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Twilight of Utopias: Julian and Aldous Huxley in the Twentieth Century

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Abstract

The biologist Julian Huxley and his younger brother, the novelist Aldous Huxley, each presented a distinct approach to utopian thought in the twentieth century. Julian Huxley sketched a vision of ideal polity that was nothing less than global, calling for the creation of a unified world culture, a new religion predicated on the methods and discoveries of evolutionary biology, and, ultimately, the emergence of a global government. Aldous Huxley's vision of utopia was deliberately local, based on his view that the machinations of large states, however well intentioned, were a threat to human liberty. *Island*, Aldous Huxley's utopian novel of 1962, depicts a small cooperative society, employing low-impact technologies while drawing its worldview from a combination of modern science and Mahayana Buddhism. The distinct visions of the Huxley brothers did share one common trait which remains resonant today. Each identified ecological sustainability as the primary foundation for any plausible utopia.

Keywords

utopia, dystopia, ecology, agnostic, UNESCO, Huxley

Introduction

In the closing decade of the twentieth century, the historian Russell Jacoby lamented that, 'A utopian spirit—a sense that the future could transcend the present—has vanished... Someone who believes in utopias is widely considered either out to lunch or out to kill' (1999: xi). Because so many of the bloody ideological struggles of the twentieth century had been at least justified if not caused by competing visions of the ideal society, it seems only fair that the concept of utopia would be greeted with a greater degree of ridicule and even alarm by the end of that

century. On the other hand, as Jacoby has argued, the abandonment of all efforts to imagine how 'the future could transcend the present' threatens to suffocate any prospects of intelligent political or social reform, even at the stage of speculation.

As we seek to understand the dramatic eclipse of utopian thought in the twentieth century, the careers of the biologist Julian Huxley and the novelist and essayist Aldous Huxley are especially instructive. From the eve of the First World War to the nadir of the Cold War, the evolutionary biologist Julian Huxley was an enthusiastic advocate of such thought. During the 1920s Julian lavished praise on the utopian vision depicted in the novel *Men Like Gods* by his friend H.G. Wells, and highlighted its connection to biology (J. Huxley 1927: 70-78). With the advent of the Great Depression, Julian would argue, along with his ideological allies in the liberal British think-tank Political and Economic Planning (PEP), that a carefully planned society would foster the ideals of both individual fulfillment and social harmony better than a society in which market forces reigned (Overy 2009: 50-54, 93-98). As the first Director-General of the United Nations Educational Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) in the aftermath of World War II, Julian Huxley would generate great controversy by applying the technocratic vision that he had developed at PEP to the challenges of the entire postwar world. His treatise, *UNESCO: Its Purpose and Philosophy*, provides an intriguing blueprint of what has been called Julian Huxley's vision for a 'planetary utopia', complete within its own vision of a world culture and a new religion based on what he saw as the fundamental principles of evolutionary biology.¹

For his part, the satirical novelist Aldous Huxley had little patience for the technocratic utopianism that his older brother admired. In his first two novels, *Crome Yellow* (A. Huxley 1921) and *Antic Hay* (A. Huxley 1923), Aldous mocked what he saw as the facile armchair utopianism of his brother's friends and colleagues, especially the biologist J.B.S. Haldane.² Aldous also attended at least one PEP meeting in 1931, though

1. J. Huxley 1991. In 1991 the editors of the *UNESCO Courier* reprinted selections from Julian Huxley's original UNESCO treatise with this note: 'In 1946 the British scientist and humanist Julian Huxley wrote a long paper entitled *Unesco, its purpose and its philosophy*, in which he set forth guidelines for the new organization. The document was highly controversial. It was regarded by some as an attack on religion, by others as pro-communist. Eventually Unesco's General Conference refused to sponsor its publication. Over forty years later, Huxley's "planetary utopia" has lost none of its force or topicality' (see J. Huxley 1991: 41-42).

