine prose writer, the chief defender of Darwin’s theories in late 19th-century England, and a noble, pugnacious, but ultimately self-contradictory “scientific moralist”³. Aldous Huxley was also a great nephew of Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), another great Victorian cultural figure, who was a distinguished poet, critic, prose writer, and school inspector, and one of the most influential educational theorists of the last two hundred years, a theorist whose lectures (especially in America), friendships (e.g., with the capitalist-philanthropist Andrew Carnegie), and writings had a profound influence on the development of liberal arts education, especially at the college level, in England, America, and throughout the English-speaking world⁴. Along with the classical-Christian John Henry Newman and the secular-liberal J.S. Mill, T.H. Huxley and Matthew Arnold were participants in an extended, public, literary debate over the nature and aims of education that set an outstandingly high standard of discourse on these issues⁵. Aldous Huxley created a large and varied body of literary work – poems, essays, plays, movie scripts, short stories, novels, historical and religious studies, political, social, educational, and scientific commentary, and a substantial anthology of religious thought. One way of conceiving much of this large and various literary achievement is to see it as an extension of the earlier

Aeschliman, *De Sade and His Progeny*, “Crisis”, September 1993, pp. 54-55; M.D. Aeschliman, *Two Roadside Abductions*, “National Review Online”, 5 July 2014: <http://nationalreview.com/article/382002/two-roadside-abductions-m-d-aeschliman> (last accessed December 2, 2014); L.G. Crocker, *The Nihilist Dissolution*, in *Nature and Culture: Ethical Thought in the French Enlightenment*, Johns Hopkins, Baltimore 1963 and R. Shattuck, *Forbidden Knowledge: From Prometheus to Pornography*, St. Martin’s, New York 1996.

³ For a judicious account of Huxley’s strengths, weaknesses, and ultimate self-contradictions, see G. Himmelfarb, *Marriage and Morals Among the Victorians* and *Other Essays*, Knopf, New York 1986, ch. 3 and 4.

⁴ *The Complete Prose Writings of Matthew Arnold* have been edited in a standard edition for the University of Michigan Press by R.H. Super. Some of his volume titles will suggest Arnold’s range: *On the Classical Tradition* (Vol. I), *Democratic Education* (Vol. II), and *Schools and Universities on the Continent* (Vol. IV). A somewhat older but still authoritative biography is by Lionel Trilling (1939), who also edited a selection of his works, *The Portable Matthew Arnold* (1949); a more recent biography is by Park Honan (1981). For a discussion of the power and pervasiveness – and some of the limitations? – of Arnold’s educational thinking, see M.D. Aeschliman, *The Restitution of Man: C.S. Lewis and the Case Against Scientism*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 1983 (new edition 1998).

⁵ For major texts of this debate, see W.E. Buckler ed., *Prose of the Victorian Period*, Harcourt, New York 1958. For extended accounts, see G. Tillotson, *A View of Victorian Literature*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1978, and A.O.J. Cockshut, *The Unbelievers*, New York University Press, New York 1964. For shorter discussions of this debate, see M.D. Aeschliman, *The Restitution of Man*, and G. Himmelfarb, “Marriage and Morals Among the Victorians”. G.K. Chesterton penned a characteristically profound, judicious, brief assessment of the value of Arnold’s critical writings as an *Introduction to his Essays Literary and Critical by Matthew Arnold*, J.M. Dent & Sons, London 1906, and subsequent reprints.

educational and philosophical debate, especially the one between his two eminent relatives. For T.H. Huxley and Matthew Arnold debated the questions of “what knowledge is of most worth?” and the coordinated questions of the proper relations, in education and life, of language, literature, religion, ethics, the experimental method, and the growth of the natural sciences generally. Scion of a distinguished scientific family, Aldous Huxley continued this debate in his own work and also contested these issues privately with his own brother Julian, a biologist who was the first Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization: UNESCO⁶. A half-brother, Sir Andrew Huxley (1917-2012), was a Nobel-Prize-winning biologist (1963).

