

BRAVE

INTRODUCTION BY
YUVAL NOAH HARARI

NEW

ALDOUS HUXLEY

WORLD

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ALDOUS HUXLEY

Aldous Huxley was born on 26 July 1894 near Godalming, Surrey. He began writing poetry and short stories in his early twenties, but it was his first novel, *Crome Yellow* (1921), which established his literary reputation. This was swiftly followed by *Antic Hay* (1923), *Those Barren Leaves* (1925) and *Point Counter Point* (1928) – bright, brilliant satires of contemporary society. For most of the 1920s Huxley lived in Italy but in the 1930s he moved to Sanary, near Toulon.

In the years leading up to the Second World War, Huxley's work took on a more sombre tone in response to the confusion of a society which he felt to be spinning dangerously out of control. His great novels of ideas, including his most famous work *Brave New World* (published in 1932 this warned against the dehumanising aspects of scientific and material 'progress') and the pacifist novel *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936) were accompanied by a series of wise and brilliant essays, collected in volume form under titles such as *Music at Night* (1931) and *Ends and Means* (1937).

In 1937, at the height of his fame, Huxley left Europe to live in California, working for a time as a screenwriter in Hollywood. As the West braced itself for war, Huxley came increasingly to believe that the key to solving the world's problems lay in changing the individual through mystical enlightenment. The exploration of the inner life through mysticism and hallucinogenic drugs was to dominate his work for the rest of his life. His beliefs found expression in both fiction (*Time Must Have a Stop*, 1944 and *Island*, 1962) and non-fiction (*The Perennial Philosophy*, 1945, *Grey Eminence*, 1941 and the famous account of his first mescaline experience, *The Doors of Perception*, 1954).

Huxley died in California on 22 November 1963.

ALSO BY ALDOUS HUXLEY

Novels

Crome Yellow
Antic Hay
Those Barren Leaves
Point Counter Point
Eyeless in Gaza
After Many a Summer Time
Must Have a Stop
Ape and Essence
The Genius and the Goddess
Island

Short Stories

Limbo
Mortal Coils
Little Mexican
Two or Three Graces
Brief Candles
The Gioconda Smile
(Collected Short Stories)

Biography

Grey Eminence
The Devils of Loudun

Travel

Along the Road
Jesting Pilate
Beyond the Mexique Bay

Poetry and Drama

The Burning Wheel
Jonah
The Defeat of Youth
Leda
Verses and a Comedy
The Gioconda Smile

Essays and Belles Lettres

On the Margin
Proper Studies
Do What You Will
Music at Night
Texts and Pretexts
The Olive Tree
Ends and Means
The Art of Seeing
The Perennial Philosophy
Science, Liberty and Peace
Themes and Variations
The Doors of Perception
Adonis and the Alphabet
Heaven and Hell
Brave New World Revisited
Literature and Science
The Human Situation
Moksha

For Children

The Crows of Pearblossom

ALDOUS HUXLEY

Brave New World

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
Yuval Noah Harari

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Vintage
20 Vauxhall Bridge Road,
London SW1V 2SA

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This edition reissued by Vintage Classics in 2022
First published by Vintage in 1994
First published in Great Britain by Chatto & Windus in 1932

www.vintage-books.co.uk

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 9781784877750

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorised representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland,
Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

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INTRODUCTION

The most important technological revolution of the twenty-first century is the ability to hack human beings. To hack human beings means to understand them better than they understand themselves. If a government or a corporation understands us better than we understand ourselves, it can then predict our feelings and decisions, manipulate our feelings and decisions, and eventually make all the crucial decisions on our behalf.

In order to hack human beings, you need three things: a lot of biological knowledge, a lot of data, and a lot of computing power. Until today, nobody had all of these. Even the most totalitarian regimes did not have enough biological knowledge, enough data and enough computing power to systematically hack millions of people. So even in Nazi Germany or in the Soviet Union, the government could not really know and manipulate what every person was thinking and feeling.