2. Portraying the conversations and intrigues of contemporary intellectuals at a country manor, *Crome Yellow* features a loquacious Mr. Scogan, whose visions of a

he would soon savage the goals of that group in *Brave New World* (A. Huxley 1932), a Swiftian parody of contemporary science fiction he affectionately called his 'bad utopia'. In spite of the joy Aldous found in lampooning the fantasies of technocratic utopians during the interwar period, however, he still felt compelled to wrestle with the idea of a serious utopia in the decades following World War II. The world would see Aldous Huxley's vision of small-scale, religiously eclectic, and ultimately fragile utopia in *Island*, published in 1962. Although the book had been significantly abridged by Huxley's editors and received a lukewarm reception from critics, its vision would be part of the inspiration for the back-to-the land and appropriate technology movements in the subsequent decades.

Taken together, the utopian musings of Julian and Aldous Huxley yield both a critique and a visionary expansion of the utopian ideal. As different as they were, each of the Huxley brothers saw a danger in a complacent belief in inevitable progress, the exaltation of the state above the individual, and in the tendency of many utopian movements to justify crimes against humanity in the present with visions of a dazzling paradise for humanity in the distant future. And yet, rather than rejecting what Russell Jacoby has called the 'utopian spirit' categorically, both Julian and Aldous expanded the concept of utopia to include a more sensitive and sustainable relationship between humanity and the ecological foundation to which it owes its very existence.

Julian Huxley: 'A Planetary Utopia'

Throughout their careers, both Julian and Aldous Huxley remained acutely aware of the legacy of their grandfather Thomas Henry Huxley, the Victorian biologist who had been nicknamed 'Darwin's bulldog' for his passionate defense of evolution. Even in the last years of his life, Aldous Huxley described himself as being, in the tradition established by his grandfather, 'a cheerleader for evolution', while the elder Huxley brother was so concerned with carrying on his grandfather's legacy that one of his peers made the at once unkind and unforgettable observation that Julian 'was so busy trying to be a Huxley that he couldn't be himself'

technocratic utopia are remarkably similar to those articulated by J.B.S. Haldane in a 1923 lecture entitled 'Daedalus: or Science and the Future' (A. Huxley 1922: 50). See also, J.B.S. Haldane, *Daedalus, or Science and the Future* in *Haldane's Daedalus Revisited* (Dronamraju 1995). Like Wells, Haldane was a friend of the Huxley family and collaborated with Julian Huxley in popularizing recent developments in biology. Haldane also furnished the inspiration for the oblivious and cuckolded biologist Shearwater in *Antic Hay* (A. Huxley 1923).

(Juliette Huxley 1986: 205).³ Although the Huxley brothers no doubt valued this intellectual inheritance, the crises of the twentieth century would compel them to re-interpret radically the vision of our place in nature that their grandfather had advanced at the close of the Victorian age. When Julian Huxley began his teaching career helping to found the biology department at Rice University in Texas in 1913, he departed from his grandfather's view, articulated in his 1893 opus *Evolution and Ethics*, that the process of evolution through natural selection could never provide an adequate basis for human ethics. Following this logic, T.H. Huxley had compared the progress of human civilization in taming the forces of nature to the same process by which English colonists in Tasmania might tame that alien landscape and make it more English (T. Huxley 2009 [1893]: 16-17).

While Julian Huxley would never quite reject his grandfather's affection for the British Empire, he did reject his rigid separation of evolutionary biology and human ethics. In fact, by 1913 Julian already conceived of evolutionary biology as being intimately related to the social and moral progress of human society. Among European and American intellectuals during the Belle Époque, this marriage of French philosopher Henri Bergson's (1911) conception of 'creative evolution' in biology to the visions of social progress was hardly unique, but Julian Huxley, in his first book, and in his public lectures in the 1910s, promoted the idea that biological evolution and human progress were intertwined with the fervor of an evangelist. Julian's vision of biosocial progress was not the Social Darwinism of the late Victorians, such as Herbert Spencer, but a gospel of efficiency infused with the values of mutual aid that had more in common with the thinking of the speculative fiction author and former Fabian socialist H.G. Wells.⁴

Where the Social Darwinists had stressed the element of competition in nature, Julian Huxley preferred to contemplate the other side of the

3. In a letter to Timothy Leary, Aldous Huxley writes, 'Become a cheerleader for evolution. That's what I did and my Grandfather before me' (Dunaway 1991: 354). More than a decade after her husband's death, Juliette Huxley included the 'so busy trying to be a Huxley' quip in her memoir, and ascribed it to the popular author Jerrard Tickell (Juliette Huxley 1986: 205).