Huxley was educated at Oxford, traveled widely, lived in France and Italy for over a decade, and from 1937 until his death in 1963 lived in southern California. Throughout his adult life he struggled intermittently with partial or full blindness. Huxley was in close dialogue throughout his California years with eminent scientists, various religious figures, artists – and the world of Hollywood screen-writing, in which he never had the success for which he hoped and worked⁷. The combination of geographical, educational, linguistic, and cultural experience that Huxley brought to bear made him one of the most learned and cosmopolitan of all major 20th-century writers – and a thinker who never ceased to ponder and write about education.

If Huxley inherited or derived from his own family, education, and cultural milieu a profound awareness of both literary-humanistic and scientific ideas and issues, he inherited also from Arnold and T.H. Huxley an earnest sense of educational and moral obligation that throughout his life was in tension with his own fastidious aesthetic taste and witty sophistication, his desire for privacy, detachment, and scholarly and religious contemplation.

Most of Aldous Huxley’s novels are satirical, but in one of them – *Brave New World* – he succeeds in drawing on very diverse satirical elements and traditions to extraordinarily powerful effect – an effect that, whatever the value and brilliance of his later writings, he was never again to achieve. Broadly speaking, there are two traditions of satire in the West. One is a tradition of comic, indulgent satire that mocks but also largely forgives human folly, foibles, ignorance, and weakness. This satire can be found early, in the plays of the Greek Aristophanes and in the poems of the Roman Horace, by reference to whom it is often called ‘Horatian.’ There is much of it in Chaucer and Mark Twain, in James Thurber and Russell Baker, in TV talk-show hosts and stand-up comedians. We all recognize it in newspaper or magazine cartoons and various genres of comedy across the ages. Its tone is often light, its goals entertainment, self-knowledge, and a kind of forgiveness based on a recognition of common humanity. But from at least as far back in the past there has been an al-

⁶ See, for example, his revealing letter of 27 October 1946 to Julian, from which I choose brief but characteristic passages: “I [feel] rather dubious about the whole [modern] idea of progress [...] Is the increase in knowledge at the expense of ‘understanding’ a progress? I don’t know, and I see no reason to suppose that anyone else does either”. *Letters of Aldous Huxley*, pp. 551 and 553.

⁷ The most authoritative biography of Huxley to date is the one by his friend S. Bedford, *Aldous Huxley: a Biography*, Chatto & Windus, London 1974. For the Hollywood years, see D.K. Dunaway, *Huxley in Hollywood*, Bloomsbury, London 1989.

ternate tradition, one with an antiseptic, moral intention and a tragic edge. This tradition can be found in the writings of the Hebrew prophets, in Roman satirists such as Juvenal, in medieval preachers and moralists, in the prose and poetry of Swift and Pope – probably its greatest masters – in the novels of Evelyn Waugh, George Orwell, and the American Nathanael West. It discerns and displays something actually or potentially tragic about human ignorance, vice, and sin, and excoriates and prosecutes it with reformative and antiseptic intention. It is often called ‘Juvenalian,’ after one of its greatest Roman masters.

Although both kinds of satire can be found in some great satirical writers and works – in Swift’s novel *Gulliver’s Travels* or Hawthorne’s short story *The Celestial Railroad*, for example – one or the other will predominate. In *Brave New World*, the prophetic-Juvenalian tradition and tone are dominant. Though there are comic touches in the novel, and though Huxley retrospectively called himself when writing it “an amused, Pyrrhonic [i.e., skeptical] aesthete”, it is in fact a profound, vehement philosophical-literary attack on the ‘sacred cows’ or ‘golden calves’ of modern ‘progressive’ thinking. Though starting out in the 1920s as a witty, detached, contemptuous observer of that crazy, consumerist-commercial chapter of modern life we call the ‘roaring ‘20s,’ Huxley was affected in a different, deeper way by the nightmarish world developments of the 1930s in Europe and the rest of the world – Depression and unemployment, Communism, Fascism, Nazism, imperialism, and war. In 1931 Huxley was writing *Brave New World*, and it was this year that the philosophical historian Arnold Toynbee called “the terrible year” during which many thoughtful people “were seriously contemplating and frankly discussing the possibility that the Western system of society might break down and cease to work”⁸.

