

# Ideology and Anti-Utopia

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*A recent film adaptation of Aldous Huxley's novel, Brave New World, makes a number of seemingly minor changes in the novel's characters, setting, and plot. Together, however, these changes transform the novel's theme into its polar opposite. As a result, the dystopian novel is transmuted into an anti-utopian film. After examining these changes in detail, I analyze the contrasting world views that lie behind the two texts and argue that they are based upon opposing views of human nature and society. I then reflect on the meaning of this transformation, arguing that it reflects a fundamental transformation in our society, one which undermines the possibility of using political action to attain social justice. Moreover, it is just this transformation which Huxley, in writing Brave New World, had hoped to warn us against.*

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When a novel is transformed into a film many changes are often made, at the very least because films cannot contain as much information as novels, a great deal must be cut from a novel to make it into a film. Thus, characters disappear, as do “unnecessary” dialogue, scenes, and subplots. Sometimes, however, changes are so extensive that they cannot be explained by reference to the technical restrictions imposed by the new media. Instead, they must be understood as arising from other factors. When the theme of a well-known novel is completely – albeit unconsciously – contradicted by the theme of a film seeking to update and popularize it, this may indicate an ideological shift in popular culture. In these cases, it is possible to use the two texts in question to reveal and chart the course of that possibly subconscious change. I believe that such a transformation can be discovered through a comparison of Aldous Huxley's novel, *Brave New World* (1967) and the recent film of the same name by Joyce, Liberman, and

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Williams (1998). In this article, I will use a comparison of the book and the film as evidence to argue that there has been a profound change in popular views concerning the possibility of utopia. After enumerating many of the differences between the two texts, I will argue that these differences can only be understood as arising out of two radically different worldviews. Interestingly, the differences between the two worldviews prove the validity of the first.

### **Evidence**

The film does retain a great deal from the novel: its action is still set in the future, during the time in which a World State, run by a small group of World Controllers, uses advanced biological and psychological technologies to insure its own stability and the continued – if superficial – happiness of its citizens; the biologically and educationally grounded class structure is unchanged from book to film; in both texts, because new citizens must be programmed so as to fit tightly into rigidly defined social roles, childbirth and parenthood are condemned as “obscene,” while marriage has been abolished and replaced by an officially encouraged promiscuity; in both the film and the novel, “hypnopaedia” is shown as being used to insure that individual judgments correspond to social requirements; and, in both media, art, religion, philosophy, and science have either been completely abolished or changed almost beyond recognition. Moreover, the plot of the film, at least at first, resembles the plot of the novel.

As in the book, Bernard Marx and Lenina Crowne travel to a “Reservation” where they meet John Cooper, “the Savage,” and bring both him and his mother, Linda, back to civilization. Although at first, he finds this new world to be both exciting and interesting, he becomes increasingly dissatisfied with it, until, after the death of his mother, he attempts to prevent some Deltas from drawing their rations of soma and is brought before the World Controller, Mustapha Mond, for judgment. However, instead of punishing him, Mond engages him in a conversation in which the background principles of the World State are revealed, after which he is released back into society. Finally, in an attempt to leave civilization, John moves to an abandoned microwave relay tower, where he meets his death.

Despite these similarities, however, the two works are strikingly different. Many of the changes seem at first to be insignificant; for example, a long scene in the middle of the book, depicting the “Solidarity Service” in which a religious ceremony turns into an orgy, has been dropped entirely from the film. It soon becomes clear, however, that these changes are not random. For example, not only is the Arch Community Songster missing from the film, but it becomes clear as the film progresses that all references to “Our Ford” or “Our Freud” have been dropped. In fact, virtually all references to religion have been dropped from the film. This is not an insignificant development, however, for it is central to Huxley’s theme that the institutions of the World State, such as its religious institutions, are seen to be the natural outgrowth of institutions in contemporary society. However, with only a few exceptions, this technique, in which contemporary institutions are projected into the World State, is not present in the film. Indeed, most scenes showing a direct connection between the institutions of our society

and those of the World State have been removed. As a result, the idea that the World State has developed out of specific identifiable tendencies present in our society is virtually absent from the film.

