# Aldous Huxley in the 1930s: the formative years of an evil man

by Mark Burdman

**Aldous Huxley, Between the Wars: Essays and Letters**
edited by David Bradshaw
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*Between the Wars* provides interesting clinical evidence of the cultural pessimism and cynicism, paranoid hatred of science and technology, and support for genocidal eugenics policies that have been such characteristic features of "the British disease" in this century. This 1930s collection of essays and articles has heretofore received little attention. As is the intention of Oxford University's David Bradshaw, the collection shows Huxley to be more deeply involved in the social and political controversies of that decade than had been previously thought by those commentators and experts who assumed that Huxley restricted himself to cultural and literary themes.

The Aldous Huxley on display is not the full-blown sociopath of the post-World War II period. Through his later writings and activities, Aldous Huxley's name has become a household word. His *Brave New World* has become a metaphor for a civilization in which an entire population is controlled by drugs and an all-powerful oligarchical state apparatus. He is also notorious for having promoted hallucinogenic drugs, in *The Doors of Perception* and *Between Heaven and Hell*. He is justifiably regarded as the single most important conceptual architect of the rock-sex-drugs counterculture launched in the mid-1960s.

The Huxley that Bradshaw presents has not yet reached such a stage of degeneracy and evil, and even appears at times to be a person not lacking in compassion and humanity. In the period of the writings, Huxley is in his late 30s-early 40s, so certain traits are not yet fully set. However, the seemingly "better side" should not be exaggerated. The seeds of the later Huxley are there. By the 1930s, Huxley had already become an accomplished sow. What was needed for *Brave New World* and the LSD/mescaline trips was only the further melancholia, pessimism, and degradation induced by living in Hollywood, beginning in 1937, and by the Second World War.

Various of his essays are musings about the potentialities for social control brought about by the new methods of "total propaganda" developed by Josef Goebbels in Nazi Germany and by Josef Stalin in the Soviet Union. The back cover of the book contains two quotes from his writings, the first from 1930, the second 1931: "Any form of order is better than chaos. Our civilization is menaced with total collapse. Dictatorship and scientific propaganda may provide the only means for saving humanity from the miseries of anarchy." And: "We may either persist in our present course, which is disastrous, or we must abandon democracy and allow ourselves to be ruled dictatorially by men who will compel us to do and suffer what a rational foresight demands."

Aldous Huxley could never be accused of having faith in his fellow man.

In a December 1936 piece entitled "How to Improve the World," Huxley mused about the possible uses of psychotropic drugs to "escape from boring or unpleasant reality," and to fulfill "the need for occasional holidays from self and surroundings." He advised that "all the psychological and chemico-physical techniques for holiday-making should be carefully investigated." His tone is often sarcastic. It would, however, take the 1960s, and the demoralization caused in the United States and worldwide by the events beginning with the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the subsequent coverup, to create the preconditions for such "chemical-physical techniques" to become a mass phenomenon (coincidentally, Huxley died, at age 69, the same day Kennedy was shot in Dallas).

## An evil family

If one would accept Lyndon LaRouche's characterization of Lord Bertrand Russell as arguably the most evil man in this century, Aldous and his brother Julian would not come

far behind. For a century and a half at least, since the influence of Aldous's grandfather Thomas Henry Huxley in the 19th century, the Huxley family has been extremely important in implementing the British royal family's "Venetian Party" agenda of neo-paganism and neo-feudalism around the world. T.H. Huxley was widely known in Britain as "Darwin's Bulldog," militantly presenting a pseudo-scientific, radical-positivist "proof" for the Darwinian theory of evolution. T.H. Huxley was, according to numerous commentaries, the first person to coin the word "agnostic," as he launched a decades-long crusade against religious belief, as supposedly detrimental to "science."

A mythology has developed over the years, about the bifurcation in the Huxley family, between those "agnostic scientists" like T.H. and his grandson Julian, a brother and professional biologist-geneticist, and the "mystical-religious" Aldous. This is all absurd. Radical positivism and radical mysticism are two faces of the same gnostic-pagan irrationalism. Not surprisingly, the Huxley family was renowned for bouts of deep depression and melancholia. Numerous Huxleys, over the decades, were hospitalized for such problems. Julian Huxley, later secretary general of the United Nations Educational, Social, and Cultural Organization (Unesco) in 1946, had earlier suffered at least two major nervous breakdowns. For that suffering, one could have compassion, were it not for the fact that the Huxleys have been militantly committed to inflicting their destructive melancholic pessimism on all of society.