4. The connection between H.G. Wells and the Huxley family spanned generations, as Wells had originally been a student of T.H. Huxley and would go on to co-author more than one biology textbook with Julian Huxley. For his part, Aldous described Wells as, 'that horrid, vulgar little man' and directed many of his sharpest barbs in *Brave New World* directly at Wells's 1923 utopian novel *Men Like Gods* (Murray 2002: 196, 249). For a discussion of the Wells's short tenure in the Fabian Society, see Wagar 2004: 17-19.

coin, the study of relationships between living things that had come to be known, since the German biologist Ernst Haeckel first coined the term in the 1860s, as ecology. Throughout his career, Julian Huxley adhered to a definition of ecology that was at once succinct and infinitely flexible: 'Ecology is the science of interrelations. It studies the balance to be achieved in a system of interacting factors' (J. Huxley 1961b). That his definition contains no delimiting reference to strictly biological factors highlights Julian Huxley's conviction that the heuristic tools of biology and especially ecology could help us to understand the complex dynamics of such human artifacts as nations, empires, and the sacred or secular belief systems that animate them. In his first book, *The Individual in the Animal Kingdom*, published just before he took up his teaching position at Rice, the young biologist made this ambitious declaration about the social meaning and application of recent developments in biology:

All roads lead to Rome: and even animal individuality throws a ray on human problems. The ideals of active harmony and mutual aid as the best means to power and progress; the hope that springs from life's power of transforming the old or of casting it from her in favor of the new; and the spur to effort in the knowledge that she does nothing lightly or without long struggle: these cannot but support and direct those men upon whom devolves the task of moulding and inspiring that unwieldiest individual—formless and blind today, but huge with possibility—the State (J. Huxley 1912: 154).

Julian Huxley's thinking in this regard was hardly unique at the time. In his book *Imperial Ecology*, the historian of science Peder Anker describes how during the first half of the twentieth century there was, throughout the English-speaking world, 'a remarkable explosion of ecological reasoning from botany to animals, society, economy, knowledge, history, psychology, science fiction, and even poetry'. Citing Julian Huxley as one proponent of this expansive application of ecological thought beyond the strict parameters of biology, Anker explains the growth of ecological discourse as the result of three major factors: 'the ecologists' ability to entangle the aims of national economy with the economy of nature, their ability to connect with imperial patronage networks, and finally their inclusion of human beings in a framework of analysis helpful to colonial management and population policy' (Anker 2001: 237). In the context of American social thought during the early twentieth century, American universities such as Rice and the University of Chicago emerged as important nodes in the nexus between ecological science and liberal social thought. Developing arguments similar to those that had been advanced by Julian Huxley and others prior to the First World War, American ecologists such as Alfred Emerson argued

that interdependence and cooperation had been neglected as essential factors in evolutionary biology and offered valuable models for human social relations in the modern world (Mitman 1992: 64-71, 111, 121).

