

## Pain versus Pleasure

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Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* takes place in a futuristic society in which people stop valuing religion and glorify sexuality. People don't live the natural life because they are genetically engineered and birthed in factories. They grow up with all the comfort in the world and a drug called soma which gives them extreme euphoria (pleasure) and keeps the whole society in peace and harmony. Huxley argues that experiencing pain vs pleasure affects people's freedom and agency. Lenina and Bernard grow up only experiencing pleasure which spoils them with euphoria and takes away their sense of agency. John the Savage grows up experiencing only pain, which gives him a sense of agency but ironically leads to him committing suicide. Mustapha Mond grows up experiencing pleasure and knows about pain, which gives him immense agency he uses to control the society.

Lenina and Bernard represent the future. Lenina is the idealistic "Civilized Person", someone who takes soma has sex for pleasure rather than recreation and is ok with being controlled. Bernard differs a little bit, he's not ok being controlled by the soma and voices his resentment towards their lack of agency, but remains actionless. His inability to do anything about his lack of agency proves how well the society is structured to hold peace and suppress agency. Bernard is the most rebellious character born in the "Civilized World", but does nothing, showing how mentally powerless the people have become. Lenina is happy with her life, unlike Bernard. She is so engulfed in pleasure (ex: luxury, comfort, sex) that she has no sense of agency. This different mindset between Bernard and Lenina is highlighted when Bernard expresses his discomfort for Orgy-Porgies and Huxley states "Odd, odd, odd, was Lenina's

verdict on Bernard Marx” (87). Huxley repeats “odd” three times to show how differently Bernard is viewed based on his stance on agency and the lack of conjunctions(asyndeton) adds more emphasis on Bernard’s oddness, making it more dramatic from Lenina’s perspective. Orgy-Porgies represent the peaceful nature of the society, the people grow up without any shame and are taught to be more sexual, so group sex parties for them is a celebration for peace and harmony. Bernard finds the Orgy-Porgies pointless, he has “no trace of agitation or excitement” (85). and is “unsatisfied” with the Orgy-Porgies compared to Lenina’s “expression of rapture”. Which is interpreted as Bernard finding pleasure pointless in comparison to Lenina’s constant hunger for pleasure. Lenina finds Bernard really odd for not valuing pleasure. Lenina only has experienced pleasure and no pain, so anything else but pleasure for her is odd. This shows how much the lack of pain and the abundance of pleasure has spoiled the society into losing their agency. Orgy-Porgies, through the use of soma, have mentally engineered the people to seek constant pleasure. This takes away agency from the people and has them constantly seeking pleasure. The society does not have agency, the soma does. Bernard, the only one to choose agency over pleasure, is found to be “Odd, odd, odd”, which means the society thinks agency is odd. The society doesn't know what agency, so they compensate for it with pleasure.

The reliance on pleasure overshadowing agency is shown through Lenina’s addiction to soma. While on the reservation, Lenina runs out of soma. Huxley states, “Lenina was left to face the horrors of Malpais unaided” (111). Huxley exaggerates from Lenina’s perspective that without soma, she has to “face the horrors of Malpais.” Since Malpais represents the past, it has more pain than pleasure, the opposite of civilized life. Lenina, only having experienced pleasure her whole life, gets scared by witnessing pain. “The horrors of Malpais” from Lenina’s

perspective, include all pains such as childbirth and self-harm religious practices which are new and different to Lenina. Without soma, Lenina can't handle the pain of Malpais. She gets overwhelmed. Her mind is programmed by the soma to only seek pleasure, so when a situation arises that takes her out of her comfort zone, she has to face “the horrors” (pain) of life. The consumption of soma forces people to give up their agency. Since soma is forced on them all their life, they can never gain any agency. It's an addiction they can't get away from, the brain always seeks euphoria (dopamine) and the people only get the euphoria from the soma. Because of soma, their lack of agency isn't a problem. The lack of agency is compensated with the constant euphoria. The use of soma provides so much euphoria and is forced on the people that their sense of agency is lost and they don't even notice it. While listening to drums in Malpais, Huxley states, “Lenina liked the drums. Shutting her eyes she abandoned herself to their soft repeated thunder... It reminded her reassuringly of the synthetic noise made at Solidarity Services and Ford's Day celebrations. ‘Orgy-porgy’ she whispered to herself” (113). Lenina, without her soma, has to put up with all the pain of Malpais. She gets euphoria from listening to the drums, which is highlighted by the words “abandoned” and “synthetic”. She is surrounded by pain and when she receives some pleasure her mind thinks of soma. She compares the drums to the “synthetic” pleasure given by soma, reminding her of Orgy-Porgies. Whenever she receives a little bit of euphoria, she has to “abandon” herself to it, which is giving up agency. This reveals how much soma has affected Lenina's life. Lenina is clueless about her lack of agency and is forced to abandon herself in euphoria whenever she encounters it, which makes her want soma (euphoria) even more. Since Lenina represents the idealistic civilized person, this means the rest of the society also abandons themselves for euphoria. The soma has them seeking only constant

euphoria, which takes away their sense of agency forever. Unlike John who doesn't seek constant euphoria and has a sense of agency due to experience with pain.

