Final Paper

Philosophy 580

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***Reflections Concerning Aldous Huxley's
"Science, Liberty, and Peace"***

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I Huxley's Proposal

"Science, Liberty, and Peace," an essay by Aldous Huxley, addresses the issue of defining an appropriate set of values for a society imbued with the fervor of remaking the world through technological means. Huxley acknowledges that the power is at hand to construct the world of our choice, but seriously questions the uses of that power chosen heretofore. Pure science, or the pursuit of knowledge about relationships rather than wholes, is "disinterested," "unimpassioned," and valueless. Consequently, it is not to science that we must turn in seeking direction., which is valuable. The application of pure science can be, and is, directed, i.e. technology can and should be controlled in an appropriate manner. The manner by which technology is presently controlled, and the consequent ends to which it is directed, are rejected by Huxley inappropriate He holds that technology is not inherently evil, but that evil men can direct its use toward evil ends. The inevitability of the Ellulian dilemma is rejected. The notion of the technological imperative is an illusion accepted out of irresponsible intellectual ignorance that submits to *"the world picture implicit in the theories of science as a complete and exhaustive account of reality."* (p. 36). This intellectual abeyance to scientific theory accounts for the reductionist thinking of modern times cited by Polayni and Terry Pence. Huxley calls it the "nothing but" thinking. Such thinking is not necessary, definitely false, and incalculably dangerous. Man has control, but to control man must value (as a verb); and to achieve a desirable end, man must value correctly.

What, then are the correct values for Huxley? I think, essentially, there is but one: spiritual enlightenment. "And beyond (the) primary psychological needs lies man's spiritual need -- the need, in theological language, to achieve his Final End, which is the unitive knowledge of ultimate Reality, the realization that Atman and Brahman are one, that the body is a temple of the Holy Ghost, that Tao or the Logos is at once transcendent and immanent." (p. 26-27). However, the milieu under which spiritual enlightenment may obtain defines a subsidiary set of necessary social conditions. To achieve these conditions, in turn, requires a complementary set of pursuable values: 1) personal independence and personal responsibility; 2) work that contains aesthetic rewards and personally meaningful significance; and 3) an organic life style, openly symbiotic with the natural environment. The achievement of these values is contingent upon a tertiary set of operational norms. It is at this tertiary level of "value" that Huxley proposes a social model.

The operational approach necessary to Huxley's ideal may be stated in one word - decentralization. Decentralization is necessary for the attainment of liberty and security, the required states for human fulfillment. Liberty, as well as I can determine from the essay, is defined in negative terms. It is the absence of power over an individual by an unapproachable powerful minority, as well as the absence of dependence upon a centralized power by the individual. Security is related. it emerges when the means of livelihood are not dependent upon the grace of centralized power. Huxley recognizes, however, that the pursuit of security might blind one to the need for liberty, and lead to abdication of personal responsibility to a promissory note from a politician who holds the illusion of security before his unwary prey. In times of economic trauma (as today) this false promise is especially attractive. But, Huxley maintains that true security cannot be obtained in a centralized production and distribution milieu, because maximized profit equations justify "elimination" of large masses of jobs at any time. Thus, to make possible liberty and security, it is necessary to decentralize the power structure of society.

Current world trends are in the opposite direction. Science's children, techniques of manipulation of power '(natural and artificial), are presently weened by minority power elites and trained for the aggrandizement of the elites' insatiable thirst for more power. In both economic and political realms, science is bent toward research that strengthens the hold of the bosses on the masses. In the field of economics, increased mass-production is pursued as a manifestation of progress, the religion of material fulfillment. Mass media mesmerized the populace into acceptance of progress, acceptance of the necessity for more depersonalizing mass production, and acceptance of the necessity of centralized production and financing, as ingredients of the magic formula to achieve true human material fulfillment. In the political field, ardent nationalism is proffered as a necessary spiritual complement of mass production. Worship of the state is demanded; damnation of false gods or states is expected. War and militarism are the necessary ingredients of maintaining the sovereignty or sanctity of the holy nation. Both of these mutually supporting false religions are antithetical to the achievement of true human liberty and security, and, according to Huxley, are perpetuated only to serve the minority power elites in their quest for-more complete control over the "means of production" i.e. the masses.