Through the shock of these tragic events – so conclusively destroying the complacent secular belief in automatic and irreversible progress – the detached observer Huxley was converted into a religious moralist – too eclectic, unconventional, and ecumenical a moralist to please most orthodox Christian minds, but in some profound way their ally – an ambivalent, intermittently proud, dark angel, but an angel nonetheless: an idol-smasher, a sophisticated scourge of sophistication; an aesthetically fastidious destroyer of merely aesthetic and self-serving views of art and life; a ‘liberal’ only in the 19th-century sense that the Protestant Madison and the Catholic Acton were liberals, but the harshest critic of that very ‘agnostic,’ irreligious liberalism that his own grandfather Thomas Henry Huxley and John Stuart Mill had done so much to promote, and that had become so widespread among the intelligentsia of the 20th century.

After *Brave New World* Huxley was attacked or deserted by just such ‘agnostic’ liberals, as well as radicals, socialists, and aesthetes. His reply to the secularizing, irreligious liberals was often direct and can be found with a witty, scornful, but tragic edge in the 1946 *Preface to Brave New World*. He defended his turn to tradition – “the natural decencies, all the laboriously acquired inhibitions of traditional civilization” – and religious, ‘Natural Law’ thinking – “the unitive knowledge of the immanent Tao or Logos, the transcendent Godhead or Brahman” (in this regard compare the religious dimension of Socrates). He

⁸ Quoted by David Bradshaw in his *Introduction to A. Huxley, Between the Wars: Essays and Letters*, D. Bradshaw ed., Ivan R. Dee, Chicago 1994, p. XVIII.

satirized his agnostic liberal educational opponents by suggesting we “build a Pantheon for Professors”, a celebratory pantheon that “should be located among the ruins of the gutted cities of Europe or Japan”. Over the entrance to the bombed-out cities of Warsaw, Berlin, Dresden, or Hiroshima should be printed the famous eulogy that the architect of St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, Sir Christopher Wren, suggested should be his only eulogy on the walls of the cathedral itself: “If you need his monument, look around you”. With scalpel-sharp irony, Huxley suggests that irreligious modern ‘liberal’ education has failed, that its dreams of cumulative, collective, irreversible progress through uncritical adoration and promotion of science and technology have delivered Babel and Armageddon, and that its own scientific terms of reference can prepare only further kinds of barbaric ingenuity, only further forms of dehumanization, perhaps leading to a brutal, profane “pornotopia”, “purged of all the natural decencies, all the laboriously acquired inhibitions of traditional civilization”. In his fine moral treatise *Ends and Means*, published a few years later, Huxley was to quote with approval the assertion that “real progress...is progress in charity, all other advances being secondary thereto”⁹.

The scornful, fastidious, witty, detached aesthete had become a religious moralist. Though like a dark angel he would hover ambiguously between good and evil, between piety and profanity, between hope and despair, for the rest of his life, a masterpiece had been wrung from both mind and heart, and through its insights and images, its animus and its yearning, an ideal of civilization had been illuminated, and its competitors and enemies exposed and mocked. Honest, thoroughgoing iconoclasm had generated not cynicism but religious vision¹⁰.

2. Brave New World

...impersonal generation will take the place of Nature’s hideous system...

The family system will disappear; society, sapped at its very base, will have to find new foundations; and Eros, beautifully and irresponsibly free, will flit like a gay butterfly from flower to flower.

Scogan, in Huxley’s novel *Crome Yellow* (1921)¹¹

⁹ A. Huxley, *Ends and Means*, Chatto & Windus, London 1946 (1937), p. 6.

¹⁰ As is obvious from Huxley’s favorable reference to William James’s *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (*Brave New World*, ch. XXVII), his own views were eclectic and ecumenical, sharing with James a fundamental antagonism to dogmatic scientific reductionism, materialism, or ‘scientism’. For thinking inspired by Huxley and explicitly in his mode, see H. Smith, *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind*, rev. ed., Quest Books, Wheaton 1989, and Id., *Why Religion Matters: The Fate of the Human Spirit in an Age of Disbelief*, HarperCollins, New York 2001. It was on Huxley’s recommendation that the French Protestant polymath Jacques Ellul’s systematic critique *The Technological Society* was translated into English in 1964. See A.A. Knopf, *Statement from the Publisher*, in J. Ellul, *The Technological Society*, Knopf, New York 1964, p. III. The book is now a classic.