John grows up only experiencing pain: he witnesses his mom suffer, he gets ridiculed for having a lighter complexion and lives in a forest to discover himself. The reservation he lives on is the total opposite of the civilized society. The people are called savages and have dirty lifestyles compared to the cleanliness of civilized society. Despite this lack of luxury, John still finds pleasure by reading Shakespeare and devoting himself to their religion. His devotion to religion gives him a peaceful state of mind. This devotion to religion is shown when he voices his desire to be a religious sacrifice. ““Why wouldn’t they let me be the sacrifice?... They could have had twice as much blood from me. The multitudinous seas incarnadine”” (116-117). John quotes Shakespeare’s Macbeth while exaggerating his devotion to religion. Macbeth cannot cleanse the blood from his hand. John’s devotion to religion is so deep that his blood sacrifice would make the “seas incarnadine” like Macbeth. Even though he suffers so much pain from his devotion to religion, he gets a peaceful state of mind afterward assuming he has done something good for god. This peaceful state of mind is a way John gets agency the civilized people (Bernard and Lenina) don't have. The devotion to his religion means he looks towards the afterlife, which he brings up with Mustapha Mond during their clash of ideals. “It is natural to believe in God when you’re alone--quite alone, in the night, thinking about death” (235). The dash in the sentence combines the ending part of the sentence (“natural to believe in God”) as a definition to the beginning part (“Natural to believe in God”). John compares “natural to believe in God” with “thinking about death”. The fear of the afterlife leads to John’s belief in God. John wants to follow God and not break any rules or commit sin because he is going to get into

heaven. The fear of the afterlife is John's fear of God. "Lying in bed, he would think of Heaven"(128). shows his belief in heaven. The ability to get into heaven for John is his agency because it's in his control. So, when John exaggerated his devotion to his religion by stating he would suffer more pain for god(116-117), he was getting more agency by choosing to devote himself to god. John's suffering and devotion to religion give him a sense of agency that the civilized people lack. With this sense of agency, John remains in peace. John's peace is due to his agency, unlike the civilized society that finds peace in pleasure.

Pleasure holds no value because for him it's John, and when Lenina tries to introduce him to pleasure, he calls her an "Impudent Strumpet" (194). He quotes Shakespeare to voice his hatred for Lenina's value in pleasure. He loves Shakespeare's writing and finds it "pure" due to the complexity of it and how it makes him mentally pure by setting him apart from others. So when he encounters something impure like Lenina's desire for sex, he voices his resentment in Shakespeare's writing. His devotion to religion(getting into heaven) requires purity, so he tries to replace the impurity(sex) with purity which is Shakespeare. For John, making sure he remains pure is a way of getting more agency. If he stays pure by replacing the impurity with Shakespeare, from his perspective, he is going to heaven and doing the right thing. He is staying pure with his control and with something he loves (Shakespeare), which gives him a sense of agency. So, when he lashes out at Lenina with insults, it's John's way of expressing the purity and agency instilled within him from his religion. If he gives in to the impurity, his agency is gone and from his perspective his life becomes pointless. John later on in the story shows how pointless his life has become because of the sins he commits. After John kills Lenina and comes back to realization, Huxley states "Just under the crown of the arch dangled a pair of feet" (235).

After John realizes that his act was impure and he was no longer going to heaven, he had no sense of living. In matters of moments, someone who stayed pure their whole life becomes impure in his own eyes. The act of John killing himself is ironic, he gets away from his impurity (killing Lenina) by killing himself, which is also impure from the religious perspective. John while approaching death (his “fear”) becomes what allowed him to get agency. He knows his lack of agency is gone because he is impure, so his death could be interpreted as him not wanting to live knowing his agency is gone. What's even more ironic is that John believed pain was the only way of getting into heaven. John only experiences pain and no pleasure, but he doesn't make it to heaven. His pain-driven agency leads to more pain and no agency. Experiencing pain gives John a sense of agency which eventually falls, on the other hand, Mustapha Mond's knowledge of pain gives him the immense knowledge to run the society.