Other institutional differences are more striking. In particular, the World State shown in the film differed in a number of ways from the one described in the book. First, Huxley portrayed the World State as being both stable and efficient and its citizens as being reasonably competent and professional, and, above all, loyal. However, in the film, the World State is depicted as inefficient and failing and its citizens are portrayed as corrupt. The corruption is most clearly seen in the actions of the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning. In the book, the Director is something of a victim of the combined power of circumstances and the particular moral code of the World State. He is brought down by the fact that he fathered a child, John, but in many ways, this was not his fault. John was born to a woman, Linda, who accompanied the Director on a trip to the Reservation, who was "lost" in an accident, and who became pregnant probably as a result of failing to complete her "Malthusian Drills." The future Director did what he could to help find Linda, remained ignorant of the birth of his son until confronted with John many years later, and did not try to cover up the incident. Finally, when these events are made public, he immediately resigns his position. In the film, however, he fathers John, not with a traveling companion but with a native girl whom he seduces and then abandons when he discovers that she is pregnant. Moreover, after Bernard and Lenina bring John and Linda back to civilization, he attempts to cover up his actions by using his position to delete crucial official computer records of that period, and later to secretly condition a worker to kill Barnard when Barnard comes dangerously close to discovering the truth about the Director's past. Finally, he kills the only witness to his original indiscretions, by secretly visiting Linda at the hospital and encouraging her to take what he knows to be a lethal dose of soma.

Second, while Huxley's World State is the model of efficiency, the World State of the film is portrayed as extremely inefficient, perhaps dangerously so. One aspect of this can be found in the relative efficiency of the technologies of the two World States. To take a minor example, while in the book, Henry Foster is scandalized that a transoceanic rocket is seven minutes late, in the film the helicopter taking Bernard and Linda to the Reservation actually crashes, and this is not remarked upon as being particularly abnormal. More important, unlike in the book, the film depicts what seem to be severe problems with the conditioning process, which is repeatedly said to be "failing." Thus, for example, in one of the film's first scenes, Lenina has to sedate a struggling child who is resisting sleep teaching. In another early scene, studies are cited showing that "anxiety and work disorders are up for the third quarter running and self-esteem and contentment are down." This problem is more graphically revealed in a scene showing the failure of a Delta assembly line worker's conditioning. This worker becomes so disoriented that he steps away from his production line (thereby stopping it completely) and, producing a mouse from inside his overalls, proceeds to pet it while alarm bells sound. The response is revealing: observing the problem his forewoman looks on in disgust and says, "Not another one!" It is this worker whom the Director, using a substitute reconditioning program, attempts to turn into an assassin in order

to kill Bernard. Significantly, when that attack fails, Bernard is able to dial the Emergency Reconditioning number from memory.

In contrast to the World State in the film, Huxley's government is a model of efficiency precisely because its conditioning program is so effective. The film omits several minor but significant scenes that demonstrate the State's strength and resilience. At first, each of these scenes seems to indicate that the natural world can break into the conditioning imposed by the state. For example, Henry Foster becomes dangerously introspective after the flight path of his helicopter is disturbed by some cremation gases rising from a phosphorus recovery facility; an "Epsilon-Minus Semi-Moron" elevator operator is depicted as taking simple pleasure in the natural light of the Sun that can be seen from the rooftop stop of his machine; and Lenina is shown as becoming hysterical at the sight of a storm on the ocean. But in each case, the intrusion is brief and is immediately swept aside by the conditioning the individual had received. In the film, on the other hand, the conditioning often fails to keep people in line. For example, Lenina is moved – even transformed – by the sight of John's concern for his dying mother. More ominously, in the film's last scene, a child asleep in the hatchery wakes up and sleepily stuffs cotton into his ears to shut out the hypnopaedic tapes with their conditioning messages.

Interestingly the social structure of the "Savage Reservation" differs between the novel and the film. Indeed, the "Reservation" (note the name change) in the film is not inhabited by Huxley's "savages" at all; that is, they are not Native Americans attempting to maintain the remnants of a traditional way of life. Instead, in the film, the Reservation is populated by representatives of some violent, post-apocalypse, militia America, who live in mobile homes, drive minivans, hang out in the parking lots of decaying malls, and drink Southern Comfort. At one point, the Reservation is described as being "filled by factions that refused to join the World State, when it was originally formed." As recent outcasts from the World State, however, these people seemingly lack the significant and particularizing religious beliefs, rituals, and understandings that played such a large role in Huxley's depiction of the savage's culture. Instead, they are trapped in their own equally-dysfunctional culture.