Taken as a package, Huxley's essays reek of the kind of cynicism for which the British upper crust has become known. Huxley is ever polemicizing against the effects of science on society, ever warning that man's ability to make profound scientific discoveries must inevitably unleash forces that destroy man himself. Admittedly, he was writing in a period of economic depression, when the certainties of former times (already upset by the ghastly First World War) were constantly in upheaval. Huxley was obviously talented and a shrewd profiler of events and persons, in the sense that highly educated British establishment cultural figures, especially those from established families, are trained to be. But his oligarchical paranoia always gets the better of him, and he can never depart from explanatory concoctions, in which technological innovations and their consequences are held responsible for economic collapse, for unemployment, chaos, social instability, and other evils.

## Before the Greens, there was Huxley

The mentality in question is best seen in one essay in which Huxley truly, as the German saying goes, "lets the sow out." So aghast is Huxley by the announcement by Cambridge University's Lord Rutherford that the atom had been split, that he spits out his hostility to the very existence of scientific discovery and hypothesis. It is as if all the accumulated British psychosis and tension since Sir Isaac Newton's controllers tried to counter the influence of Germany's Leibniz and friends had congealed into one hysterical shriek.

In a May 14, 1932 article on "Industrial Progress and Social Stability," Huxley fretted that the "Cambridge discoveries" announced by Rutherford could become "commercially exploitable. The first step has been taken; the next step, and the next are bound to follow." Worse than that, the process of scientific discovery exemplified by the breakthrough in nuclear energy would become uncontrollable: "A thought is like a seed, planted in the right kind of mental soil it is foredoomed to grow—naturally, inevitably, blindly. . . . For the purposes of thought, our minds are simply more or less well-manured plots of ground, more or less thoroughly saturated solutions, in which the acorn is planted or the nucleus of the crystal suspended. . . . Their business is to grow, to become completely themselves; and they do grow often with disastrous results to everything that happens in their neighborhood."

With no attempt at even pseudo-documentation for his argument, Huxley raved: "Developing thought incommodes man in various ways. Embodied as machines or as social organizations, it may interfere with an old-established and habitual well-being by altering his physical environment. Unembodied, in the form of new hypotheses about the nature of things, it may disturb his mental and emotional life by undermining his consoling beliefs and making nonsense of his cherished aspirations. There is a technique of scientific discovery. Minds trained in this technique constitute a particularly propitious environment for growing thoughts about the external world. During the last 200 years, an ever-increasing number of good minds have been trained in this technique, and thought about the Universe has developed, in consequence, at an ever-increasing rate. . . . [This] has so completely altered the conditions of human existence, that men have found themselves quite incapable of adjusting their way of living to the new mental and physical environment created by it. Hence the present crisis in world affairs."

He warned that the splitting of the atom "brings into focus" the problems posed by "an incessantly growing corpus of scientific knowledge." Huxley asked: "What should society do with such embodiments of developing thought as are calculated, temporarily at any rate, to derange its organization and imperil its stability?" In his view, "commercially exploitable" atomic energy "would cause unspeakable confusion in the world," as well as generate "financial and social chaos," and undermine "certainty and stability."

Governments, not able to control such thought, would have to act to "check and control . . . the embodiment of developing thought in machinery and industrial organization. . . . [G]overnments will find themselves forced to control the industrial application of new inventions. They will have to do it in order to preserve social stability. A communi-

ty cannot allow its very existence to be jeopardized because some logical process has worked itself out in the mind of some man of science, and because some manufacturer has bought the right to exploit the resulting conclusions."

Presaging the efforts of the U.N. crowd (greatly influenced by the late Julian Huxley) to establish world-federalist control over scientific and technological processes, Huxley insisted: "The principle that the application of new discoveries should be controlled in the interests of society is already clearly recognized. . . . In due time this principle—that social stability is more important than industrial 'progress' and must not be sacrificed to it—will inevitably receive legal sanction and universal application. The commercial rights in all new patents will be acquired by the state, and the exploitation of revolutionary discoveries permitted only under conditions which guarantee the least possible derangement of social stability."

