

THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF THE EXCESSIVE USE

**THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF
THE EXCESSIVE USE OF TECHNOLOGY
IN BRAVE NEW WORLD**

Written BY ALDOUS HUXLEY

(1894 – 1963)

Published in 1932

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the Excessive Use of Technology
in Brave New World**

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Abstract:

This study discusses a masterpiece of a great novelist and tackles a very important theme. *Brave New World* is one of the masterpieces that were written by the great writer, Aldous Huxley. It was published in 1932. In those old days of Huxley, namely in the beginning of the twentieth century, the fears about technology and its potential negative effects on society were not clear. On the contrary, there were many writers who wrote about the potential marvelous effects of technology and how it would change life that was full of wars and sufferings to a world of happiness and easiness. This was one of the ideas that motivated Huxley to write this novel as a parody of the similar novels of his era. In present, we realize the negative effects of technology more than the society of Huxley did. According to the current reader, *Brave New World* may be considered of a greater importance than it did during the days of its first publishing. The other bad face of technology appeared more clearly in the present days. This enlarges the appreciation about Huxley's predictive and meditative eye about the control of technology over life aspects and its negative effects upon. Huxley used the setting and characters in his science fiction novel to express widely held

opinions, particularly the fear of losing the individual identity of the human beings in the fast-paced world of the future.

Excessive use of technology in *Brave New World* produces several castes of man products. Although they are different in level, they are pre-conditioned to live one stable life of their own caste. The life of the 5 castes is similar in some ways; they are not allowed to think of any life that may contradict their life in the World State, they are not allowed to love nature or to read books because that may endanger the stability of life, no special identity is allowed to any of them, namely, they must behave and think and feel as they are pre-destined to do and as determined by the World State Controllers, and if any of them feels the dangers of any such taboo ideas, he must promptly swallow one or two grams of soma to regain his conformity and false happiness. In this world of machine-like males and females, there are some examples that have different ideas of that of the World State.

The characters of Bernard, Helmholtz and John are three examples of persons that cannot conform to the rules of the World State. Bernard is different than the persons of his caste because his body is smaller than them and this is contributed to a mistake that may have done while he was pre-conditioned in the Hatchery and Conditioning Center. A conversation between two female characters in novel, Lenina and Fanny, reveals that he is considered as a bad person; not only because his physical deformity but also because he spends much time with himself thinking and meditating, and this is considered a taboo in the excessive technological society of *Brave New World*. Bernard feels that something is missing and that endangers the stability of the technology-controlled society, therefore, he is exiled at the end of the novel.

Helmholtz is a friend of Bernard. He is a very successful member that has all the precise descriptions of a dweller of the Brave New World. He is very successful with women and he is a successful lecturer in the faculty of feeling engineering. But he

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feels that he has more traits that distinguish him than the other members of the World State. The excessive use of technology in the Brave New World had pre-conditioned him to be a copy of the other members of his caste. He is made to be a machine to an individual because that endangers the stability of the World. Therefore, he is exiled at the end of the novel.

The third example is John the savage. He is a hybrid of the culture of the Brave New World and the culture of the Reservation of the Savages. His mother Linda was missed in the Reservation and she was pregnant of him from his father, The Director of the Hatcheries and Conditioning Center . Of course, begetting a non-preconditioned child by a natural birth is prohibited and is considered as a shame. All children in the society that uses technology excessively, comes by pre-conditioning and hatching in the Hatchery Center. They are considered like products that come out of a factory. They are individuals without individualities. John cannot conform to this society; therefore, he commits suicide at the end of the novel.

Those three miserable ends of three critical characters of the novel confirm the negative effects of excessive use of technology on the society of *Brave New World*.

Introduction:

Brave New World is a great science fiction novel by a great novelist, Aldous Huxley. It was published in 1932. Brave New World was ranked by the Modern Library in 1999 as the fifth novel on its list that included the 100 best novels that were written in English in the 20th century and in 2003, it was ranked by "The Observer" magazine as number 53 in a list of the top 100 greatest novels that have ever written. Moreover it was listed as number 87 on the survey called "The Big Read" that was held by the BBC. Huxley discusses in it the negative effects of the excessive use of technology on a society. Huxley's family

structure, his thoughts, the thoughts and prominent figures of his era all are echoed in the whole structure of the novel.