In addition to these changes in the setting, there are a number of changes in the main characters. Again some of these changes are a result of the change in media. For example, the Bernard Marx of the film is a composite made up of the positive characteristics of three different characters: Bernard, Henry Foster, and Helmholtz Watson. The film's Bernard has the intelligence and job of Helmholtz, the good looks and sex appeal of Henry, and the travel itinerary of Bernard. However, this Bernard is able to see what no character in the book fully realized, namely that "the world is built on a lie, and when you see that, the whole thing crumbles." The lie, he goes on to say, is that "unhappiness can be eliminated" through intelligent social organization. Despite this realization, however, Bernard accepts the position as the new Director of Conditioning when it comes open as a result of the arrest of the old Director. This seems to indicate that Bernard, too, is about to be corrupted. He is saved, however, by Lenina who comes to his office after he has assumed his new position, to tell him not only that she has become pregnant with his child (having forgotten her Malthusian Drill the night the

John died) but also that she also has no intention of having an abortion. Although at first he is scandalized by this repetition of the first Director's crime, inspired by his memory of John he comes to realize that he truly loves Lenina. This, together with his earlier realization that the World State is corrupt and doomed to failure, leads him to forge some travel documents and join Lenina and his child on a beautiful deserted beach somewhere beyond the authority of the World State.

Obviously, the character of Lenina has also been changed. Whereas, in the book, she was attracted to the Savage, this did not lead to any major changes in her character. Although in the book, she is last seen looking at John while pressing her hands to her heart – seemingly a sign that she has fallen in love with John – there are many reasons to doubt that this expression is genuine or that she is even capable of such an emotion. In the film, however, she clearly has been transformed by her contact with John. Not only does she choose to leave the World State in order to give birth to Bernard's child but also before she leaves, she attempts to undermine the State. At one point she rejects soma in order to experience her emotions directly. Moreover, she also tries to teach her class (she is a schoolteacher in the film, not a bio-technician) about love.

The most interesting characterological changes occur in the film's portrayal of the Savage. In the book, John appears as a marginalized and ineffective member of the native community. He is not allowed to participate in religious ceremonies and seems often to be the victim of bullies. In the film, however, he appears to be much more forceful. More important, because the film's Reservation does not contain the remnants of another independent culture, John cannot act as a representative of that culture. Although he is shown bearing "initiation scars" (to what remains unclear), he never makes reference to any of the practices or beliefs of this other culture. In fact, throughout the film, he is presented as a cultural outsider, as a feral man who has been raised to be independent of any culture. This outsider status even extends to his knowledge of Shakespeare. Although he has read and even memorized a number of Shakespeare's plays, his familiarity with Shakespeare does not seem to have had any influence on the development of his character, as it did in the book. His knowledge of Shakespeare makes him an odd and colorful figure but it does not give him any depth, nor does it connect him to any deeper culture. More importantly, while the Savage of the book is completely unable to enter into a healthy relationship with a woman, in the film John is merely unwilling to enter into the kind of casual sexual relationships demanded by civilized women. Moreover, in the film, John seems to truly love his mother. Finally, because in the film he is free of the sexual hang-ups that torture him throughout the book, his flight from civilization to his refuge at the relay tower is not also a flight from himself. As a result, he does not whip himself for having impure sexual thoughts, does not attack Lenina when she arrives at the tower, does not participate in an orgy brought about by that attack, and does not commit suicide when he realizes that he cannot escape his impure sexuality. Instead, in the film, John seems happy at the tower until he is disturbed by paparazzi and his death comes about by accident when he trips and falls off a wall in his attempt to flee the crowds drawn by press reports to his hiding place. Thus, where the book's Savage dies at his own hands as a result of internal conflicts, the film's John dies at the hands of society, its innocent victim.