¹¹ A. Huxley, *Crome Yellow*, Chatto & Windus, London 1921, p. 47.

Democracy is a name for a life of free and enriching community. It had its seer in Walt Whitman. It will have its consummation when free social inquiry is indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication.

John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (1927)¹²

Whitman was not least a genius in his understanding that a rejection of Christianity in behalf of an emotional egalitarianism would have to begin with a rejection of the idea that the self was internally structured by conscience.

Quentin Anderson¹³

Published eighty years ago, Huxley's *Brave New World* is on several counts the most impressive and important philosophical, satirical, and educational novel of the last century and of our time. Although it was an immediate success, its moral orientation and implications surprised and shocked 'progressive' intellectuals, who had naturally assumed that the witty, skeptical, mocking, 'liberated' author of the brilliant 1920s essays and novels, scion of England's most distinguished scientific family, would "have inherited a distinct family bias [in favor of] the idea of progress" through science, technology, secularization, and moral libertinism¹⁴. Perhaps the single most influential non-Communist 'progressive' writer in the world at the time was H.G. Wells, who in the 1920s had enlisted the help of Huxley's biologist brother Julian – future Director-General of UNESCO – in writing an encyclopedic volume on biology, *Science of Life*¹⁵. Wells was deeply offended by *Brave New World* and wrote Huxley a letter calling his novel "treason to science and defeatist pessimism"¹⁶.

Huxley's novel looks both to the past and to the future, and it was his personal, retrospective interpretation of the course of civilization since the 18th-century French 'Enlightenment' that finally induced him to break with secular, avant-garde political and educational intellectuals and writers and to conceive and envision his nightmarish future utopia in an acidulous cautionary tale. As so often in the history of life and literature, the process of writing itself probably served as the stimulus or catalyst to Huxley's making up his own mind; he came to realize what he believed when he saw what he wrote. He may well have started out only to satirize lightheartedly the superficial, complacent optimism of thinkers such as Wells; the process of writing took him far beyond his original intention and gave

¹² Quoted in D. Steiner, *Rethinking Democratic Education*, Johns Hopkins, Baltimore 1994, p. 168.

¹³ *Introduction to Walt Whitman's Autograph Revision of the Analysis of Leaves of Grass*, New York University Press, New York 1974, p. 19. See also Anderson's *magnum opus*, *The Imperial Self: An Essay in American Literary and Cultural History*, Knopf, New York 1971.

¹⁴ See A. Sanders, *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1994, p. 555.

¹⁵ See S. Bedford, *Aldous Huxley: A Biography*, Carroll and Graf, New York 1985 (1974), p. 188. For a discussion of Wells's career as writer, thinker, and educator, see M.D. Aeschliman, *The Decline and Fall of H.G. Wells, "The World and I"*, November 1993, pp. 306-311.

¹⁶ S. Bedford, *Aldous Huxley*, p. 253.

birth to a profound philosophical fable whose resonance and relevance have only grown and deepened since 1932¹⁷.

Huxley's re-evaluation of the French 'Enlightenment' – which had first widely promoted the idea of cumulative, collective, inevitable, irreversible human progress – led him to see it not as a mainly positive development – as 'progressive' historiography always has – but instead as a terrible wrong turning for humanity, a turning toward reductionist materialism that logically entailed the profanation and evisceration of the human essence or soul, a kind of abolition of the moral dimension of the human person. He saw in the atheistic, deterministic experimental materialism of LaMettrie and the libertine sexual predation and terrorism of the Marquis de Sade the seeds of the "nihilist dissolution" of "all the natural decencies, all the laboriously acquired inhibitions of traditional civilization"¹⁸. This – and not Jacobinism, or Socialism, or Communism, or Nazism – was the "really revolutionary revolution [...] in the souls and flesh of human beings" that he dreaded and warned of by depicting it in the gruesome, 'pornotopian' sexual commercialism, consumerism, and communalism of *Brave New World*.

