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# ***Brave New World* and the Threat of Technological Growth**

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"Progress is lovely" (Huxley 98)

The world in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* has one goal: technological progress. The morals and aspirations of the society are not those of our society today - such as family, love, and success - but instead are focused around industry, economy, and technologic growth and improvement. The citizens are not concerned with themselves as individuals; they have been conditioned to see the world as a collective and technologically oriented. This society is one which Neil Postman, the author of *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, would consider a 'Technopoly.' But Postman also perceives cultures in the world today to be nearing this socio-technologic status. What can be seen about *Brave New World* and its comments on technological advancements as well as their effects in society, when we examine it from the perspective of Postman's *Technopoly*? The medical advancements in Huxley's novel and its concepts of educational standardization carry drastic similarities to society today as well. Sir Ken Robinson's discussions on education elucidate these congruencies. Through these scholastic perspectives it can be seen that the novel is a dangerously accurate prophesy of technology's capacity to dominate society, and how this domination is silently changing the goals, moralities, and values of our culture.

The most prevalent themes in *Brave New World* are centered around the industrial and economic systems in novel, and how technology has brought the advancements of these themes to fruition. The mentality of the society is that progress, through invention, is the key goal of mankind. Consumerism and productivism are the purpose of life in Huxley's industrial utopia. The consumerist ideals of the society can be captured by one of the hypnopædic proverbs demonstrated in this quote from the novel: "“But old clothes are beastly,” continued the untiring whisper. “We always throw away old clothes. Ending is better than mending, ending is better than mending, ending is better than mending.”” (Huxley 54). All the citizens of The World State in the novel are conditioned since birth to maintain that buying new is proper and repairing is immoral. They are taught to conform to the consumer-oriented mentality of the culture. Postman provides an example for the means of how this transition in society is taking place today and suggests how Huxley may have imagined it happening: “Along with [the idea that if something could be done, it should be done] there developed a profound belief in all the principles through which invention succeeds: objectivity, efficiency, expertise, standardization, measurement, and progress. It also came to be believed that the engine of technological progress worked most efficiently when people are conceived of not as children of God or even as citizens but as consumers” (Postman 42). This perspective describes with pinpoint accuracy how Huxley's society functions. The people are no longer oriented to believe in god, but instead only believe in the principles of consumption.

In the novel all religion has faded away and been forgotten by the citizens of the World State. The only deity-like or religious principles that people follow are that of Henry Ford, inventor of the Model T. Society's closest acknowledgement of a “god” is Ford. As Postman states, “the great narrative of inductive

science takes precedence over the great narrative of Genesis, and those who do not agree must remain in intellectual backwater” (Postman 50). In fact, the dating system used in the novel is based upon A.F. and B.F. which is the abbreviated form for After Ford and Before Ford, which Huxley clearly used to parody our current dating system of B.C. (before Christ) and A.D. (anno domini). God is not merely second to technology - as is the paradigm of society today, which Postman calls the ideals of a ‘Technocracy’ - but God has completely been stamped out and forgotten, replaced by paradigms of God being progress, which is the ideal of a Technopoly.

Postman describes the cause of this to be that “the greatest invention of the nineteenth century was the idea of invention itself. We had learned how to invent things, and the question of why we invent things receded in importance” (Postman 42). By constantly inventing, replacing, and consuming, a society loses its ties with the spiritual and gains new ones to technology; personal transcendence is replaced with technological transcendence. Progress, technology, and invention become their God. This transition -as Postman puts it the transition of a Technocracy to a Technopoly- is the transition that has taken place in Brave New World. Technocracy did not entirely destroy the traditions of the social and symbolic worlds. Technocracy subordinated these worlds - yes even humiliated them - but it did not render them totally ineffectual” (Postman 45). However, a Technopoly, utterly destroys the existence of these worlds, and this is the state of Huxley’s utopia. “Technopoly eliminates alternatives to itself in precisely the way Aldous Huxley outlines in Brave New World. It does not make them illegal. It does not make them immoral. It does not even make them unpopular. It makes them invincible and therefore irrelevant (Postman 48).

