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Reality Principle in Brave New World

Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World" presents a dystopian world where technological advances have created a society devoid of suffering, conflict, and personal autonomy. Set in a world that has achieved superficial peace through genetic engineering, brainwashing, and recreational drug use. A Central theme of the world is the use of psychological manipulation and the suppression of desires for the sake of maintaining civilization as it is currently constructed. This intersects well with the ideas of Freud, particularly the reality principle. Which is the idea that we balance our desires for immediate gratification with the constraints and demands of the real world.

Within this paper, we will talk about the suppression of the pleasure principle through the use of soma and technological advances, the control of perception and conformity within this dystopian, and the use of superficial happiness humans will never actually achieve a genuine human experience.

In "Brave New World," Aldous Huxley displays a society designed to suppress the pleasure principle, which seeks immediate gratification of desires and needs. The World States achieves this suppression through the widespread use of soma, a drug that provides an escape from any form of discomfort or dissatisfaction, effectively redirecting the population's desire

from natural human experiences to chemically induced happiness. This instant gratification serves as a foundation for maintaining social order, by ensuring that individuals remain content, thus preventing the types of desires that could lead to social instability. Furthermore, the role of technology in “Brave New World” extends beyond mere pharmaceutical control but includes psychological manipulation from birth. The use of conditioning such as “Books and loud noises, flowers and electric shocks—already in the infant mind these couples were compromisingly linked; and after two hundred repetitions of the same or a similar lesson would be wedded indissolubly” (Huxley, 17). This is an invasive form of control by brainwashing and flooding the youth's minds which allows them to manipulate and control easier. In addition, current educational institutions do this, “Educational influences may well entail the withholding of reasons since the child may not yet be in a position to understand and evaluate reasons. Moreover, we routinely habituate children into certain practices and dispositions that seem more like initiation or indoctrination into certain forms of life than teaching” (Lewin, 2022). We can see some conditioning suppresses any impulses that might disrupt social order or any seen as social destabilizers. By reprogramming what individuals think, especially during their youth, society ensures that the pleasure principle is not just suppressed by redirected towards ends that further the goals of the dystopian state in the context of “Brave New World”.

The idea of suppressing the pleasure principle for social stability is not confined to any fictional dystopia but is shown in various historical aspects as well. For example, the effective use of advertising has allowed for “Marketers to develop a large spectrum of strategies to reach [children and adolescents]... They have been reported to induce unhealthy eating habits, to cultivate a materialistic value system, and to be a source of conflicts between children and their

parents”(Frontiers,2020). This quote shows how subtle manipulations in visual exposure time can significantly sway consumer choices, emphasizing the powerful role of attention in marketing. In addition, “Marketers have developed a large spectrum of strategies to reach children and adolescents...They have been reported to induce unhealthy eating habits, to cultivate a materialistic value system” (Frontier,2020). These practices reflect a similar use of the reality principle, where society's stability and economic growth are prioritized over individual well-being or freedom.

In “Brave New World,” the manipulation of perception is an essential strategy employed by the World State to secure conformity and maintain societal stability. For example within “Brave New World”, ““Alpha children wear grey... They’re so frightfully clever... I'm really awfully glad I'm a Beta... Gammas are stupid... Epsilons are still worse... They’ll have that repeated forty or fifty times more before they wake... Roses and electric shocks... wordless conditioning is crude and wholesale... In brief, hypnopædia. ‘The greatest moralizing and socializing force of all time.’”(Huxley,21). Through a method of indoctrination, the state molds the perceptions and attitudes of its citizens through a hierarchy. This form of mental programming reinforces social norms and expectations, overriding any development of personal insights or critical thinking except for a small percentage of the population. In addition, research done by Hans Jonas in an argument against cloning “claims that genetic modification interferes with the ability of the modified human being to make free choices” (Resnick, 2006). This idea pushes forward the idea that the World State in “Brave New World” created this dystopian system to further control and manipulate their populace. The reality principle is enforcing, as

individuals are conditioned to accept state-imposed truth without question, effectively neutering any potential for dissent or deviation from societal norm

The World State deprives individuals of their freedom and tames the capability to experience genuine human experiences by manipulating perception. Love, ambition, and moral and ethical debates are commonly drawn from personal struggles and intellectual freedom. Reflecting on the ethical concerns that arise with AI, Micahel Sandel notes “AI not only replicates human biases, it confers on these biases a kind of scientific credibility. It makes it seem that these predictions and judgments have an objective status” (Pazzanese,2020). This existing bias under AI can perpetuate a similar type of control over perception as seen in “Brave It forces one to reflect on the delicate balance that exists between personal freedom and societal stability. It asks whether that type of trade-off is ethical or moral whereby we lose touch with what it means to be human. The book makes us wonder whether it is okay to make that kind of a trade-off whereby we lose touch with what we mean to be human.

In “Brave New World” while the citizens of the World State appear free from conflict, underneath the emptiness and lack of fulfillment. This reflects the psychological consequences of a life devoid of the challenges and rewards of true emotional engagements, suggesting that the lack of the elements can lead to a diminished human experience. The ethical and societal consequences of such a model are significant. By prioritizing stability and conformity, the World State effectively denies individuals the essential human experience that fosters personal growth and maturity. As seen in Psychology Today, “In many instances, denial leads to short-term satisfaction but long-term pain. Denial can shape dynamics in different domains of life, whether that be ignoring relationship conflicts or refusing to acknowledge an illness”(Psychology Today).

The psychological trade-offs of this engineered society are vast. It is important to point out that, in Huxley's story, the outside, onlooker world would perceive the denizens of the World State as being, indeed, without inner conflict, yet below the surface, an abyss of emptiness and unfulfilled life. Such outcomes would then be correlated to the psychic outcomes from a life without the abrasive challenges and rewards found in true emotional engagements, as if to suggest that if such elements are repressed, the human experience could be vastly diminished, even in the apparent absence of conflict or pain.

In conclusion, “Brave New World” shows a critique of a society overly reliant on technology and drugs to govern human behavior and suppress individual desires, which reflects many of Freud’s concerns in “Civilization and its Discontents” by sacrificing personal autonomy and the genuine human experience for social order, this dystopia shows the conflicts between the reality and pleasure principle. Ultimately, “Brave New World” shows us the cost of unchecked technological and psychological control and makes us reflect on the true nature of happiness and the value of individuality.

Works Cited

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