Ultimately, Julian Huxley would leave Rice University to serve in the British Army Intelligence Corps during World War I. Over the course of the interwar decades, he became known on both sides of the Atlantic not merely as biologist but as a 'statesman of science', promoting the popularization of the life sciences through the new media of radio and film, serving as the director of the London Zoological Society from 1935 to 1942, and working for the British Ministry of Information as part of the war effort. During this period, Julian Huxley's combined interest in both biology and a well-planned technocratic society colored his view of world events. Visiting the Soviet Union in 1930, he would express a glowing admiration of its commitment to state-funded scientific research, though it would not be long before he would become critical of Stalin's commitment to Lysenkoism (the widely discredited theory, maintained by Soviet scientist Trofim Lysenko, that acquired traits could be heritable) and its damaging effect on life sciences in the USSR. On his many visits to the United States during this period, Julian Huxley would become a great promoter of New Deal projects such as the Tennessee Valley Authority, praising the project as much for fighting soil erosion as for generating electricity and creating jobs. Regarding the rise of the Third Reich in Germany, Julian Huxley presented perhaps the first systematic critique of the racial pseudoscience taught in German schools and universities after 1933.⁵ While his brother Aldous would remain loyal to a strict pacifism in the face of the Third Reich, and would ultimately leave London for Los Angeles as war became more likely, Julian Huxley was an early critic of the Nazi regime, and would dedicate his considerable energy to the war effort. Though he was over fifty years of age when Britain went to war against Germany in 1939, Julian Huxley was eager to serve the war effort in any way he could. In her autobiography, *Leaves of the Tulip Tree*, Juliette Huxley describes her deep apprehension in the fall of 1941 when Julian volunteered to serve the Ministry of Information by crossing the Atlantic to promote the British war effort directly to the American public: 'He was catching a transport leaving

5. In the thirties Julian Huxley was among the most outspoken critics of the intra-European 'race' theory of the Nazis, but his own views on race relations retained a lingering bias against individuals of African descent, that he had exhibited since at least the 1920s. For an incisive discussion of how Julian's views on race affected his work for UNESCO, see Sluga 2010: 410-13. For Julian Huxley's thorough critique of Nazi race theory, see Huxley, Carr-Saunders, and Haddon 1935.

from a northern port in the deep secrecy which now shrouded every sailing as the German submarines were swarming the seas like hungry sharks' (Juliette Huxley 1986: 181). When Julian arrived in New York, just days before the attack on Pearl Harbor, he was asked by an American reporter at the gangplanks if he wanted the United States to enter the war. According to his memoirs, he gave a qualified response: 'Yes, but only under certain circumstances'. This was simplified in the press as 'He Wants War' and Julian received a torrent of hate mail. Days later, after Pearl Harbor, the hate mail stopped and Julian recalled that, 'I was welcome everywhere I went' (J. Huxley 1970: 262).

Just months after the defeat of the Axis powers, the Conference of Allied Ministers of Education met in London to draw up plans for UNESCO. Julian Huxley's international reputation as a scientist and public intellectual, as well as his work for the war effort, made him a favored candidate to lead the new organization. Taking the helm at UNESCO in 1946, just as emerging tensions with the Soviet Union were darkening an already uncertain postwar landscape, Julian Huxley would present a view of the human situation that was different from the ideologies of the Eastern and Western blocs, because it was predicated, unlike communism or liberalism, on an ecological approach to the human situation. Along with contemporaries in biology, literature, and social planning such as the ecologist Arthur Tansley,⁶ and the ornithologist Max Nicholson, Julian was part of an intellectual community that 'explained human faculties in ecological terms: the human abilities to reason, to will, to envision and plan for the future, to recapture past histories, to organize knowledge, and to perceive and learn were all explained according to ecological principles' (Anker 2001: 10-12). Not surprisingly, Julian believed that he was more than qualified to implement these ideas about human ecology as the first director-general of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (Anker 2001: 3). In the eyes of Julian and other members of Britain's Political and Economic Planning group, the experience of helping to manage the Empire made British elites ideally suited to manage the new international organizations that were to shape the postwar order. As his friend and fellow ecologist Max Nicholson would later recall, 'experience with the newly-fledged United Nations, and with such international agencies as UNESCO strongly suggested that the high ideals and ambitious programs of such world bodies tended to make little progress...unless

6. Arthur Tansley began his career as a botanist when he worked directly under T.H. Huxley at the University College London. He soon expanded his studies into ecology (Anker 2001: 10-12).

they were given an injection of British administrative manpower and expertise...’ (Nicholson 1970: 195).