But soon, some governments and corporations will have enough biological knowledge, enough data and enough computing power to monitor all the people all the time, and to know what each of us is thinking and feeling in every

moment. They will know us better than we know ourselves. What will happen then?

If the power to hack humans falls into the hands of a twenty-first-century Stalin, the result will be the worst totalitarian regime in history. It will be far worse than anything seen in the twentieth century. And there are already several applicants for the job of twenty-first-century Stalin. But even if we avoid the establishment of such a digital dictatorship, the power to hack humans might still undermine human freedom in a myriad of ways.

As people rely on algorithms to make more and more individual and collective decisions, authority will gradually shift from humans to these algorithms. This shift is already under way: billions of people trust the Facebook algorithm to tell us what is new, the Google algorithm to tell us what is true, Google Maps to tell us where to go, Netflix to tell us what to watch, and the Amazon algorithm to tell us what to buy.

Humans are used to thinking about life as a drama of decision-making. Liberal democracy and free-market capitalism see the individual as an autonomous agent constantly making choices about the world. Works of art – be they Shakespeare plays, Tolstoy novels, or tacky Hollywood comedies – usually revolve around the hero having to make some particularly crucial decision: to be or not to be? To stay with Mr Karenin or run away with the dashing Count Vronsky? Christian and Muslim theology similarly focus on the drama of decision-making, arguing that everlasting salvation or damnation depends on making the right choice. What will happen once algorithms tell us what to do, and even refashion our bodies and brains?

If and when this happens, human life will cease to be a drama of decision-making. Democratic elections and free markets will make little sense. So will most religions and works of art. Imagine your favourite Shakespeare play with all the crucial decisions made by the Google algorithm. Hamlet will have a much more comfortable life, but what kind of life will it be? Do we have philosophical and spiritual models for making sense of such a life?

We are enjoying an unprecedented technological bonanza, but at the same time we are facing philosophical bankruptcy. The usual bargain between philosophers and politicians is that philosophers have a lot of fanciful ideas, and politicians explain that they cannot be implemented due to lack of means. Now we are in the opposite situation. The new technologies are giving politicians the means to create heaven and hell, but the philosophers are having trouble conceptualizing what the new heaven and hell will look like.

History abhors a vacuum. And history won't wait for us. If we fail to conceptualise the new heaven quickly enough, we might be easily misled by naïve utopias. And if we fail to conceptualize the new hell quickly enough, we might find ourselves trapped in it with no way out. So we need a map of the new heaven and hell, and we need it fast. We need a guidebook to the future.

Perhaps the best guidebook I know is an oldie: Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. The book explores what happens when the government can hack humans, and can control society by manipulating the internal realities of our bodies instead of the external realities of the world.

Huxley wrote his masterpiece in 1931, and he didn't know anything about genetics, artificial intelligence or the Internet.

His technological vision of the future is therefore outdated. Readers will have to bear with that. Yet despite its technological obsolescence, *Brave New World* is the most prophetic book of the twentieth century, and one of the most profound discussions of technology in modern philosophy. Indeed, with each passing year *Brave New World* is becoming even more relevant.

When Huxley wrote *Brave New World*, Soviet Communism was ascending to new heights of brutality, Fascism was entrenching in Italy, Nazism was about to take over Germany, militaristic Japan was embarking on its war of conquest in China, and the world was gripped by the Great Depression. Yet Huxley managed to see through all these dark clouds, and envision a future society without wars, famines and plagues, enjoying uninterrupted peace, abundance and health. It is a consumerist world, which gives completely free rein to sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll, and whose supreme value is happiness. The underlying assumption of the book is that humans are biochemical algorithms, that science can hack the human algorithm, and that technology can then be used to manipulate not just individuals but entire societies.

In Huxley's brave new world, the World Government uses advanced biotechnology and social engineering to make sure that everyone is always content, and no one has any reason to rebel. There is therefore no need of secret police, of concentration camps, or of an Orwellian Ministry of Love. Indeed, Huxley's genius consists in showing that people can be controlled far more securely through love, pleasure and consumption than through violence, fear and austerity.