The desired state of affairs, the "ought to be," and the contradictory present state, the "is" call for resolution. Huxley sees the futility of traditional means of solution, i.e. revolution, as a major deterrent to the achievement of desired social change. His solution is two-fold. The first part requires the masses, those who are oppressed, must practice

self-denial and self-sacrifice, according to the principles of satyagraha, in order to undermine the strength of the centralized power elites through active nonviolence. The other component of the solution rests with the scientists and technicians, who provide the tools of power to the centralized bosses. These scientists and technicians must refuse to serve centralization pursuits and redirect their efforts toward the functionalization of local self-sufficiency. This two pronged attack on centralization, nonviolent resistance by common workers and an organized strike by the knowledge elite, must be activated to effect the desired changes.

II My Response

In the preceding section, I have sketched the essentials of Huxley's argument for 1) the desirability of social change, and 2) the means to effect that change. My outline was brief and necessarily assumes the reader's familiarity with the essay. In the following section I shall outline what I believe to be the major fallacy in Huxley's argument.

"If the ministers of the various sects and religions would abandon sentimentality and superstition, and devote themselves to teaching their flocks that the Final End of man is not in the unknowable utopian future, but in the timeless eternity of the Inner Light, which every human being is capable, is he so desires, of realizing here and now, then the myth of progress would lose its harmfulness as a justifier of present tyranny and wrongdoing."
        (Huxley p. 38-39); and
"there is no remedy for the evil except personal self-denial" (p. 10-11). "Like war, satyagraha demands public spirit, self-sacrifice, organization, and discipline for its successful operation..."
        (from Shridharani in Huxley, p. 6).

These three quotes vividly demonstrate the fallacy of Huxley's theme. He sets up the ideal of personal enlightenment, possible "here and now." If the real significance of this statement is comprehended, then the social condition has no bearing on the individual's salvation, and, in fact, concern for the social situation is an automatic exclusion from salvation. The here and now <u>must</u> be accepted as it is in order to achieve the enlightenment to which Huxley seems to aspire. Desire for an improvement of the social condition, and especially action (violent or nonviolent) directed towards social improvement betrays a rejection of the here and now and precludes salvation. And yet, despite his profession of the Inner Light's immediate salvation, Huxley charges valiantly into the midst of the sentimentality and superstition of the priests he condemns, and picks up their very flag and calls for revision of the social power structure as a means to future "salvation for all." I could not agree more with the ideal of salvation professed by Huxley, but I must feel sad, not condemning, that he *"vid(e) meliora proboque; deteriora sequor" (he) see(s) the better and (he) approve(s); but the worse is what (he) pursue(s)"* (p. 11).

He comes close, but he slips on his sentimentality and returns to the quagmire of misery, accepting self-denial, in order to instruct his flock that the Final End must be deferred, for the present, in favor of self-denial, that it may be achieved in the, as yet, unrealized future. The reversal of centralization trends is, at best, a very long-term project, calling for among other things, a reordering of human values for both the present powerholders and the pliant masses. This reversal is the hope of Huxley, and yet he maintains that *"any faith based upon hypothetical occurrences a long time hence must always, in the very nature of things, be hopelessly unrealistic."* (p. 33).

Somehow, he equates faith in an unknowable future only with centralists dreams, but conveniently exerts his own hopes and faith from the criteria of judgement he sets up. As a typical phantasmist's self-delusion, Huxley condemns the illusions of other phantasmists as justification of his own illusion. This self-delusion is critical to Huxley's assessment of the social condition. It totally precludes the possibility of his recognition of the benevolent desires of the powerholders. *"Today the political boss has been brought up in our more enlightened and scientific environment. Consequently, he is able to perpetrate his outrages with a perfectly clear conscience, convinced that he is acting for humanities highest good..."* (p. 40). If such a boss is acting "convinced" of the highest good, then his act is moral, as moral as any that Huxley may propose. The argument becomes a standoff between two phantasmists, each convinced that he is right and the other is wrong; while there is no authority, except their own beliefs, to which they can submit for arbitration.