On the 26th of July in 1894, near Godalming Surrey village, in England, Aldous Leonard Huxley was born as the third son for a family of well-educated members; as his father was a writer, editor and a teacher and his mother was a teacher as well. His grandfather Thomas Henry Huxley seems to have a great effect on Aldous's life and thoughts and it can be said that *Brave New World* is a kind of rebellion against the ideas of his grandfather. His grandfather was a biologist. He was famous by spreading the thoughts of Darwin concerning evolution, to the extent he was described as "Darwin's bulldog". He rather invented the word "agnostic" that means a person that neither believes in faith nor God. So, he contributed to the continuous debate between science and religion and it was a theme that captured the imagination of Aldous, his grandson, the matter that was very obvious in *Brave New World*, when he tried to reveal the negative effects of excessive use of technology which is generated from the effect of excessive use of science and the excessive use of the scientific applications on society and individuals.

The grandfather was known of imposing firm restrictions on his grandsons. He thought that academic and professional brilliance were intrinsic matters and no excuses were allowed concerning that matter. One of Aldous' brothers grew up to be a scientist, really he was successfully "conditioned" by his grandfather but his beloved brother, Trevenan could not bear the excessive burdens of science and academic progress that were imposed on him by his grandfather, so he committed suicide. The death of Trevenan in 1914 was real breakage of Aldous' heart. A matter that made him think if the dominance of science and consequently technology is a real goodness in man's life. He questioned this theme in *Brave New World* through revealing the inner parts and thoughts of his characters in *Brave New World*. He used some different kinds of characters; one of them is

"John". It is thought that the character of John the savage who cannot conform to the society of excessive technology and whocommits suicide at the end of the novel is a kind of recalling his brother, Trevernan.

In 1920, Aldous Huxley worked for some period in an advanced chemical plant called Burner and Mond in Billingham in County Durham, northeast England. According to what is stated in the introduction of the latest edition of *Brave New World*, his experience in this chemical plant which was considered as "an ordered universe in a world of planless incoherence" was an important source for the novel. Huxley also said that he was inspired *Brave New World* by the utopian novels of H. G. Wells including *A Modern Utopia* (1905), and *Men Like Gods* (1923). Wells saw the future with an optimistic eye, so did the writers of the utopian novels in his era. That enlightened the imagination of Huxley to write a parody of these novels which became *Brave New World*. He wrote a letter to an American acquaintance of his who was called Mrs. Arthur Goldsmith that he had "been having a little fun pulling the leg of H. G. Wells", but he "got caught up in the excitement of (his) own ideas". On the contrary of the optimistic visions of future that were expressed in such kind of novels in his era, Huxley presented a fearful vision of the future and he described *Brave New World* as a "negative utopia". Some critics see that the society of *Brave New World* is a utopian-intended society that is turns to be a dystopia. Huxley successfully manipulated several elements to show the negative effects of future technology on all aspects of life.

As an echo of the Huxley's life inside the novel, that is considered as his child that is begotten from his life, Huxley the brilliant scholar derives the title of *Brave New World* from Miranda's speech in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Act V, Scene I:

O wonder!

How many goodly creatures are there here!

How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,

That has such people in't.

— *William Shakespeare, The Tempest, Act V, Scene I, ll. 203–206*

Also, the character of Mustapha Mond, one of the Ten World Controller is named after Sir Alfred Mond; as a short time before writing *Brave New World*, Huxley visited the technologically advanced plant of Mustafa Mond and that had a great impression on him. Moreover, choosing the date of the novel to be named as "After Ford" was due to the book *My Life and Work*, written by Henry Ford. Huxley read the book on the boat during his journey to America. When he arrived America, he was shocked by the American way of life such as; the youth culture, commercial cheeriness and sexual promiscuity. This shock inspired him the shape of life aspects in a technological society in *Brave New World*. From 1914 to 1918 Britain suffered from The First World War. Huxley and the English society lived the struggle between the interests of people and governments. Instability and death made all people look forward to a way of life that causes stability and happiness. As a scientifically-bred character that absorbed the importance of science and technology and as a person inherited the blood of the poet and essayist Mathew Arnold, as Aldous' mother was the niece of that great poet, Huxley stands in the middle of the two worlds; the world of strict science and technology and the world of poetry, meditation and nature. When people and writers dreamed of a utopia in the future and where technology was praised for causing easiness of life and happiness, Huxley portrayed *Brave New World* to imagine the growing use of technology and what it may lead to if human beings exceed the limits when using it. This is the main theme of *Brave New World* that is going to be discussed.