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, it is clear that Orwell is describing a frightening, nightmarish world, and the only question left is

'How do we avoid reaching such a terrible state?' Reading *Brave New World* is a far more disconcerting and challenging experience, because you are hard-pressed to put your finger on what exactly makes it dystopian. The world is peaceful and prosperous, and everyone is supremely satisfied all the time. What could possibly be wrong with that?

When *Brave New World* was published in 1932, both Huxley and his readers knew perfectly well that he was describing a dangerous dystopia. Yet many present-day readers could easily mistake *Brave New World* for a utopia, and our consumerist society is actually geared to realizing Huxley's vision. Today happiness is the supreme value, and we increasingly use biotechnology and social engineering to ensure maximum satisfaction to all citizen-customers. You want to know what could be wrong with that? Read *Brave New World*. The climactic dialogue between Mustapha Mond and John the Savage is among the most profound discussions of technology, happiness and the meaning of life in modern Western philosophy.

Yuval Noah Harari
September 2019

Les utopies apparaissent comme bien plus réalisables qu'on ne le croyait autrefois. Et nous nous trouvons actuellement devant une question bien autrement angoissante: Comment éviter leur réalisation définitive? . . . Les utopies sont réalisables. La vie marche vers les utopies. Et peut-être un siècle nouveau commence-t-il, un siècle où les intellectuels et la classe cultivée rêveront aux moyens d'éviter les utopies et de retourner à une société non utopique, moins 'parfaite' et plus libre.

NICOLAS BERDIAEFF

FOREWORD

CHRONIC REMORSE, AS all the moralists are agreed, is a most undesirable sentiment. If you have behaved badly, repent, make what amends you can and address yourself to the task of behaving better next time. On no account brood over your wrongdoing. Rolling in the muck is not the best way of getting clean.

Art also has its morality, and many of the rules of this morality are the same as, or at least analogous to, the rules of ordinary ethics. Remorse, for example, is as undesirable in relation to our bad art as it is in relation to our bad behaviour. The badness should be hunted out, acknowledged and, if possible, avoided in the future. To pore over the literary shortcomings of twenty years ago, to attempt to patch a faulty work into the perfection it missed at its first execution, to spend one's middle age in trying to mend the artistic sins committed and bequeathed by that different person who was oneself in youth – all this is surely vain and futile. And that is why this new *Brave New World* is the same as the old one. Its defects as a work of art are considerable; but in order to correct them I should have to rewrite the book – and in the process of rewriting, as an older, other person, I should probably get rid not only of some of the faults of the story, but

also of such merits as it originally possessed. And so, resisting the temptation to wallow in artistic remorse, I prefer to leave both well and ill alone and to think about something else.

In the meantime, however, it seems worth while at least to mention the most serious defect in the story, which is this. The Savage is offered only two alternatives, an insane life in Utopia, or the life of a primitive in an Indian village, a life more human in some respects, but in others hardly less queer and abnormal. At the time the book was written this idea, that human beings are given free will in order to choose between insanity on the one hand and lunacy on the other, was one that I found amusing and regarded as quite possibly true. For the sake, however, of dramatic effect, the Savage is often permitted to speak more rationally than his upbringing among the practitioners of a religion that is half fertility cult and half *Penitente* ferocity would actually warrant. Even his acquaintance with Shakespeare would not in reality justify such utterances. And at the close, of course, he is made to retreat from sanity; his native *Penitente*-ism reasserts its authority and he ends in maniacal self-torture and despairing suicide. 'And so they died miserably ever after' – much to the reassurance of the amused, Pyrrhonic aesthete who was the author of the fable.