His British expertise notwithstanding, the philosophy that Julian Huxley brought to his management of UNESCO immediately after World War II invited public criticism from the U.S. State Department, American veterans’ groups and even from the Vatican.⁷ Julian Huxley’s musings on evolution in his *UNESCO: Its Purpose and Philosophy* (1947) generated a great deal of reaction in the United States, especially from the Texas chapter of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, who were appalled to see any U.S. tax dollars spent to support an internationalist organization headed by an agnostic and tireless evangelist for the theory of evolution. In his groundbreaking history of UNESCO, James Sewell writes that Julian’s extended essay had the impact of ‘a suitcase bomb’ (Sewell 1975: 158). On the other hand, many of the ideas that Julian expressed in his manifesto for UNESCO were consonant with the transatlantic community of modernist intellectuals with whom he had become even more involved during the thirties and forties. The influential modern architect Walter Gropius, for whom Julian had found work in London after the Nazis closed Bauhaus, expressed ideas that were very similar to Julian’s own. Addressing UNESCO in 1947, Gropius called for a new synthesis of ‘art, science, and religion’, and declared, ‘Only then will the individual be integrated with his community, carried by a new faith!’ (Welter 2002: xxi).

Julian Huxley’s confidence that a wise technocratic state, mastering the new tools and resources made available by advances in the applied sciences, could lead the human race to a brighter future had only been strengthened by the experience of the Second World War. During the last years of the war, Julian Huxley joined his longtime friend and colleague H.G. Wells to produce a series of radio broadcasts in which prominent biologists such as J.B.S. Haldane and W.F. Crick were invited to speak on the impact of new discoveries in biology on the future of the human race. Wells and Julian Huxley were both contributors to the program and collaborated in producing the anthology of readings, published under the title *Reshaping Man’s Heritage*. The introductory remarks to the volume present that odd combination of nascent ecological awareness and aggressive technological ambition that characterized the thinking of both men:

7. Under Huxley’s leadership, the Vatican press organ Fides Agency declared, ‘[UNESCO] is strongly marked by Anglo-Saxon pragmatism and relativism, by Latin laicism, by Oriental syncretism... And the communistic sympathies of many officials, experts and delegates should not be forgotten’ (Associated Press 1952).

Man forms part of the web of living things, plants, and animals, on some of which he depends for food and clothing. Other creatures, especially viruses, live upon him: he must master them or they will master him. Now man is continually refashioning the web: growing better plants and improving the soil in which they live, breeding finer animals, and searching for the best animal foodstuffs: in a word, reshaping the heredity and environment. He has explored the world, and by the invention of fire, clothing, houses, central heating, refrigeration, he has progressed toward independence of climate. Chemical science gives man mastery of the world of materials. Atoms are reshuffled to meet his needs. Man uses his brain to save his muscles, first by training other animals to work for him, later by harnessing the energy of wind and water, coal and oil (J. Huxley and Wells 1944: 5).

This thumbnail sketch of the place of human beings in nature marks an interesting point of transit between the triumphal plan of colonization outlined in T.H. Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* and the pleas for greater awareness of ecological limitations that first Aldous and then Julian Huxley would make in the postwar era. Although man's place as 'part of a web of living things' is acknowledged in language that is entirely absent from T.H. Huxley's vision of colonization, the triumphal language and the emphasis on man's power to dominate nature in all its forms is even stronger here. This change in tone is hardly surprising in light of the advances in technology that had taken place in the intervening half century.

If the challenges of the Great Depression had moved Americans to debate the merits of technocracy without fully embracing it, the emergency of the Second World War would compel them to embrace a proliferation of technocratic institutions without pausing to debate their impact on the social contract. As epitomized by the Manhattan Project, government research and development exploded during the Second World War. The flurry of technological competition that characterized World War II and the subsequent Cold War created the vast and intricate nexus of universities, research institutions such as Los Alamos and RAND, defense contractors, and government agencies that President Eisenhower would ultimately term 'the military-industrial complex'. In large part because of the stunning advances in applied science and technology that it had helped to accelerate, the conclusion of the Second World War witnessed more than the ascendancy of the United States to the position of global dominance once held by Great Britain. It also witnessed the ascendancy of *Homo sapiens* as the decisive power in determining the future direction of life on earth. In his environmental history of the twentieth century, J.R. McNeill cited 1945 as the year when the global economy, with its attendant consumption of resources and

creation of pollution, began a long and completely unprecedented acceleration in growth after the prolonged slump of the thirties.⁸ For most observers, though, the advent of the Atomic Bomb was more indicative than any economic statistics of the human race's new Promethean power over the rest of life on earth.