For all but its few Alpha misfit-dissenters, the government of *Brave New World* has systematically abolished conscience, doubt, shame, guilt, privacy, modesty, and the unique human loyalties and rites of romantic love, marriage, natural childbirth, maternity, and the family. It has brought into existence a new regime of guiltless sexual promiscuity and ritualized, utilitarian sexual self-worship. Huxley here parodies not only the libertinism of

¹⁷ For Huxley's own impression of what happened during composition, see *ibid.*, p. 244. For an example of the importance of the influence of Huxley's novel, consider that former President G.W. Bush's science advisor, Dr. Leon Kass, has built his career as a moralist on insights and arguments that he credits to C.S. Lewis, Hans Jonas, but especially to Huxley. See *Toward a More Natural Science: Biology and Human Affairs*, Free Press, New York 1985, esp. pp. 34-36. See also J. Turney, *Frankenstein's Footsteps: Science, Genetics, and Popular Culture*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1998. Curiously and ironically, Wells's own early scientific fables were models for Huxley (as well as C.S. Lewis and many others) and retain their value as powerful products of the traditional or orthodox moral sensibility, though Wells deserted this view and ceased to be a writer of serious fiction when he moved on to writing 'progressive' educational, sociological, and scientific propaganda. See M.D. Aeschliman, *The Decline and Fall of H.G. Wells*. The recent Nobel Laureate in Literature, V.S. Naipaul, has rightly drawn attention to the greatness of Wells's early scientific-philosophical fables, which he argues should have won their author the Nobel Prize for Literature. See M. Gussow, *Another Bend in the River for Naipaul*, "The New York Times", 15 November 2001, now available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/15/books/another-bend-in-the-river-for-naipaul-he-tests-the-water-for-nobel-prize-speech.html> (last accessed November 20, 2014).

¹⁸ Huxley makes these points briefly in the 1946 *Preface to Brave New World* and at more length in his earlier moral treatise *Ends and Means*, Chatto and Windus, London 1946 (1937), ch.14, esp. pp. 267-277. See also L.G. Crocker, *The Nihilist Dissolution*, in his authoritative *Nature and Culture: Ethical Thought in the French Enlightenment*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1963; M.D. Aeschliman, *De Sade and His Progeny*, "Crisis", September 1993, pp. 54-55; M.D. Aeschliman, *Two Roadside Abductions*, "National Review Online", 5 July 2014: <http://nationalreview.com/article/382002/two-roadside-abductions-m-d-aeschliman> (last accessed November 20, 2014); R. Shattuck, *Forbidden Knowledge: from Prometheus to Pornography*, St. Martin's, New York 1996. Richard Pipes, Baird Professor of History of Harvard and one of the great historians of our time, has recently reiterated and stressed the connection between the French materialism of the 18th century and modern reductionism and dehumanization. See his letter to "National Review", 15 August 1994. Cf. T. Todorov, *Memoire du mal, tentation du bien: Enquete sur le siecle*, Robert Laffont, Paris 2000, ch. 1.

the 'roaring '20s', through which he had lived and of modernity generally but the decadent libertinism of mid-18th century French 'high' and literary society. He also satirizes the pantheistic, collective "religion of humanity" that the French 'progressive' sociologist Auguste Comte had envisioned in the 1850s as a replacement for Christianity: "a religion shorn of metaphysical implications, with humanity as the object of worship"¹⁹.

The educational means by which this "really revolutionary revolution" have been brought about are the very highest products and devices of modern technological ingenuity and expertise; the means are perfect, only the ends for which they are used are defective and corrupt. The means are genetic manipulation, non-stop educational and commercial propaganda, universal and mandatory birth control, 'lotos-eating' chemical bliss, and high levels of hedonistic consumption as the proof of sociability itself. The result is a profane, shameless, but popular society that is far more morally and culturally 'primitive' than the Indian reservation of Malpais ("bad land"), where at least the rudiments of 'natural' humanity are preserved. The anxiety of conscience has been eliminated; the tension and depth of emotional loyalty and fidelity to an individual or a few individuals – loved one, spouse, child, mother, brother, sister – have been destroyed and prohibited. Traditional literature has been banned.