Today I feel no wish to demonstrate that sanity is impossible. On the contrary, though I remain no less sadly certain than in the past that sanity is a rather rare phenomenon, I am convinced that it can be achieved and would like to see more of it. For having said so in several recent books and, above all, for having compiled an anthology of what the sane have said about sanity and all the means whereby it can be achieved, I have been told by an eminent academic critic that I am a sad symptom of the failure of an intellectual class in time of crisis. The implication being, I suppose, that the professor and his colleagues are hilarious symptoms of success. The benefactors

of humanity deserve due honour and commemoration. Let us build a Pantheon for professors. It should be located among the ruins of one of the gutted cities of Europe or Japan, and over the entrance to the ossuary I would inscribe, in letters six or seven feet high, the simple words: SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF THE WORLD'S EDUCATORS. SI MONUMENTUM REQUIRIS CIRCUMSPICE.

But to return to the future . . . If I were now to rewrite the book, I would offer the Savage a third alternative. Between the utopian and the primitive horns of his dilemma would lie the possibility of sanity – a possibility already actualized, to some extent, in a community of exiles and refugees from the Brave New World, living within the borders of the Reservation. In this community economics would be decentralist and Henry-Georgian, politics Kropotkinesque and co-operative. Science and technology would be used as though, like the Sabbath, they had been made for man, not (as at present and still more so in the Brave New World) as though man were to be adapted and enslaved to them. Religion would be the conscious and intelligent pursuit of man's Final End, the unitive knowledge of the immanent Tao or Logos, the transcendent Godhead or Brahman. And the prevailing philosophy of life would be a kind of High Utilitarianism, in which the Greatest Happiness principle would be secondary to the Final End principle – the first question to be asked and answered in every contingency of life being: 'How will this thought or action contribute to, or interfere with, the achievement, by me and the greatest possible number of other individuals, of man's Final end?'

Brought up among the primitives, the Savage (in this hypothetical new version of the book) would not be transported to Utopia until he had had an opportunity of learning something at first hand about the nature of a society composed of freely co-operating individuals devoted to the pursuit

of sanity. Thus altered, *Brave New World* would possess an artistic and (if it is permissible to use so large a word in connection with a work of fiction) a philosophical completeness, which in its present form it evidently lacks.

But *Brave New World* is a book about the future and, whatever its artistic or philosophical qualities, a book about the future can interest us only if its prophecies look as though they might conceivably come true. From our present vantage point, fifteen years further down the inclined plane of modern history, how plausible do its prognostications seem? What has happened in the painful interval to confirm or invalidate the forecasts of 1931?

One vast and obvious failure of foresight is immediately apparent. *Brave New World* contains no reference to nuclear fission. That it does not is actually rather odd; for the possibilities of atomic energy had been a popular topic of conversation for years before the book was written. My old friend, Robert Nichols, had even written a successful play about the subject, and I recall that I myself had casually mentioned it in a novel published in the late twenties. So it seems, as I say, very odd that the rockets and helicopters of the seventh century of Our Ford should not have been powered by disintegrating nuclei. The oversight may not be excusable; but at least it can be easily explained. The theme of *Brave New World* is not the advancement of science as such; it is the advancement of science as it affects human individuals. The triumphs of physics, chemistry and engineering are tacitly taken for granted. The only scientific advances to be specifically described are those involving the application to human beings of the results of future research in biology, physiology and psychology. It is only by means of the sciences of life that the quality of life can be radically changed. The sciences of matter can be applied in such a way that they will destroy life or make the living of it impossibly complex and uncomfortable;

but, unless used as instruments by the biologists and psychologists, they can do nothing to modify the natural forms and expression of life itself. The release of atomic energy marks a great revolution in human history, but not (unless we blow ourselves to bits and so put an end to history) the final and most searching revolution.