Therefore, from the perspective of Postman’s Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology, Huxley’s society in Brave New World is a stunningly perfect example of a Technopoly. In this Technopoly, technology and the advancements of it contain all the principles one needs to live their lives by. A Technopoly is a more radical concept than a technocracy. “The citizens of a technocracy knew that science and technology did not provide philosophies by which to live” (Postman 47) unlike the Technopoly in Brave New World. This is precisely why Huxley’s society is a Technopoly and not a Technocracy; in the novel the citizens know just the opposite, that science and technology does provide philosophies by which to live and moreover is the very pinnacle of their lives and their existence.

The lower castes of Huxley’s society are simple workers; multitudes of drones and one-task thinkers. The mass production of human life is key to the economic structure of this society, but there is another factor that goes along with the workers. Not only are the workers created for the purpose of a simple life of servitude, they are also conditioned to enjoy such a meager life. They are content with this lifestyle in every sense, and therefore, they are stable. Like biological machinery, constantly working, working, working; satisfied with every minute of their day. This resembles our world today as Sir Ken Robinson elucidates in his RSA Animate on education. Robinson speaks about the “culture” of education and how children are conditioned to think that there are ‘smart’ and ‘dumb’ individuals and that this paradigm limits children. This black-and-white standardization is similar to Huxley’s caste system. A strict organization like these contains the similarities of making society believe that society is best if it operates on the modern principle that there is a cultural split in education: the split of high and low intelligence. These two examples also share the similarity that they neglect how certain individuals may be better or worse at different tasks or subjects and that in reality this kind of standardization actually limits society. This is a postmodern idea, currently growing in popularity.

In society today there is the idea of ADHD being an epidemic in America. Sir Ken Robinson points out that there is not really an epidemic and that children are being medicated carelessly. they are given Ritalin and Adderall so they can be focused in school. A non-medical problem is being cared for with medication (RSA). This strongly resembles the Soma in Brave New World. If someone isn’t happy, they simply take Soma, and suddenly they’re content again. This reliance on drugs is a parallel between Huxley’s novel and Sir Robinson’s video. As Huxley’s proverb goes, “a gramme is better than a damn” (Huxley 156).

The similarities between how our education system puts children in groups by age and has them taught to think that there is only one answer. Robinson points out how students are taught linearly instead of divergently (RSA). This standardization of education reflects the caste system in Brave New World and how each caste is conditioned to be only able to do the job their caste demands. Each caste is conditioned through hypnopaedia to only think one way, this resembles the culture of our education system and how students are taught to think only in terms of if one score high on tests, one is intelligent and will have a good job and if one scores low, the person is unintelligent and must have a laborious job.

Another significant parallel which can be seen through the 'lens' of Robinson's video is the similarities between the "production line mentality" of America's education system, and the biologically mass-produced citizens of the World State in Brave New World. The students in America go through this process of classes organized by age, yet as Robinson elucidates, age does not necessarily dictate a student's aptitude or discipline with a certain subject (RSA). This resembles the caste system in the novel and how everyone is conditioned from pre-birth to maturity to only be intelligent enough for their caste's jobs.

The democracy of individual growth and personal spirituality is eliminated in Huxley's Technopoly. By analyzing the novel from the perspectives of Postman and Robinson, it becomes clear that Huxley's work is a prediction for the future that hits all-too close to the bone. The transition from the Technocracies of today, to the Technopoly in Brave New World is one that seems to be growing nearer, dauntingly. When do our advances in technology begin to do more harm than help? No one can predict when good-natured intentions can bring about unfortunate ends, yet Huxley provides a profound guess. How long before the ever-sharpening claws of technology latch around our own society, and grip us away from the morals we hold to be valuable? Should we fear this threat? Or embrace its benefits? "Progress is lovely, isn't it?" (Huxley 98).

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## References

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