## Analysis

These changes are so extensive and systematic that they cannot be properly understood to be the random, essentially neutral, effects brought about by the change in media. Instead, they reflect a certain view of the world that differs in a number of ways from Huxley's. It is in these differences that we can find the cultural meaning of the film. I believe that these differences can be best discussed in terms of two contrasts. First, the film and the book embody two different attitudes: while the film presents an essentially optimistic view of the human condition, the book is thoroughly pessimistic. Second, while the film is constructed around a central dichotomy drawn between nature and culture, the book is constructed around a very different dichotomy drawn between high and low culture.

The most remarkable scene in the film is the penultimate scene showing Bernard and Lenina walking along a deserted beach. They are clearly happy, carefree, and in love. Their escape from the World State is represented by the absolute naturalness of that scene which contrasts in every way to the scenes set in the sterile, highly urbanized, hyper-modern World State. There is not a building in sight nor is there any sign of modern technology. Bernard and Lenina are wearing colorful, "natural" clothing unlike the black business suits or outrageous party costumes they wore back in civilization. And they are carrying their child. They are clearly free. Moreover, John, although he is killed at the end of the film, is not crushed by the society. Although he could not get away, he never loses his innocence, his internal freedom. Finally, given the problems that are said to exist in the conditioning process, it is likely that many other people might escape the World State. In the book, however, virtually everyone is trapped and defeated by the World State. Lenina remains a citizen of the World State, rejected and beaten by the Savage for reasons she can't understand. Bernard and Helmholtz are banished to the islands. Finally, John, having beaten Lenina for arousing the sexual desires that he finally acts on, commits suicide; utterly defeated, utterly unable to escape his early socialization. Thus, in the film, escape is always a real possibility – indeed, this is its central theme – while, in the book, escape is never an option – and this is its central theme.

These differing endings and themes can be explained by the fact that the characters in the two texts face different kinds of problems, and this, in turn, is the result of the fact that the authors of the two works have differing understandings of the nature of the human condition. In effect, the film understands this condition in terms of a fundamental contrast between private, intimate, naturally-caring relationships and public, rule-governed, social relationships. According to this contrast, the public realm is the domain of corruption, control, and inauthenticity while the private realm is the domain of freedom, nature, and authenticity. According to the film, intimate relationships because they are based not on rules but on trust and caring, are not only beyond society's normalizing reach but, because they represent an alternative, they can act to subvert society. This theme is played out in a number of ways.

I have already remarked on the corruption of the World State but even where corruption is not obviously present, most interactions seem to be manipulative and



superficial. The citizens of the World State seem to be totally self-interested, ready to take advantage of each other's misfortune and willing to break rules when doing so is to their advantage or the other's disadvantage. The inhabitants of the Reservation seem to share many of these characteristics. On the other hand, private intimate relationships in both societies are portrayed as being intrinsically valuable. Indeed, the only social interactions that are presented in a positive light take place within these private relationships. Thus, the interactions between John and his mother (except when she is using drugs), between Bernard and Lenina (after he has rejected society), and between John and Lenina (at Linda's deathbed), are among the only scenes in the film that allow the audience any relief from the unremittingly negative portrayals of the interpersonal relationships characteristic of the larger societies.

Second, private caring relationships are not simply shown as superior to public interaction, they are also portrayed as being potentially subversive of the larger social order. For example, John's relationship with his mother is not only portrayed as being intimate and caring but it distinguishes John from the other inhabitants of the Reservation. It also allows John to break out of his group's violent patterned-response to strangers. Moreover, it is John's demand for a caring, but not sexually intimate relationship with Lenina, that leads her to reject the norms of her society and makes possible the deepening of her relationship with Bernard. Bernard, in turn, is freed from his socially defined roles by Lenina's example and by her offer of a caring relationship. Finally, as the film hints, the failure of the Delta assembly line worker's conditioning is caused by his caring relationship to his pet mouse.

Third, the film presents intimate relationships as being wholly natural, based as they are on a natural human trait, empathy. As long as this emotional attitude is present, it seems that any relationship can become intimate. Thus, people from different societies and from all social classes can have these relationships, and it is even possible to have such a relationship with a mouse. Because intimate relationships are a matter of attitude alone, they are always possible: nothing needs to be learned and no skill needs to be mastered; all that is important is the capacity to empathize with another. If we are simply left alone, we can enter into such a relationship. This connects to the theme of escape. The film is able to portray escape from social conditioning as an ever-present possibility because the means of escape are always at hand: their only precondition is the will to enter into them, they are always possible. Therefore, escape from the public sphere only requires the will to escape and this is why conditioning is so uncertain.