This really revolutionary revolution is to be achieved, not in the external world, but in the souls and flesh of human beings. Living as he did in a revolutionary period, the Marquis de Sade very naturally made use of this theory of revolutions in order to rationalize his peculiar brand of insanity. Robespierre had achieved the most superficial kind of revolution, the political. Going a little deeper, Babeuf had attempted the economic revolution. Sade regarded himself as the apostle of the truly revolutionary revolution, beyond mere politics and economics – the revolution of individual men, women and children, whose bodies were henceforward to become the common sexual property of all and whose minds were to be purged of all the natural decencies, all the laboriously acquired inhibitions of traditional civilization. Between Sadism and the really revolutionary revolution there is, of course, no necessary or inevitable connection. Sade was a lunatic and the more or less conscious goal of his revolution was universal chaos and destruction. The people who govern the Brave New World may not be sane (in what may be called the absolute sense of that word); but they are not mad men, and their aim is not anarchy but social stability. It is in order to achieve stability that they carry out, by scientific means, the ultimate, personal, really revolutionary revolution.

But meanwhile we are in the first phase of what is perhaps the penultimate revolution. Its next phase may be atomic warfare, in which case we do not have to bother with prophecies about the future. But it is conceivable that we may have enough sense, if not to stop fighting altogether, at least

to behave as rationally as did our eighteenth-century ancestors. The unimaginable horrors of the Thirty Years War actually taught men a lesson, and for more than a hundred years the politicians and generals of Europe consciously resisted the temptation to use their military resources to the limits of destructiveness or (in the majority of conflicts) to go on fighting until the enemy was totally annihilated. They were aggressors, of course, greedy for profit and glory; but they were also conservatives, determined at all costs to keep their world intact, as a going concern. For the last thirty years there have been no conservatives; there have only been nationalistic radicals of the right and nationalistic radicals of the left. The last conservative statesman was the fifth Marquess of Lansdowne; and when he wrote a letter to *The Times*, suggesting that the First World War should be concluded with a compromise, as most of the wars of the eighteenth century had been, the editor of that once conservative journal refused to print it. The nationalistic radicals had their way, with the consequences that we all know – Bolshevism, Fascism, inflation, depression, Hitler, the Second World War, the ruin of Europe and all but universal famine.

Assuming, then, that we are capable of learning as much from Hiroshima as our forefathers learned from Magdeburg, we may look forward to a period, not indeed of peace, but of limited and only partially ruinous warfare. During that period it may be assumed that nuclear energy will be harnessed to industrial uses. The result, pretty obviously, will be a series of economic and social changes unprecedented in rapidity and completeness. All the existing patterns of human life will be disrupted and new patterns will have to be improvised to conform with the nonhuman fact of atomic power. Procrustes in modern dress, the nuclear scientist will prepare the bed on which mankind must lie; and if mankind doesn't fit – well, that will be just too bad for mankind. There will have to be

some stretchings and a bit of amputation – the same sort of stretchings and amputations as have been going on ever since applied science really got into its stride, only this time they will be a good deal more drastic than in the past. These far from painless operations will be directed by highly centralized totalitarian governments. Inevitably so; for the immediate future is likely to resemble the immediate past, and in the immediate past rapid technological changes, taking place in a mass-producing economy and among a population predominantly propertyless, have always tended to produce economic and social confusion. To deal with confusion, power has been centralized and government control increased. It is probable that all the world's governments will be more or less completely totalitarian even before the harnessing of atomic energy; that they will be totalitarian during and after the harnessing seems almost certain. Only a large-scale popular movement towards decentralization and selfhelp can arrest the present tendency towards statism. At present there is no sign that such a movement will take place.

There is, of course, no reason why the new totalitarianisms should resemble the old. Government by clubs and firing squads, by artificial famine, mass imprisonment and mass deportation, is not merely inhumane (nobody cares much about that nowadays); it is demonstrably inefficient – and in an age of advanced technology, inefficiency is the sin against the Holy Ghost. A really efficient totalitarian state would be one in which the all-powerful executive of political bosses and their army of managers control a population of slaves who do not have to be coerced, because they love their servitude. To make them love it is the task assigned, in present-day totalitarian states, to ministries of propaganda, newspaper editors and school-teachers. But their methods are still crude and unscientific. The old Jesuits' boast that, if they were given the schooling of the child, they could answer for the man's