The literary historian and moralist Quentin Anderson has argued that Walt Whitman's emotional and sexual egalitarianism – his literary promotion of a pan-sexual, polymorphous 'democratic' utopia where "everyone [would] belong to everyone else" (*Brave New World*, ch. 3) – amounts to an enormously "destructive" and "radical assault on the very basis of Western consciousness" – the traditional, even 'natural', religious "idea that the self [is] internally structured by conscience". Philosophy, religion, and ethics are to be replaced by psychology, science, and art; the family is to be replaced by the free-floating, rootless, pleasure-hunting individual, perhaps Rousseau's dreamy, vagabond, hipster-sensualist. As Huxley's Scogan puts it in *Crome Yellow*, "Eros, beautifully and irresponsibly free, [flits] like a gay butterfly from flower to flower"²⁰.

¹⁹ Article on 'Comte', *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, 5th Edition, Columbia University Press, Boston and N.Y. 1993, p. 619. See also F.S. Marvin, *Comte, the Founder of Sociology*, Chapman & Hall, London 1937; reprint 1965, and my overview of the work of the great contemporary sociologist P.L. Berger, *A Contemporary Erasmus: Peter L. Berger*, "Modern Age", 53, 2011, 3, pp. 5-14.

²⁰ Q. Anderson, *The Imperial Self*, pp. 32, 33. For further argument on the importance of the family as the initial school of reality formation and of conscience itself, see M.D. Aeschliman, *Running a Respectable Household, in Gentility Recalled: 'Mere' Manners and the Making of Social Order*, D. Anderson ed., Social Affairs Unit, London 1996, p. 167. I suspect that William James was naively unaware of Whitman's pan-sexual project when he praised him in his essay *On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings* (*Talks to Teachers*, 1899, P. Woodring ed., Norton, N.Y. 1958, esp. pp. 161-163). It is unlikely that the far more radical and anti-traditional John Dewey was similarly unaware of Whitman's biography. Whitman's life and work are central to the modern 'progressive' assault on traditional institutions, beliefs, and mores in the USA, UK, and France. See, e.g., P. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Oxford, N.Y. 1975, and P. Pollard, *André Gide: Homosexual Moralists*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1991. When Norman Podhoretz expressed worries about the effects of the Beat poet Allen Ginsberg's promiscuous lifestyle, the outraged Ginsberg shouted at him and promised to "get at" traditional parents "through your children!" See N. Podhoretz, *Ex-friends*, Free Press, N.Y. 1999, and M.D. Aeschliman, *Podhoretz vs. the Nihilists*, "National Review Online", 18 January 2014: <http://www>.

Charles Glenn has argued that ever since the birth of the ‘modern project’, theoretically in the French ‘Enlightenment’ and politically in the French Revolution, radical political and educational reformers have seen their greatest enemies as religion and the traditional family. Rousseau and the Jacobins he influenced had an intense desire to reduce and remove parental influence, to replace it by state direction of the education of children²¹. But even less radical ‘progressive’ educational theorists have seen the traditional family, with its intense personal loves, loyalties, anxieties, and memories – and its internal moral and intellectual standards – as their chief stumbling block to re-constituting human nature and society. Writing in 1928, a few years before Huxley published *Brave New World*, the influential American educational philosopher John Dewey made the point in his praise of the Soviet Communist educational-political experiment to demote the family in Russia: “To anyone who looks at the matter cold-bloodedly [sic], free from sentimental associations clustering about the historic family institution, a most interesting sociological experimentation is taking place [in Russia], the effect of which should do something to determine how far the bonds that hold the traditional family together are intrinsic and how far due to extraneous causes; and how far the family in its accustomed form is a truly socializing agency and how far a breeder of non-social interests”. Dewey seemed pleased to note that in Russia progress had been made by “the schools in building up forces and factors whose natural effect is to undermine the importance and uniqueness of family life”²².