Mustapha Mond is one of the few men who run the world. Mond knows the rest of the society is guarded against, he is exposed to pain and pleasure. He knows about the “seven-year war” and all the pain the society suffered, so he tries his best to expose the society to only pleasure, and take away their agency. “What's the point of truth or beauty or knowledge when the anthrax bombs are popping all around you? (228).” This rhetorical question by Mond challenges John's desire for agency. Truth, beauty, and knowledge are ways of getting agency for John. He finds truth and beauty in Shakespeare and gains knowledge from it. Mond challenges John that these values(truth, beauty, and knowledge) don't matter when society is in chaos and pain(anthrax bombs). The peace achieved by the current society overshadows the loss of truth, beauty, and knowledge for Mond; which is the opposite for John, his values(religion) overshadow his pain(religious blood sacrifice). Instead of finding value in truth, beauty, and

knowledge, he changes the values of society to be focused on pleasure. For there to be an only pleasure, pain has to be gone. Agency includes pain(as shown with John), so by taking away the society's agency, they're only left with pleasure(as shown with Lenina). By taking the society's agency away, Mond himself is in total control(the most agency). He disguises his control of the society as world peace, he states to John, "Universal happiness keeps the wheels steadily turning; truth and beauty can't (228)." Universal happiness allows for Mond to be in control. Universal happiness(pleasure and peace) is due to the society's lack of agency. By stating that peace keeps "the wheels steadily turning", he is indirectly stating he is in control and making the wheels turn, not "truth and beauty"(values of agency). Without Mond and his predecessors, there would be no Universal happiness. Universal happiness was a way for the society to avoid the pain/chaos("anthrax bombs") but transcended into society losing agency. To prevent anything like a war breaking out again, Mond is forced to keep the society in peace. The peace is translated into pleasure because peace can be achieved with pain(shown with John) but the society is forced to correlate peace with pleasure (sex) and it makes them mentally unaware and purposeless. Everything is centered around keeping Universal Happiness, so everything is centered around pleasure. Mond's control of the society and knowledge of pain forces him to remove the society's value in truth and beauty, which leads to the society losing their agency.

Mond admits how he removes truth from society through a metaphor comparing science(truth) to an animal. "Science is dangerous, we have to keep it most carefully chained and muzzled" (225). This personification of science as an animal that is chained and muzzled represents the society's agency being chained up. Science represents knowledge and truth, which gives the society agency and that's where the "danger" arises. With more and more people

realizing that they need agency, Musthpa loses his agency. Musthpa's agency depends on the cluelessness of the society. The introduction of science(knowledge and truth) would make the people smarter, they would learn to think for themselves rather than depending on soma.

Chaining up the society's agency could be interpreted as him chaining away pain. With knowledge of the past(seven-year war), society would be introduced to pain, which would indulge their curiosity even more and give them the mental agency to think for themselves. For there to be peace, society needs to be chained away from pain. Through the personification of science, Mond shows how necessary it's for him to get rid of pain and suffering for his benefit. "Christianity without tears--that's what soma is"(238). Mond compares the euphoria John gets from his religion to soma. Soma represents the agency being taken away from them(as discussed earlier). If religion is just soma with tears, religion also takes away people's agency like soma. This comparison comes from Mond's perspective which shows the origins of his idea of creating peace. If religion takes away society's agency, why should the pain be necessary if the society can reach euphoria without it? Mond dwells on this question, to show John that either way, religion(pain) versus pleasure(soma/sex), they lose agency. The only difference between how John's and Mond's get their euphoria is John has to suffer while Mond doesn't. Religion from Mond's p.o.v has pointless suffering and not enough compensation like the pleasure given by soma.

Through the use of these literary devices, Huxley shows how experiencing pain versus pleasure affects one view on their agency. For Bernard and Lenina experiencing only pleasure and no pain made them pawns for Mond to control. John only experiences pain and it gives him an appreciation for his agency. Ironically this appreciation isn't enough and leads to him breaking



his values. Mond the only one that has a balance of pleasure and knowledge of pain causes him to live a happy life with a solid purpose(control the society to keep the peace). Lenina and John, fall on the opposite extremes of pain and pleasure which does not allow either of them to have a complete life with purpose. Only being exposed to one versus the other will never give someone full agency. The question that arises from this is, is a balance of pain and knowledge necessary for a purposeful life with agency?