**The Negative Effects of the Excessive Use of
Technology in Brave New World:**

When the novel is read, it seems to the reader as if Huxley takes a journey in a time-machine. He exceeds our life but we can see our present life passing along his journey. The reader imagines that Huxley does not stop in our era; he travels more and more exceeding our years, passing over our thoughts, tickling our curiosity and wonder about our future; leaving a question in every mind; could we reach this phase of time in the future. He arrives to the year 632 A. F, that means "After Ford" that corresponds to 2540 A. D. Huxley chooses the start of calendar after the Ford's production of the T-model, as an assertion of the importance of technology in the minds of the *Brave New World's* dwellers. The scene opens in Central London Hatcheries and Conditioning Centre. Huxley shows us a society of excessive use of technology that pre-condition fetuses to their pre-destined role that they would not escape in the World State. He arrives to a future that really can start our impression with a kind of exclamation and astonishment about new styles of life that starts at laboratories and bottles instead of mothers' wombs. Gradually we gain more and more astonishment accompanied with some shocks with the way of reproduction, classification of people and their class in life that does not enable them to choose or to be better or worse. Huxley tries to prove that excessive use of technology has negative effects on society and individuals through several points. The system of the World State classifies the embryos into five castes; Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta and Epsilon. The last three castes are pre-conditioned to be the inferior classes in the society. They are deliberately weakened and manufactured to be less in body and mind capabilities than the other two high-levelled castes; Alpha and Beta. The Bokanovsky and the podsnap's techniques are the two astonishing techniques that control the life of people even before being an embryo. Bokanovsky Process is made by

shocking an egg "the start of the human fetus" to divide into 96 identical embryos. They are identical because they will do the same works on similar machines in the future. On the other hand, the Podsnap's Technique speeds up the process of ripening of eggs within a single artificial ovary. So, about 11.000 brothers and sisters of identical twins are produced in 150 batches. The tone of the novel shockingly reveals the excessive use of technology in "producing" infants of the World State. They are treated like the production of goods in a factory. Begetting children in *Brave New World* happens in the Hatchery Center and the natural way of begetting children by a mother and a father becomes a prohibited way of life. These ways of producing identical creatures reveal the prominent negative effects of the excessive use of technology which erases individuality in the human beings. The newly-hatched infants are seen as identical machines not as human beings. The characters of each of them are erased. They do not have the ability to choose whether these inhumanly techniques are to be applied on them or not. They are pre-destined to be humiliated and dehumanized without a choice of them. It is a mere unjust choice of technology that determines to choose those embryos to be less than other castes like Alpha and Beta. When those infants grow more, their minds are shaped by some Hypnopædic messages, which are certain phrases that are played continuously to be heard by the children when they are sleeping; emphasizing the role of educating during sleeping. This is another technique that shapes the minds of the children on the way that suits the World State Controllers and on the way that they see that it achieves stability of the society of the World State. Here, the excessive use of technology deprives the individuals of their individuality. No special traits are given to some special characters. They are mostly identical in shape and life; all that is made by a good intention of achieving stability. These negative effects of technology do not affect the low castes only; even the higher castes suffer from the same negative effects

of technology. These effects are revealed through presenting the lives of several characters.

Firstly, the character of Lenina; she is a typical model of a "virtuous" woman in the society of *Brave New World*. She works in the Hatcheries and Conditioning Center. She lives a free sexual life with Henry who also works in the Hatcheries and Conditioning Center. The relation between Henry and Lenina reveals another negative effect of technology that banned the natural shape of relationship between a man and a woman through marriage, forming a family and begetting children by birth and substituted it by a free sexual relationship and children are hatched and produced in the laboratory. Henry reminds Lenina of their date after work in front of the students and that is considered a very natural and "virtuous" behavior in the Brave New World. On the other hand, the students blush when they hear a story about a naturally begotten child as if they hear about an immoral deed. This inversion of principles and rules shows the negative effect of excessive use of technology. Mostafa Mond, one of the Ten Controllers of the Brave New World announces frequently along the novel that sexual suppression in the old world was a cause of instability, so, the Brave New World, from Mond's point of view, corrects that defective way of thinking and frees the sexual relationship from any restrictions. Here, the technological society breaks inherent religious rules of marriage and family structure. By the end of the novel, Mond goes further; that they do not need religion or God and that they have all the means of satisfactions that are pre-conditioned for them and if there is any problem, soma can solve it.