To Dewey – and to many similar radical theorists before and since – the emotional egalitarian and pan-sexual prophet-bard-liberator Walt Whitman was “the seer of democracy”, a liberator from ‘narrow’ sexual and social roles, monogamy, family, conscience, character, religion, and in fact from rationality itself as traditionally conceived throughout the long centuries during which Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian beliefs and ideas interacted to shape what was thought to be civilized life²³.

nationalreview.com/node368378 (last accessed December 1, 2014). For the astonishingly promiscuous and Sado-Masochistic lengths to which influential, contemporary radical egalitarian ‘moralists’ can go in pursuit of the liberationist project, see J. Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, Simon and Schuster, N.Y. 1993, ch. 1. For a typical, characteristically sophisticated (sophistical?) defense of such “styles of radical will” in pursuit of Whitman’s ‘democratic’ and ‘fraternal’ project, see G. Kateb, *The Inner Ocean: Individualism and Democratic Culture*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y. 1992, esp. ch. 10, *Whitman and the Culture of Democracy*. Ginsberg, Foucault, and Kateb celebrate and promote what Huxley, Quentin Anderson, and Podhoretz hate, fear, and oppose. And cf. Malcolm Muggeridge, writing a quarter of a century ago: “Love especially can prove a highly subversive force in that it stimulates individual and particular emotions and loyalties, whereas eroticism is generalized and therefore conducive to a conformist state of mind”. Quoted by W.F. Buckley Jr., *Porn, Pervasive Presence*, “National Review”, 19 November 2001, p. 44. Muggeridge’s description precisely fits Huxley’s dissenter John, the ‘primitive’ or ‘Savage’.

²¹ See, e.g., C. Glenn, *Plato, Rousseau, Dewey, and the School Wars*, University Professors Lecture, Boston University, Boston 1997; his *Contrasting Models of School and State*, Continuum, New York 2011; and my review of it, *Parents vs. the State*, “Crisis Magazine”, 23 November 2012, www.crisismagazine.com/2012/parents-vs-the-state (last accessed November 20, 2014).

²² Quoted in C. Glenn, *Contrasting Models*, p. 27.

²³ For Dewey’s identification of Whitman as the “seer of democracy”, see note 12.

But from Huxley this progressive dream of Comte, Whitman, and Dewey – of a utopian, aesthetic, immanentist ‘community’ and ‘communication’ and democratic ‘consummation’ – ultimately elicited a sense of horror and hatred, and inspired a literary attack. By 1932 Huxley had come to think that such a ‘utopia’ was quite possible – even probable – in the long-term future, but the question that he asked, along with the Russian émigré anti-Communist Berdyaev, whom he quoted in his epigraph to *Brave New World*, was “Comment l’éviter?” – how to avoid it?²⁴ Discerning the profound threat to personality and conscience that Quentin Anderson called “the radical assault on the basis of Western consciousness”, Huxley responded with a vehement moral fable vindicating the deepest and most enduring achievements of Western civilization: conscientious self-scrutiny; moral liberty; personal responsibility (including the senses of shame and guilt); private and enduring love – romantic, marital, maternal, familial; courtesy, modesty, and privacy; limited government; religious piety; and mistrust of hedonism.

Though Huxley continued to be an omnivorous, eclectic ‘Encyclopedist’ – a true “lifelong learner” – and though he was a ‘dark angel’ who hovered and oscillated ambiguously between ideas and behaviors for the rest of his life, he came to know that inner moral struggle was the very essence of humanity – “the self is internally structured by conscience”, in Anderson’s words. One of Huxley’s favorite passages was the religious meditation from the *Chorus Sacerdotum* of Fulke Greville’s 16th-century verse-drama *Mustapha*, which expresses human moral duality: Huxley used it as the epigraph to his 1928 novel *Point Counter Point*. But he knew that its point had been summarized long ago; “as usual,” he wrote in 1946, “it is a case of “video proboque meliora; deteriora sequor” – I see and approve the good; but the worse is what I follow²⁵. In writing *Brave New World* he had reached certain intuitions about education, the moral life, religion, and civilization that he was to deepen, promote, and defend in several books in different genres during the last thirty years of his life. In a global, ecumenical way he tried to adapt and focus traditional Natural Law theology, the idea of the “image of God” in the human person – “the unitive knowledge of the immanent Tao or Logos, the transcendent Godhead or Brahman” – and in a collectivist age to defend traditional Western Natural Law civic consciousness, including “that liberty under law which, as [Lord] Acton never tired of insisting, is the end of all political action, all social and economic arrangements”²⁶.

