

Joseph Cantrell

The Amity of Enlightenment

Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* shows happiness is dictated by the mutual acceptance of society and individual thought. If one can both embrace living in society and retain their own individual thought with the encouragement of society, happiness is evident. There are illusions created to maintain social stability and sometimes abused to suppress enlightenment. These illusions offer happiness through an artificial mutual acceptance for which the enlightened may see no value. Successful critique of this falseness is an avenue of satisfaction which must be guaranteed to the enlightened. Critique allows the individual to accept society by understanding the logic of its limitations and thus manifest happiness within.

In *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley presents the masses as happy slaves and the enlightened as unhappy leaders in a fictional future utopia. These people are conditioned to love and hate certain environments and ideas immediately after birth through the use of classical conditioning. Mustapha Mond received a vast education to lead this world as an Alpha citizen. He was first at odds with the society and wanted to continue studying science outside of it, but changed his mind as he conceded there was no better alternative to its current structure. He understood society's ways and embraced them as society also embraced him. He achieved happiness within the society by his own reasoning. Mustapha notes, "Actual happiness always looks pretty squalid in comparison with the over-compensations for misery. And, of course, stability isn't nearly so spectacular as instability" (Huxley, 119). Mustapha observes our greatest moments spur from desire synthesized by instability, and he reasons true happiness can never hope to match the satisfaction gained from success in the face of adversity. Mustapha chose government work over science because he knew his over-compensations would be much more

satisfactory just as Hemmholtz chose a difficult life on an island to inspire artistic works in which could take more pride.

Brave New World contained several other fictional societies in which freedom of thought was disastrous. Huxley presented a society consisting only of enlightened Alphas in Cyprus. However, low-level jobs usually assigned to lower castes were inflicted upon enlightened Alphas. These Alphas recognized their own potential and were at odds with society's production constructs, resulting in a massive civil war that destroyed most of the society. Huxley's Ireland experiment showed that individuals did not seek enlightenment to herald their happiness; they simply consumed more soma to receive a more instant form of happiness without much effort. Mustapha Mond says of this extra time, "Those three and a half hours of extra leisure were so far from being a source of happiness, that people felt constrained to take a holiday from them" (Huxley, 120). The soma consumption was their holiday from the unrest generated by excess leisure time. Freeing the mind beyond the norm of society yields unhappiness with the stability driven limitations imposed on the society.

However, John the Savage was not born in this society and struggles to be happy in it. In the end, the Savage sought to escape from his world, and after gradual self-destruction he fled the society to a remote area. However, as long as he was alive, he could not escape the world around him as a free-thinking individual. The world found him with helicopters and asked him to express himself freely. The Savage despised society's embrace and rejected it. The Savage began to realize his only solution of escape from society was suicide. However, he neglected the aspect of human biology giving way to classical conditioning. Had the Savage worked to habituate better attitudes and understanding toward the society, his embracement of it could have become axiomatic.

In Plato's Allegory of the Cave portion of *The Republic*, a prisoner dwells unhappily in a cave after his forceful enlightenment. The prisoner becomes unhappy as he is brought back from enlightenment in the sun to live with the prisoners and their societal constructs. However, Plato remarks the prisoner can "learn by degrees to endure the sight of being, and of the brightest and best of being" (Plato, 4-5). The prisoner must condition himself over time, with great effort, to accept the world and its happiness in order to foster his own sense of happiness. The prisoner who fights this will engineer his own demise by society's hands or his own. Because the enlightenment gives way to unhappiness with society, society strays to an avoidance of enlightenment, and eliminates those who seek it. Plato presents politics as an avenue of conditioning, enlightenment, and happiness. Politics is a place for the enlightened to convene together and work for the betterment of humanity and thus themselves.

In *On History*, Kant argues that freedom of the mind is an essential right of mankind. Because governance of mankind is necessary to progress and maintain it, the right to criticize the limitations and mandates imposed by the government must be closely guarded. Although labor may bring about unhappiness due to its restriction of freedom, criticism of it later is a freedom which must be protected. Kant uses religion as an example of an illusion that has been abused throughout history. He notes religion, when abused, is "not only the most harmful but the most degrading of all" (Kant, 9). If one relies on others and never seeks enlightenment, it hurts mankind as a whole. The escape from self-incurred tutelage lies in free thought.

Kant argues that humans biologically care for free thought, and its denial naturally leads to human misery. Kant reasons, "the propensity and vocation to free thinking – this gradually works back upon the character of the people" (Kant, 10). Religion and politics are very powerful tools for the encouragement and the silencing of enlightenment. Free thought can be used to

shape these entities for the betterment of mankind. Happiness will follow society's acceptance of enlightenment.

In *Affluenza*, De Graaf argues the source of people's unhappiness is their own aspirations. He claims seeking increased consumption is a feedback loop resulting in more unhappiness and more desire for consumption. This insatiability is conditioned from birth through advertisements and society as a whole. De Graaf's solution lies in caring for all of humanity and inspiring happiness in others through kind words and actions. De Graaf presents many different implementations of this idea in *Affluenza*. De Graaf argues learning about the world is necessary to appreciate it and manifesting a desire to change the world is possible by realizing it is in one's best interest to do so. Existing in culmination, one realizes individual actions affect humanity and the world as a whole as well. This person then becomes a happy slave of the world.