religious opinions, was a product of wishful thinking. And the modern pedagogue is probably rather less efficient at conditioning his pupils' reflexes than were the reverend fathers who educated Voltaire. The greatest triumphs of propaganda have been accomplished, not by doing something, but by refraining from doing. Great is the truth, but still greater, from a practical point of view is silence about truth. By simply not mentioning certain subjects, by lowering what Mr Churchill calls an 'iron curtain' between the masses and such facts or arguments as the local political bosses regard as undesirable, totalitarian propagandists have influenced opinion much more effectively than they could have done by the most eloquent denunciations, the most compelling of logical rebuttals. But silence is not enough. If persecution, liquidation and other symptoms of social friction are to be avoided, the positive sides of propaganda must be made as effective as the negative. The most important Manhattan Projects of the future will be vast government-sponsored inquiries into what the politicians and the participating scientist will call 'the problem of happiness' – in other words, the problem of making people love their servitude. Without economic security, the love of servitude cannot possibly come into existence; for the sake of brevity, I assume that the all-powerful executive and its managers will succeed in solving the problem of permanent security. But security tends very quickly to be taken for granted. Its achievement is merely a superficial, external revolution. The love of servitude cannot be established except as the result of a deep, personal revolution in human minds and bodies. To bring about that revolution we require, among others, the following discoveries and inventions. First, a greatly improved technique of suggestion – through infant conditioning and, later, with the aid of drugs, such as scopolamine. Second, a fully developed science of human differences, enabling government managers to assign any given individual to his or

her proper place in the social and economic hierarchy. (Round pegs in square holes tend to have dangerous thoughts about the social system and to infect others with their discontents.) Third (since reality, however utopian, is something from which people feel the need of taking pretty frequent holidays), a substitute for alcohol and the other narcotics, something at once less harmful and more pleasure-giving than gin or heroin. And fourth (but this would be a long-term project, which would take generations of totalitarian control to bring to a successful conclusion), a foolproof system of eugenics, designed to standardize the human product and so to facilitate the task of the managers. In *Brave New World* this standardization of the human product has been pushed to fantastic, though not perhaps impossible, extremes. Technically and ideologically we are still a long way from bottled babies and Bokanovsky groups of semimorons. But by A.F. 600, who knows what may not be happening? Meanwhile the other characteristic features of that happier and more stable world – the equivalents of *soma* and hypnopaedia and the scientific caste system – are probably not more than three or four generations away. Not does the sexual promiscuity of *Brave New World* seem so very distant. There are already certain American cities in which the number of divorces is equal to the number of marriages. In a few years, no doubt, marriage licences will be sold like dog licences, good for a period of twelve months, with no law against changing dogs or keeping more than one animal at a time. As political and economic freedom diminishes, sexual freedom tends compensatingly to increase. And the dictator (unless he needs cannon fodder and families with which to colonize empty or conquered territories) will do well to encourage that freedom. In conjunction with the freedom to daydream under the influence of dope and movies and the radio, it will help to reconcile his subjects to the servitude which is their fate.

All things considered, it looks as though Utopia were far closer to us than anyone, only fifteen years ago, could have imagined. Then, I projected it six hundred years into the future. Today it seems quite possible that the horror may be upon us within a single century. That is, if we refrain from blowing ourselves to smithereens in the interval. Indeed, unless we choose to decentralize and to use applied science, not as the end to which human beings are to be made the means, but as the means to producing a race of free individuals, we have only two alternatives to choose from: either a number of national, militarized totalitarianisms, having as their root the terror of the atomic bomb and as their consequence the destruction of civilization (or, if the warfare is limited, the perpetuation of militarism); or else one supra-national totalitarianism, called into existence by the social chaos resulting from rapid technological progress in general and the atom revolution in particular, and developing, under the need for efficiency and stability, into the welfare-tyranny of Utopia. You pays your money and you takes your choice.

Aldous Huxley, 1946