Things are much different in Huxley's book. Escape from Huxley's state is virtually impossible. In part, the reason for this is that Huxley does not understand the human condition in terms of a distinction between nature and society. Indeed, nature apart from humanity plays little role in Huxley's book, and to the degree that it does, it seems to be portrayed negatively (Huxley 1967, pp. 70–75). More important, however, Huxley seems to ridicule the very idea of a "natural" unsocialized human and, more specifically, the idea of a "noble savage." Thus, for example, far from picturing the inhabitants of the Reservation as somehow more natural than the citizens of the World State, Huxley goes to some length to draw parallels between the two, comparing the snake dancing in the one to the Solidarity Service of the other, the sexual repression of

the one to the dysfunctional sexual relationships of the other, and the hierarchical structure of the one to the authoritarianism of the other. The culture of the Reservation is fully the equal of the culture of the World State and both are thoroughly bad places. Given that Huxley sees these two societies as equals, it is clear that John, despite his nickname, cannot have been intended as a representative of a more natural kind of person. Quite the opposite. In many ways he is the most civilized person in the book, with the possible exception of Mond to whom he is constantly compared. What makes John different is his familiarity with the high culture of the past, especially with the plays of Shakespeare which seem to have strongly influenced his psychological development.

Huxley's view of intimate, caring relationships is also very different from that of the film. These relationships play little if any role in the book. Moreover, to the degree that they do appear, they are usually portrayed as a source of mis-communication and suffering. For example, Bernard's attempt to develop a close relationship with Lenina seems to produce only pain, as does John's relationship with Linda. Every attempt to establish an intimate relationship in the book ends in failure. Moreover, these relationships do not fail because the parties lack the will to enter into them; instead they fail because the parties, unable to escape their early socialization, lack the emotional depths and the interpersonal skills, not to mention the psychological knowledge and the moral virtues that make a successful relationship possible. Thus, for Huxley, not only are intimate relationships not more natural than other types of relationships, they do not even represent an alternative type of relationship. Therefore, they are not subversive in any way.

Instead of understanding the human condition in terms of a personal/political dichotomy or even a nature/society dichotomy, Huxley constructs his world view in terms of a dichotomy between the kind of high culture capable of embodying and transmitting important values and the kind of low culture produce by the modern entertainment industry and described by Marcuse (1969) as completely lacking in critical and reflective intellectual content. This comes out most clearly at the end of the book, when the Savage finally confronts the World Controller. Significantly, in their conversation, Mond dismisses the idea, put forth by John, that the World State is somehow less natural than other societies. Instead of fearing nature, Mond fears something else entirely, the values articulated by religion, art, philosophy, and science. As was revealed in an earlier passage, Mond feared that these values:

Might easily decondition the more unsettled minds among the higher castes, make them lose their faith in happiness as the Sovereign Good, and take to believing, instead, that the goal was somehow beyond, somewhere outside the present human sphere; that the purpose of life was not the maintenance of well-being, but some intensification and refining of consciousness, some enlargement of knowledge. Which was, the Controller reflected, quite possibly true. But not, in the present circumstances admissible (Huxley 1967, pp. 119–120).

Clearly, what Mond fears is that people will give up on the pursuit of pleasure and instead pursue some transcendental values. Mond fears this possibility because he believes that it would be difficult to control people who have structured their lives



around such transcendent values. This passage helps clear up an ambiguity in Mond's discussion with the Savage. In that discussion, he tells the Savage that in order to achieve stability, the World State had to sacrifice "high art," (pure) science, and (serious) religion. However, the reason for this sacrifice is left unclear. At times, Mond indicates that these institutions and artifacts had to disappear because, as people were now happy, they did not feel any need for them. At other times, he argues that they disappeared because people no longer could understand them. But high culture didn't simply disappear from the World State, it was suppressed, and suppressed because it was thought to be the home of subversive transcendental values. By suppressing art, science, and religion, Mond hoped to undermine those values in order to reduce people to a condition of slavery so as to better control them for their own and for society's good.