Highly informed in the natural sciences, Huxley nevertheless was one of the most dogged and eloquent opponents of all forms of scientific reductionism, of “noth-

²⁴ Huxley’s novel is largely inspired by the religious speculations of Dostoyevsky and a school of his anti-collectivist Russian Christian followers, of whom Berdyaev was one. See M.D. Aeschliman, *The Necessity of Guilt and Shame: Dostoyevsky’s Warning to the Modern World*, in *This Will Hurt: The Restoration of Virtue and Civic Order*, Digby Anderson ed., The Social Affairs Unit, London 1995.

²⁵ The famous Latin quotation is from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, book VII; the even more famous and influential Christian statement of and meditation on it is found in St. Paul’s *Epistle to the Romans*, ch. 7. This citation of the phrase is found in A. Huxley, *Science, Liberty, and Peace*, Chatto & Windus, London 1946, p. 12.

²⁶ See A. Huxley, *Science, Liberty, and Peace*, p. 20.

ing-buttery”, and of uncritical “technophilia”²⁷. Possessed of a brilliant, restless, capacious, wide-ranging sensibility, he “tried to keep the mind open to the world and to that which transcends the world”²⁸. Unlike many modern artists and scientists – and educational theorists – he resisted “the substitution of aesthetic and intellectual values for moral values” and was suspicious of intellectuals: “the intellectually gifted are notorious for the ruthless way in which they cultivate their gifts”²⁹. In an era when it was extremely unfashionable to do so, he insisted on the irreducible importance of religion in life: a “totally unmystical world” – the world promoted by the French “enlightenment” and its numerous derivative streams of ideology and action – “a totally unmystical world would be a world totally blind and insane”, he wrote in a book also pointing out the dangers of religious superstition, obscurantism, and fanaticism; yet from the ‘Enlightenment’ onwards, he wrote, “the sources of mystical knowledge have been steadily diminishing in number all over the planet. We are dangerously far advanced into the darkness”³⁰.

For all of its scientific allusiveness, futuristic circumstances, and modernistic stylistic devices, Huxley’s *Brave New World* is a work that promotes a profoundly traditional sensibility and educational vision. As opposed to the appalling, blatant corruptions of public language in this dystopia, the passages from Shakespeare stand in the work for the judicious, ‘earnestly’ sincere, personal language of the private individual, of each human person who tries to educate himself and others through what Socrates called ‘speech’. The careful, judicious, non-reductive language that the book proposes as antiseptic and tonic is not the exclusive possession of the artist, the aesthete, or the scientist, but the living quality, the very measure, of the continuing educational project we call – and rightly – civilization. What “makes human beings ‘human’”, writes the contemporary German philosopher Gadamer, “is their ‘linguisticity’”³¹.

Though Huxley was a ‘dark angel’, morally and even epistemologically, a high and life-long aspiration is permanently achieved in *Brave New World*. As a young teacher he had written: “I never really feel I am performing a wholly moral action, except when I am writing”. As a mature adult he wrote: “The craving for righteousness seems to be a human characteristic just as fundamental as the craving for explanation”³².

²⁷ See, e.g., *Ends and Means*, pp. 266-278. See also M.D. Aeschliman, *Modernity*, in *The C.S. Lewis Readers’ Encyclopedia*, J.D. Schultz – J.G. West ed., Zondervan, Grand Rapids 1998, p. 282-283, and Id., *Science and Scientism*, in *American Conservatism: An Encyclopedia*, B. Frohnen et al. ed., ISI Books, Wilmington 2006, pp. 771-775.

²⁸ A. Huxley, 1937, quoted in S. Bedford, *Aldous Huxley*, p. 352.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 306 and 311.

³⁰ A. Huxley, *Grey Eminence*, Chatto & Windus, London 1941, p. 82; quoted in S. Bedford, *Aldous Huxley*, p. 440.

³¹ L.E. Hahn ed., *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, Open Court, LaSalle, IL 1997, p. 360.

³² The first comment is quoted in S. Bedford, *Aldous Huxley*, p. 96; the second is in *Ends and Means*, p. 281.



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