De Graaf shows people form groups adhering to a lifestyle of voluntary simplicity to reduce the strain on the world's resources. Serving the world with this recognition in mind facilitates their happiness. This voluntary simplicity can be practiced in wide communities that grow in number as others see success in their neighbors' happiness. Duane Elgin says, "For a long time they felt alone, but now they're beginning to find each other" (De Graaf, 187). De Graaf argues changing the world through political activism is also very rewarding in much the same manner. Politics allows one to alter the effects of others on the world through legal force. This provides a mandate to which to adhere that may be enacted better than with one's own will alone.

Enlightenment among illusion giving way to misery is a common theme across these four works. Plato's shadows are false knowledge, false beliefs, and false desires. Kant calls these

shadows self-incurred tutelage. De Graaf's self-incurred tutelage is insatiability, and Huxley's is engineered happiness. Huxley's solution for insatiability is conditioning combined with soma. As societal and individual stability is achieved, the desires of people can be conditioned without their backlash. All four authors reason that enlightenment is difficult to achieve, and therefore requires some amount of work and unhappiness. When an individual's needs are met then happiness is achieved, and in times of happiness an individual will not seek enlightenment because he has no reason to do so. Mustapha Mond says to the Savage, "What you ought to do is on the whole so pleasant, so many of the natural impulses are allowed free play, that there really aren't any temptations to resist" (Huxley, 127). There is no obstacle to overcome, and therefore there is no need to choose enlightenment over happiness. This solution worked well for the society in *Brave New World*, but an outsider found it overly radical. John the Savage challenged the society and attempted radical change by forcing the society to accept his ideas. However, society was not fond of his aggression and retaliated. The Savage retreated away to a cabin, but later he was embraced by the society. They flooded in by helicopter to witness his ideation and even to rejoice with him. The Savage rejected this society even though it accepted him, and resolved his only reconciliation was death. The Savage pushed his own back up against a self-incurred mental wall formed by tutelage conditioned in his old society, and finally broke this wall down down by his own hand. The Savage is a very strong believer in religion, and his last given words are, "Oh, my God, my God" (Huxley, 139). Kant stated misused religion is the most harmful tutelage, and Huxley offers a solid affirmation of this belief. However, De Graaf mentions religion in a very positive light as places of fellowship and rejoicing, and offers a strategic silence of its downfalls for enlightenment. Each author posits forced illusions yield

unhappiness as the truth can always be brought out by individual thought, leaving individuals restless with society's synthesized shadows.

The intent of these illusions is to manufacture happiness in people by giving them a means for universal acceptance. Religion can be used very well to establish accepting beliefs of each individual as well as society, but it can also be used very dangerously to foster hatred of enlightened individuals. Plato's shadows serve the same purpose, and the enlightened individuals are killed by the cave society. The cave society decided enlightenment beyond the cave led to unhappiness, and thus all seeking enlightenment would be executed. The intent is to retain mental focus on the shadows until they become axiomatic, and this makes enlightenment more arduous for the individual. In *Brave New World*, this is done from birth using classical conditioning methods of association and repetition. This also applies to the modern world, where *Affluenza* shows the scope of increasing consumption accomplished by advertising and conditioning. The intent is to foster happiness in consumption, but not all people can consume as much as they desire. Some people cannot consume enough to survive in society, while others drown themselves in manufactured luxuries. In the consumption-driven society, this leads to massive amounts of debt and unhappiness due to financial insecurity. *Affluenza* notes this is a common problem and societal pressure makes escape very difficult, but possible. The escape De Graaf promises is contingent on the accessibility of enlightenment Kant emphasizes.

A society must take care to foster free thought or else suffer the destruction of enlightened individuals by themselves or others. If society does not accept individual thought, the society will destroy the individuals practicing it. If the individual's thoughts do not accept society, he will self-destruct. Huxley painted a picture of civil war in the Alpha society, where there is a mutual unacceptance between society and free thought. Huxley says, "all people

detailed for low-grade work were perpetually intriguing for high-grade jobs.” The Alphas with less coveted more because their neighbors had more and they were equipotential twins. They refused to accept their society because of their insatiability while society forced them to work menial jobs even with their enlightened state. This is similar to Plato’s prisoner who performs the shadow ritual with great distress. De Graaf’s offer of voluntary simplicity and enlightenment eliminates this need of consumption, but it is difficult to enact without the support of society.

Brave New World shows happiness is dictated by the mutual acceptance of society and individual thought. *Affluenza* demonstrates this in a modern, realistic context rather than Huxley’s fictional one. Huxley painted a picture of a future utopia achieved through human innovation and enlightenment but refuting these same values with its systems. Illusions cast unhappiness on the enlightened, but these individuals can condition themselves to accept the society just as they were conditioned to revile it. Happiness can be achieved within if the individual’s thoughts embrace society through understanding and this action is reciprocated to the individual.

Bibliography

Graaf, John De, David Wann, and Thomas H. Naylor. *Affluenza*. N.p.: Berrett-Koehler, 2005.

Print.

Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. N.p.: Global Grey, 2015. PDF.

Kant, Immanuel. *On History*. Lewis Beck ed. New York: Macmillan, 1963. PDF.

Plato. *The Republic*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. PDF.