Six years of laboratory working produces that magical drug, soma. It is a chemical drug that improves the mood of a human being and gives him a mood of happiness. One more negative effect of the excessive use of technology, it is the spread of drugs to conceal the bad feelings that arise because the other negative effects of technology such as; cancelling the individuality and the

right of thinking and depriving the inhabitants from their freedom and letting the choice be to the World Controllers only; in other words, people of the Brave New World must obey the rules of the World State or they would be exiled. Bernard and Helmholtz are another two characters that do not conform to the Brave New World's excessive technological society.

In the character of Bernard Marx, Huxley draws upon the name of Karl Marx who denounces capitalist society. Bernard criticizes the Brave New world's society because it is hostile to him. In a conversation between Lenina and Fanny, the reader is informed about the bad "reputation" of Bernard as "he doesn't like Obstacle Golf" and because "he spends most of his time by himself – alone". It is shown also that Bernard Marx admits that he dislikes the society's view of Lenina as a piece of "meat" because she belongs to everyone else. This unusually thinking is attributed to a mistake that was done in the hatchery when Bernard was produced and that someone "thought he was a Gamma and put alcohol into his blood surrogate". Bernard represents a failed component of the Brave New World's society; that he is always reminded of his physical inadequacy. He feels humiliated. He is laughed at by the women he makes proposals to. The excessive use of technology in the society of *Brave New World* cannot stand any small difference in any of its members; it even does not bear any small mistake would happen in the production of any of them. Disconformity of Bernard does not come out of a choice from his own, it is – according to the explanation of the society - due to a mistake that a worker had made when Bernard had been produced. Also, the refusal of Bernard of the society around him does not come out of a real thinking of his own; it is generated by their hostility against him because his mean physical structure. Even though, he was exiled at the end of the novel. The reader may pity Bernard because he has no choice in his physical deficiency and the reader realizes how the excessive use of

technology has negative effects on society. Technology prevents persons from having personalities.

Another example of unconformity with an excessive technological society is Helmholtz who is also a native dweller of the World State. In the case of Helmholtz, matters are different a little. He feels and realizes in himself greater characteristics than the dwellers of his society. His relations with women or his position as a writer of Hypnopaedic phrases and a lecturer in the faculty of feeling engineering reveals him as a perfect example of the Alpha class, but it is revealed that he feels of having greater characteristics than others; of course it is a taboo in a society that hatches its individuals to be equal in all traits. Helmholtz writes phrases that encourage students to search inside themselves to discover what is within: "Did you ever feel As though you had something inside you that was only waiting for you to give it a chance to come out? Some sort of extra power that you aren't using – you know, like all the water that goes on the falls instead of through the turbines". Of course this is considered a crime in that excessive technological society of *Brave New World*, as Helmholtz encourages the students to feel, to think, to search and to admire nature; really he breaks all restrictions of the society. So, at last he is exiled. Another time the reader feels the injustice of that technological society. The image of the Brave New World is confronted by the image of the Old World which is the Reservation of Savages. In the Reservation, the reader meets two characters that profoundly affected by the system of the Brave New World. They are Linda and her son, John.

Linda was a part of the Brave New World. She was missed in a journey in the reservation. She tried to live in the way of the Brave New World but she failed. She slept with several men as a "virtuous" woman in the Brave New World, but she was considered as a prostitute. She is despised by the society of the reservation. She could not live without soma, so she substituted soma with another kind of consumable that enables her to be out

of conscious. She does not know how to bring up a child so she leaves him to be brought up with the books of Shakespeare. She became an outsider in the reservation because of her weird and unvirtuous behavior and she could not return to the Brave New World because she had a child by a natural birth and this is abhorrent in the society of the Brave New World that considers begetting a child from a natural birth is a shame and that children must be hatched and pre-conditioned using their excessive technology. So, Linda became a martyr that cannot adapt with either of the two worlds. John, her son is the last example of a person that suffers from the excessive use of technology and he is referred to throughout the novel by "John the savage". He is a hybrid between two cultures that represent two different societies. Despite he is brought up in the reservation, he cannot adapt neither with the society of the reservation nor the society of the Brave New World. John inherits the status of his mother as an outsider in the society of the reservation. He is disgraced because of his mother and despised by his peers as John says in the novel, "Do you know, they shut me out of absolutely everything? When the other boys were sent out to spend the night on the mountain - you know, when you have to dream which your sacred animal is - they wouldn't tell me any of the secrets". Even when he goes to the Brave New World he cannot conform to. His first contact with the society starts with laughter of the workers when he calls The Director as his father, the matter that causes another disgrace for him from the first moment. He cannot conform to the society even when he takes soma; he turns to be more philosophical. When he discusses with Mustafa Mond, one of the Ten Controllers, the matters of happiness and religion, Mond claims that happiness is generated in the Brave New World by the pre-conditioning of citizens and not suppressing sexual tendencies and that there is no need of religion and that this causes stability of the society. Despite this utopia-like society, John takes his decision and says, "I don't want comfort, I want God, I want

poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness, I want sin". Actually, John wants a real life of an individual. He wants to be a person that is distinguished by his character and traits; a person that may meet good or bad persons and undergo the real adventure of life; a person that can sin and repent; a person that knows the real happiness when he tastes the real sadness. Mond sees that the remedy of any feeling of dissatisfaction can be reached by soma and John considers soma as Christianity without tears, namely, it is a hollow and fake feeling of happiness and it is not a real one. Huxley expresses the feelings of panic that John undergoes that the stability of this utopian-like society is not a real stability. It is the stability of death. Only died persons are the ones who have no changes and ups and downs. The living person is a real individual that has the things he loves and the things he hates naturally without pre-conditioning. The real individual can sin and feel a real sadness then he can repent and pray to God and feel the real existence of God in his life. He can feel real feelings of happiness not conditioned feelings. John cannot conform to that seeming-like utopian. He commits suicide. John's suicide signifies that this society is not a real utopia and that the excessive use of technology has turned it to be a dystopia, in which John could not maintain his selfhood and dignity. It is a superficial and machinery society, that the real person cannot live in, therefore John chooses suicide to feel free. John announces by his suicide that this society of excessive use of technology is not a society that deserves human to live in. It is a society of man-like machines. Critics see that the character of John recalls Trevenan, Huxley's brother who committed suicide because the great burdens of lessons and science restrictions that were imposed on him by their grandfather T. H. Huxley. The reader pities John and so does with Huxley for the death of his closest brother Trevenan.

On the other hand, Bernard and Helmholtz are exiled to prevent

any trial of thinking or changing in the society of machine-like creatures. When technology overcomes, human beings are turned to be similar machines without any individuality. At the end, by the death of John and the exile of Bernard and Helmholtz, the Brave New World or Factory returns to its stability of dead souls.

Conclusion:

On the 20th of November, 1963, two days before the death of Huxley, he was too weak to write, so he recorded on a tape six words that summarize his ideas and beliefs. He revealed his vision about the real role of a real writer when he said, "Our Business is to wake up". He lived his life and always wanted to teach people. In his final work, *Shakespeare and Religion*, he stated three rules that people need in order to wake up. The first rule is to search in life to find more aspects that can be used to transfer it to a full life. The second rule is to not to attempt to live outside the world that is given to us. The third rule is to learn how to transform the world and transfigure it. Those three rules are very obvious in building the novel of *Brave New World*. Helmholtz, one of *Brave New World* characters emphasizes the idea of searching inside oneself to extract more beauty and capabilities. In this novel, Huxley also emphasizes through the character of John that despite the existence of this massive and excessive technology, one needs to live his real life as it is given from God. That echoes the words of Huxley that we must not try to live outside the world that is given to us". He wants to say that there are intrinsic rules and boundaries that are drawn by God, that we must not exceed even if we have got a marvelous and great technology because if we use technology excessively in a way that may contradict the rules of God, it will inevitably have negative and adverse effects on the society and the individual.

To not to be misunderstood, Huxley does not want people to stop thinking or to stop improving life. He encourages thinking and moderate use of science and technology when he asserts the need

THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF THE EXCESSIVE USE

to search for better ways to make life full and to search inside the spirit to extract its greatest beauty.

Concerning *Brave New World*, conditioning, combined with prenatal treatment, creates individuals without individuality. Trying to exceed the limits of God and the use technology in an excessive way with an intention of building a utopia on earth, may lead to building a dystopia. In *Brave New World*, The intended utopia does not bring the feeling of happiness and completeness to its citizens. Thus thisintended utopia by the excessive use of technology turns to be a potential dystopia.

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