For Julian Huxley, this combination of unprecedented human knowledge and technological power signaled the dawn of a new epoch that required a new and rational religion for the human race. Since the 1920s, Julian had promoted the idea of a 'religion without revelation' based on the principles of evolutionary biology.⁹ Two decades later, he would conceive of UNESCO as offering a framework for the unification of knowledge and culture on a global scale. Ultimately, Julian speculated, this amalgamation of modern science and cultural traditions from around the globe would lead to an entirely new form of rational and universal religion:

What celebrations will be devised of human achievement and human possibilities, what pilgrimages and gatherings, what ceremonies of participation, what solemnizations of the steps in individual lives and personal relations? What rituals and techniques of 'salvation', of self-development and self-transcendence will be worked out, what new incentives and new modes of education, what methods for purgation and for achieving freedom from the burdens of guilt and fear without inflicting harm on oneself and others, what new formulations of knowledge and consequent belief? What modes will the future find of distilling its ideas of its destiny into compelling expression, in drama or architecture, painting or story, or perhaps wholly new forms of art? (J. Huxley 1957: 126).

Almost a century after T.H. Huxley had mocked Comte's proposals for a religion of humanity as 'Catholicism without Christianity', Julian Huxley offered the world a very similar proposal for a rational religion with its own 'rituals and techniques of "salvation"' and 'methods of purgation'. As if this were not ambitious enough, Julian Huxley saw the cultural and religious unification of the human race as precursors to the creation of a unifying world government. Julian Huxley reasoned that the educational program of UNESCO should 'stress the need for world

8. 'The fastest growth came in 1950 to 1973, but the whole period following World War II saw economic growth at rates unprecedented in human experience' (McNeill 2000: 5).

9. In *Religion without Revelation*, Julian Huxley describes an epiphany he had in Colorado Springs which began his drive to create a secular religion based on the principles of evolution. Here he reaffirms the declaration of the Victorian scientist and liberal politician John Morley that, 'The next great task of science will be to create a religion for humanity' (J. Huxley 1927: 82).

political unity and familiarize all peoples with the implications of the transfer of sovereignty from separate nations to a world organization'. This was not a goal which Julian Huxley believed would be achieved in the near term, but he saw UNESCO programs for promoting science and the arts across borders as small and practical steps which could 'do a great deal to lay the foundations on which world political unity can later be built' (J. Huxley 1947: 13).

Julian Huxley's visions for a new religion and a world government have earned him a place among the perennial villains of conspiracy theorists, especially on the political right. Reverend Tim LaHaye, co-author of the bestselling *Left Behind* novels that depict the Anti-Christ as the future Secretary-General of the United Nations, sees Julian Huxley as one of the primary architects of the UN's humanist and, as LaHaye argues, implicitly anti-Christian agenda (LaHaye 2003: 83). Goaded religious conservatives became a Huxley family tradition beginning with T.H. Huxley's public debates with the Anglican bishop Samuel Wilberforce in 1860, but Julian Huxley, by going beyond the agnostic skepticism of his grandfather to promote a raft of causes from secular religion, to eugenics, to world government, has earned a special place in the demonology of the religious right.¹⁰ Ironically, Julian Huxley's insistence that evolution is imbued with a clear purpose and direction that human beings can understand and emulate has meant that his work holds little appeal for the 'New Atheists' of the early twenty-first century, who generally argue, following the lead of Richard Dawkins, that there is no design or purpose whatsoever implicit in the processes of organic evolution.¹¹

In another controversial move during his tenure at UNESCO, Julian Huxley commissioned a project that would employ the philosopher Arne

10. Because of its connection to racism in the twentieth century, the concept of eugenics remains especially contentious in the twenty-first century. While T.H. Huxley had been a strong critic of eugenics in his 1893 essay *Evolution and Ethics*, Julian and Aldous Huxley would ultimately part with their grandfather's view of the subject. For example, under the aegis of what they called 'positive eugenics', both Julian Huxley and Aldous Huxley favored such practices as maintaining sperm banks where the purportedly more valuable sperm of exceptional men could be made available to prospective mothers. Julian Huxley was widely criticized for taking this position, and his proposals for such sperm banks even inspired the condemnation of Joseph Stalin, who called such proposals 'An insult to Soviet womanhood' (Ardagh 1962). For his part, Aldous made 'positive eugenics' through artificial insemination an essential element in his utopian novel *Island* (A. Huxley 1962: 231-33).