## The plea for 'eugenic sterilization'

Another opening in the Huxleys' war against humanity was put forward in an April 1934 essay, asking, "What Is Hapening to Our Population?" in which he quoted favorably from a pamphlet by the London Eugenics Society entitled *Committee for Legalizing Eugenic Sterilization,* whose members included brother Julian. He wrote:

"Today, thanks to the philanthropic activities of social reformers, sub-normal parents are helped to rear their sub-normal children to maturity. . . . *If conditions remain what they are now, and if the present tendency continues unchecked, we may look forward in a century or two to a time when a quarter of the population of these islands will consist of half-wits. What a curiously squalid and humiliating conclusion to English history!* What is the remedy for the present deplorable state of affairs? It consists, obviously, in encouraging the normal and super-normal members of the population to have larger families and in preventing the sub-normal from having any families at all" (emphasis in original).

Huxley continued:

"But encouragement of normal and super-normal fertility would do nothing to diminish the fertility of the sub-normal. Mental deficients are congenitally incapable of acting on grounds of enlightened self-interest; nor can they exercise self-control or foresight in the name of an abstract principle, or for the sake of a cause recognized to be good. They cannot be expected, therefore, to limit their own fertility. It follows that, in one way or another, their fertility must be limited for them. Compulsory sterility is already imposed on idiots and imbeciles, who pass their lives in asylums, where they are prevented form propagating their species. . . . Eugenic sterilization has been practiced for some time in America, where it is legal in more than half the states of the Union. In Canada, it is now legal in the province of Alberta. The operation is extensively performed in Switzerland, and in Germany the sterilization of defectives has been legal and compulsory since the beginning of this year."

## Nietzsche, Mencken, and Wells

Bradshaw's introduction contains useful background material on some of the factors influencing Huxley in the immediate post-World War I period. There is a very interesting chapter on Huxley's relation, in the 1920-26 period, with the American writer Henry Louis Mencken. What attracted Mencken in the first place to Huxley, was that "the greatest single influence on Mencken's life and work" was the 19th-century writings of Thomas Henry Huxley, whom Mencken considered "perhaps the greatest Englishman of all time." Aldous had already approached Mencken in writing, drawn by the latter's biting attacks on American cultural life, and Mencken responded enthusiastically when he realized Aldous was T.H.'s grandson.

In response to a communication, Mencken sent Aldous his translation of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Der Antichrist.* According to Bradshaw, "from his earliest writings to his last, Nietzsche was adamant that culture could flourish only where the many have been subjugated to the few. . . . Nietzsche's emphasis on caste is stressed by Mencken in his *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche* (1908) and in his compilation of *The Gist of Nietzsche* (1910), and it is significant that in both books, Mencken identifies a passage from *The Antichrist* (1895) as the kernel of Nietzsche's philosophy. . . . Christian dogma and humanitarian ethics were anathema to Nietzsche." The Nietzschean influence in much of Aldous Huxley's own social writings is clear.

In the second part of his introductory remarks, Bradshaw debunks a myth that has circulated in British circles, that Huxley was opposed to the ideas and proposals of H.G. Wells. In fact, Wells presented Huxley with a "presentation copy" of his *The Open Conspiracy,* published in 1928. In this book, Wells calls for the establishment of a "world economic system," a "world directorate serving the common ends of the race," and so on. Bradshaw points out that Huxley's "adumbration of the future use of eugenics," beginning with writings in the latter 1920s, "owes much to the work of H.G. Wells. . . . Huxley had a great deal in common with Wells between the mid-1920s and the mid-1930s, not least his conviction that the state must take eugenic measures to arrest the multiplication of the unfit."

There is much more useful material in these introductory remarks, on Huxley's hierarchical-caste views and the like. Bradshaw repeatedly tries to find excuses for Huxley, mainly by arguing, in effect, that some views which may seem abhorrent, were nothing more than the *Zeitgeist* among leading British circles. That is hardly an excuse, however, but rather an indictment, of a species for whom Aldous Huxley is an important representative. To understand that *Zeitgeist* better, this book is worth reading.