That Huxley's worldview is based on a distinction between high and low culture – and not on one drawn between nature and culture – is key to understanding his book. In particular, it helps to explain its unrelieved pessimism. First, Huxley views high culture and its transcendent values as the highest achievement of society, one which alone justifies its existence. The destruction of this culture, therefore, would be a great evil and it is this destruction – not the loss of freedom or individualism – that Huxley finds most disturbing about the World State. Second, Huxley understands high culture to be unstable and easily-threatened. Indeed, he sees it as on the defensive in the modern world, under attack by present-day commercial society which, in Huxley's view, takes a superficial form of happiness to be the only value. Thus, in *Brave New World*, Huxley uses his technique of projective criticism to condemn modern society precisely on the grounds that, because it is so successful at promoting this kind of happiness, it is destroying high culture. *Brave New World*, therefore, should be understood as a warning against the dangers of a successful bourgeois commercial culture. Third, Huxley seems to believe that there can be no recovery from the destruction of high culture, at least in the short run. This is the case because, in Huxley's view, transcendental values are not merely intrinsically valuable, they are also instrumentally valuable tools through which to understand the human condition and by which to improve our situation. The continuing embodiment of these values in social institutions is, therefore, for Huxley a truly virtuous circle. Once the institutions of high culture are destroyed, however, the values which those institutions support will become inaccessible to us and, when that happens, it will become impossible for us to make sense of what happened to us and, thereby, to improve our current situation. Thus, in the book, because the World State has so completely destroyed not only European high culture but also the indigenous culture of Native Americans on the Reservation, the central characters—with the partial exception of the Savage (because of his access to Shakespeare)—cannot understand that there is any real problem with their lives. Even when nature or death intrude on their superficial lives, they are unable to imagine any alternatives. Incapable of envisioning large scale social changes, not to mention social revolution, they are thoroughly and completely trapped. This is why the film and the book are so different. Culture, unlike, nature, is a human creation. It is not always there, and once destroyed it may never be rebuilt. As a result,

in the book, the means needed to escape the World State are no longer at hand. The trap is complete. On the other hand, since, according to the film, intimate relationships are natural, they are an ever-present possibility. As a result, in the film, the means needed to escape the World State are always at hand. The trap can never be complete closed.

## Reflections

The differences between these two texts reflect a larger change in popular culture concerning the idea of a utopia. According to J. C. Davis (1981), utopias like other forms of ideal societies try to solve “the collective problem [central to all societies of] the reconciliation of limited satisfactions and unlimited human desires within a social context.” Unlike other types of ideal societies, however, which try to *dissolve* this problem by idealizing either nature (as in the English peasant myth of the “Land of Cockayne”) or humanity (as in the various conceptions of “perfect moral commonwealths”) or both (as in the story of “Arcadia”), utopias attempt to *solve* this problem within the parameters set by nature: “The utopian’s method is not to wish away the disharmony implicit within the collective problem, as the other ideal-society types do, but to organize society and its institutions in such a way as to contain the problem’s [pernicious] effects ... [e.g.,] crime, instability, poverty, rioting, war, exploitation, and vice” (Davis 1981, pp. 36-38). More broadly, utopias seek to solve what are thought to be central social problems through various fundamental and comprehensive restructurings of society’s central institutions.

It has been widely argued that utopia is no longer relevant in the modern world (Kumar (1987, p. 380). Although a number of reasons have been cited for this decline of the utopian imagination, Judith Shklar has argued convincingly that the real cause of the death of utopia can be found in the rise of what she terms the “romanticism of defeat.” Shklar identifies this form of romanticism with a particular attitude; namely, the attitude of “... the ‘alienated soul’ that has lost all faith in the beliefs of the past, having been disillusioned by skepticism, but [that is also] unable to find a new home for its spiritual longing in the present or future. Hopelessly tossed back and forth between memory and yearning, it can neither accept the present nor face the new world” (Shklar 1957, p.15). Shklar argues that while romanticism began as a revolt against the simple optimism of the philosophers of the Enlightenment and a defense of such morally significant values as individuality, creativity, and community, today this revolt has lost its critical force:

