

Huxley's Disturbing Prophecy

A decade and half after the publication of *Brave New World* (1931), [Aldous Huxley](#) penned a [foreword](#) to his magnum opus that has attracted relatively little attention.

Written shortly after the conclusion of the Second World War, the article is fascinating in both its frenetic pace and bold conclusions, some of which appear prescient, others absurd.

After opining on what he perceived as the weaknesses in [Brave New World](#), Huxley went on to discuss the natural societal confusion that accompanies periods of social upheaval and rapid technological advancement, and touched on the widespread centralization and expansion of government that followed World War II.

He then matter-of-factly laid out a somewhat dire and jarring prediction:

"It's probable that all the world's governments will be more or less completely totalitarian even before the harnessing of atomic energy; that they will be totalitarian during and after the harnessing seems almost certain. Only a large-scale popular movement toward decentralization and self-help can arrest the present tendency toward statism. At present there is no sign that such a movement will take place."

Now, it's important to note that Huxley quickly adds that he did not expect the new totalitarianism to resemble the old.

The artificial famines, firing squads, and mass imprisonments were "demonstrably inefficient"; an efficient totalitarian state would control "a population of slaves who do not have to be coerced, because they [love their servitude](#)."

That would be the Manhattan Project of the future, he believed, and it would first require economic security, for,

“without economic security, the love of servitude cannot possibly come into existence.”

Huxley presumed that economic security would be achieved rather easily. The more difficult work of inculcating a love of servitude would involve a more personal revolution, one involving “human minds and bodies.”

The four steps?

1. Improved technique of suggestion, including [“infant conditioning.”](#)
2. A more robust understanding of human differences.
3. A substitute for alcohol and the narcotics of his day (“something at one less harmful and more pleasure-giving”).
4. A foolproof system of eugenics.

He glumly [concluded](#) that the horror of *Brave New World* “may be upon us in a single century.”

Where to begin? I confess that in parts of the essay Huxley sounds a bit like a prepper who has drank too much cough syrup. But I also found it refreshing to read an intellectual of Huxley’s stature point out that in humanity’s steady march of progress, humans may arrive at their Utopia only to discover it’s a nightmare.

It also raises the question: Are we beginning to witness the “large-scale popular movement toward decentralization and self-help” that Huxley identified as the prescription to totalitarianism?

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