III Reflections

I believe Huxley's solution, any solution, that proposes to alleviate the suffering of great masses, to insure a just distribution of the necessary material means to support life, any solution that proposes to solve the basic value dilemma of mankind is unrealistic, phantasmic, and is in actuality a means of increasing, rather than eliminating, the

evils it addresses. The human being values; he makes good and evil appear out of the void. But what is good and what is bad? is a question that plagues the mind; it is the human dilemma.

For one, murder is the most heroic act a man can perform, for another it is the most degraded form of behavior in eternity. Is one right and the other wrong? Science applied to operational techniques is the source of the greatest insult to and degradation of man's unique, passionate, personalized character. Science applied to operational techniques is the greatest intellectual achievement of the universe, and the source of man's self-controlled fulfillment through evolution. We have encountered both these arguments this semester. Right or Wrong? Where does "blame" fall for the evils of the world, where does "praise" belong for the goods of the world.

Three thousand years of recorded dialogue, and who knows how many more years of spoken dialogue, have failed to answer the ultimate questions, to define the indisputable right or the indisputable wrong. Marcuse, Ferkiss, Polanyi, Mumford, Fromm, Huxley, Fuller, Soleri, etc. etc. all call upon historical information as essential to an understanding of present conditions and values. But, all also, in a sense, ignore history in attempting to define a good and a bad in somewhat absolutist terms. It may be countered that since we must value "things" and "ideas", we must attempt to value them correctly; correctly in terms of God, History, science, humanitarianism, what have you. However, to value correctly is to value and is subject to dispute.

The authors mentioned above all used the same technique to establish the correctness of their own values. This technique is the one I referred to in the critique (you are quite right, it was not a critique)-of Terry Pence's seminar paper. That is, to establish an evil in the world, and then identify the antithesis of your argument with the evil. The identification is achieved primarily by temporal correlation of the established evil with an artificially constructed "prevailing philosophy" i.e. the antithesis. In this manner the thesis stands out as a radiating light of hope prevailing against the forces of doom. The effectiveness of the argument relies on the completeness of the identification of the evil and its antithesis. Many of the authors we read were very effective, i.e. persuasive, especially, from my receptive viewpoint: Marcuse, Polanyi, Ellul, and yes, Huxley. I felt they outlined self-destructive patterns of behavior extremely well, called attention to deterministic factors, that are subtle, elusive, and easily overlooked. But none, except perhaps Polanyi, offered me anything except a switch in my allegiance from the bad guys to them, the good guys. To accept their proposals I still must sacrifice myself on their altar.

I choose not to do that, preferring to build my own altar. I call no one to that altar for I know that I alone am to die upon it. The altar is constructed of good and evil, but only good and evil. For all other human beings, no matter which idol they worship, I profess an inability to judge. I merely observe that we all know good and evil, and that none of us know Good or Evil. "If the humanitarian is right, then he is a phenomonalist." But, since I can always dispute his rightness, he must necessarily be a phantasmist. "Science, technology, and human values": the title of our course with addition of the phrase "human values," the antecedents became superfluous. The title could read "Bread and butter and human values" and the importance of the subject would be no less. Maybe the desire is that I assess the specific effects of science and technology on specific conceptions that I hold. I will let Edgar Allan Poe speak for me.

Sonnet - To Science

Science: true daughter of Old Time thou art:
Who alterest all things with thy peering eyes.
Why preyest thou thus upon the poet's heart,

Vulture, whose wings are dull realities?.
How should he love thee? or how deem thee wise,
Who wouldst not leave him in his wandering
To seek for treasure in the jewelled skies,
Albeit he soared with an undaunted wing?
Hast not dragged Diana from her car?
And driven the Hamadryad from the wood
To seek shelter in some happier star?

Hast thou not torn the Naiad from her flood,
The Elfin .from the green grass, and from me
The summer dream beneath the tamarind tree?
EAP - 1829

Comment by professor after an A grade: Excellent approach to this final paper, a really comprehensive summary of our semester from your consistently maintained viewpoint, with Huxley as a useful launching pad.