While early romantics showed considerable combative vigor, and really believed that the spirit of poetry might yet conquer the world of prose, the contemporary romantic cherishes no such hope – indeed, no hope of any sort. Instead of dramatic energy there is now only a feeling of futility. Romanticism now expresses itself in a denial of the very possibility of knowing – much less controlling – history, nature, or society.... The great tragedy of the present age is that history, society, and politics, for all their insignificance to our real self, press upon us unavoidably. The outer world is crushing the unique individual. Society is depriving us of our selfhood.... This is the romanticism of defeat, the ultimate stage of alienation.... Romanticism began by denying the facile optimism of the men of reason, but

under the stress of the social enormities of the present age it has come to reject the entire modern world, and implicitly the very possibility of social knowledge and amelioration. (Shklar, 1957, pp. 17–18).

If the romanticism of defeat has come to dominate the modern worldview, then effective political action of the sort envisioned by utopian has become inconceivable. If society is necessarily totalitarian, then there can be no hope for positive social change and no purpose to social action. On this romantic view, our only hope must lie outside of society and this hope can be realized only if we somehow depart from society and return to nature. Since this romantic rejection of social reform and the return to nature is anathema to utopianism, to the degree that this form of romanticism dominates popular political thought, utopianism will be impossible.

The romanticism of defeat not only makes utopianism impossible, it makes dystopianism impossible as well. This is the case because, despite their apparent opposition, utopianism and dystopianism are closely related modes of political engagement. Utopian thought attempts to spur political action by envisioning a society that makes political salvation possible. This society, on the utopian view, is not only different from our own but it is unlikely that it will develop out of it without deliberate concerted political effort. Utopianism, therefore, paints its detailed picture of this perfectly good society in the hope that this vision will both cause us to undertake such an effort by arousing our desire, and guide our actions to the proper end. Dystopian thought also attempts to spur political action but it does this by envisioning a society which makes our salvation all but impossible. While this society, too, is different from our own, on the dystopian view, it is the logical outcome of ongoing processes in our society. Indeed, it is an assumption of the dystopian view that this evolution can be prevented only by deliberate concerted effort. Dystopianism, therefore, paints its detailed picture of this perfectly evil society in the hope that this political vision will both allow us to understand the specific evils of our society and, by arousing our disgust, cause us to make the changes that are needed to prevent the dystopian vision from being realized. Utopianism and dystopianism are complementary modes of political engagement, differing only in that while the former works by attraction, the latter works by repulsion. Because utopianism and dystopianism are mirror images of each other, they must share a similar presupposition such as the judgment that the current society is relatively imperfect and the belief that salvation can be attained through political action. Because it rejects these preconditions, the romanticism of defeat is incompatible with both utopianism and dystopianism; it is an essentially anti-utopian view and, to the degree that it comes to dominate a culture, both types of utopian thinking must disappear.

If, as Shklar argues, the romanticism of defeat has come to dominate modern popular political thought, it would be impossible today to translate Huxley's novel directly into a film. Huxley's book is a thoroughly dystopian work: he takes the World State to be an evil society, much worse than our own; he writes his book as a warning against current trends in our society that are moving us toward that state; and he wants us to understand that this future society is about as bad as a society can get, not only because it makes the salvation of its citizens impossible, but because it allows no

possibility of change once it is in place. Given the contemporary death of all forms of utopianism at the hands of the romanticism of defeat, the cinematic version of Huxley's book must be radically transformed as, indeed, it was. In the film, the World State is not worse than our own society; instead, it is only as bad as the life on the Reservation which, in turn, is similar to life in contemporary society. Moreover, the film is not warning us about what might happen if current trends in our society continue; instead, it addresses itself to what it takes to be an inescapable social reality. Finally, the World State does not extinguish all hope because it is always possible to escape from it by entering into a caring relationship. The film perfectly embodies Shklar's romanticism of defeat and is, therefore, fundamental anti-utopian. Its theme is not that we must be on guard because society can get worse, it is that all societies are bad, that our salvation is to be found outside society, and that we must, therefore, avoid becoming entangled either in social action or in utopian/dystopian patterns of thought.

Karl Mannheim famously contrasted ideology with utopia on the basis of their contrasting attitudes toward existing society. According to Mannheim, visions of alternative societies are "'utopian' if they inspire collective activity which aims to change [existing social] reality to conform with [the vision's] goals, which transcend [that] reality." On the other hand, vision of alternative social realities are "'ideological' if they serve the purpose of glossing over or stabilizing the existing social reality" (Mannheim 1935, p. 200). Thus, in Mannheim's view, while utopianism is by definition a politically radical attitude, ideology is essentially conservative. If dystopianism is an alternative form of utopianism and anti-utopianism the opposite of both, then anti-utopianism should be ideological in Mannheim's sense. Mannheim's conceptual scheme implies that, when *Brave New World* was transformed from a dystopian novel to an anti-utopian film, it was transformed from a politically radical, dystopian work into a politically conservative, ideological work. How did this happen?

In his study of turn-of-the-century antimodernism, Jackson Lears argued that romanticism, once it attained its current hegemonic status, provided the intellectual basis for both the dominant political institutions of modern society and the movements that sought to overthrow them. This common root not only rendered those movements impotent, but perversely transformed them in such a way that they actually provided support for the institutions they opposed, thereby insuring that they remain unchanged:

... antimodernism had a dual significance: it promoted accommodation to new modes of cultural hegemony while it preserved an eloquent edge of protest.... [In doing so, it] eased the transition from classical to corporate liberalism, and from a Protestant to a therapeutic world view.... Lacking firm religious or ethical commitments, antimodern dissenters became immersed in endless self-absorption.... [Their quest] for authenticity reinforced the dominance of bureaucratic corporate authority. By undermining larger spiritual or ethical frameworks, the preoccupation with [inner] experience devalued political action and focused discontent on exclusively personal issues. In part a reaction against the threat to autonomy posed by emerging bureaucratic institutions, the quest for authenticity [had the effect of] accommodating Americans to the new bureaucratic regime (Lears 1981, pp. 301–302).

Lears argues that the crucial move – the one that transformed romantic antimodernism from a protest movement into a therapeutic movement that ultimately promoted the accommodation of romantics to the institutions they once protested – is the turn away from social criticism toward the development of an authentic inner life. He suggests that this process can be seen at work in a number of periods of U. S. history:

The lack of firm commitments to wider values has doomed much of the antimodern legacy to continued circularity and accommodation. [Romantic] yearnings for [authenticity and] intense experience have continually resurfaced during the twentieth century. [But as] self-fulfillment and immediate gratification have become commodities on the mass market, calls for personal liberation have begun to ring hollow.... The avant-garde has lost its critical edge and has ended by caricaturing the culture it set out to criticize. Yet each generation of cultural radicals seems doomed to repeat the mistakes of its predecessors. Throughout the twentieth century, Americans have heard the same attacks on “repression” as the central problem of their society, the same demands for “personal growth” as a remedy for all psychic and cultural ills.... This failure of imagination occurred most recently among some of the cultural radicals of the 1960s, whose “revolution” was rapidly transformed into a consumer bonanza of stereos, designer jeans, and sex aids (Lears 1981, p. 306).

Romanticism, therefore, is doomed to defeat because it is essentially ideological in Mannheim’s sense. Thus, when under the influence of modern romanticism, *Brave New World* was transformed from a dystopian novel into an anti-utopian film, it became its opposite: instead of being a roadmap for radical social change, it became an ideological prop for the status quo. Ironically, in the process, this transformation demonstrates the value of the original text, as the film is an example of what the book warns against. The transformation of the book into a popular film itself embodies the decline of culture Huxley feared. No longer able to articulate the values that Huxley thought were the necessary means to our salvation and unaware of this loss, the film calls us to reject all culture in the name of self and nature, unaware that history teaches us that this type of Romantic protest will only confirm the status quo. Seen in this light, the film illustrates that the trap Huxley feared has almost completely closed around us: so insidious is this trap that it can transform a warning into a snare. In transforming Huxley’s dystopian novel into an anti-utopian film, its authors have furthered the romantic reduction of the political to the personal and, thereby, helped insure the stability of the commercial culture which Huxley had hoped to criticize by making their film. In doing so, they have illustrated the value – and our need – of utopian practice and a utopian alternative, for without utopian and dystopian visions the cause of social justice is lost.

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