11. 'Natural selection is the blind watchmaker. Blind because it does not see ahead, does not plan consequences, has no purpose in view' (Dawkins 1996: 21).

Naess,¹² who would later help to found the Deep Ecology movement (Naess 2003), to research the global semantics of the term 'democracy'. Naess interviewed scholars and prominent intellectuals from all over the world, and compiled a detailed report on the various meanings assigned to the term. The unsurprising fact that some in Eastern bloc nations defined Leninism as 'democracy' raised the ire of Huxley's critics, and 'despite a high demand UNESCO never reprinted the report' (Anker 2001: 233).¹³ In his memoirs, Julian described the controversies that made his term as director-general of UNESCO both turbulent and brief:

As it turned out, the humanist attitude which I adopted led various delegates (quite erroneously) to think that I was anti-religious, while my liberal views were taken by others to be communistic. When I found during the conference that one of my previous colleagues was spreading this allegation of my communist leanings, I became very angry and formally asked the executive board to expel him, failing which I would resign. He was sent off on some educational mission; but some of the mud had stuck, and I was not elected as first Director-General until after several sessions of the Board, and then only for a term of two years instead of the normal five (J. Huxley 1973: 16).¹⁴

In light of his wide array of other projects and the backbreaking schedule that UNESCO work require, Julian would ultimately count it as a blessing that his tenure as its first Director-General turned out to be just two years instead of five.

In retrospect, it may be that the most enduring element in Julian Huxley's vision for UNESCO was his call for a universal 'recognition of the fact that the wildlife of the world is irreplaceable, but that it is being rapidly destroyed' (J. Huxley 1947: 51). In light of this development, which received little public attention in the postwar atmosphere of 1946, Julian argued that, 'areas must be set aside where, in the ultimate interests of mankind as a whole, the spread of man must take second place to the conservation of other species' (Huxley 1947: 45). In the years following the publication of *UNESCO: Its Purpose and Philosophy*, Julian Huxley would show perhaps greater dedication to this idea of protecting wildlife

12. For the author's own explanation of Deep Ecology, see Naess 2003.

13. This report on democracy was ultimately published by Oslo University in 1956 as *Democracy, Ideology and Objectivity: Studies in the Semantics and Cognitive Analysis of Ideological Controversy* (Naess 1956).

14. Julian Huxley's autobiography indicates that this unnamed 'former colleague' was the historian Sir Ernest Baker: 'He and I had previously quarreled over my attitude toward established religion when I was professor of biology at King's College, London, of which he was Principal... I scented trouble, rightly suspecting that he would attack my pamphlet' (J. Huxley 1973: 16).

and natural habitats than to any other goal outlined in his treatise for a 'planetary utopia'. In the summer of 1947, Julian Huxley helped to organize a conference of delegates from over 24 nations in Brunnen, Switzerland (McCormick 1989: 33) to discuss the protection of threatened habitats, laying the foundations for the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The IUCN would emerge in 1948 as one of the first global environmental groups, supplementing the commitment of UNESCO to defend 'world heritage sites' with its own parallel commitment to guard wilderness and biodiversity.

This dedication to preserving wilderness had been central to Julian Huxley's career in the life sciences for over a decade before he took the helm at UNESCO. While touring East Africa in 1929 at the behest of the British Colonial Office advisory committee on education, he fell in love with the landscape of the Serengeti, and he would call for its preservation as a unique habitat in his 1931 survey *Africa View*. Here Julian argued passionately that we should view 'wild animals and wild nature in general as worthy of preservation *for its own sake*...because the world would be poorer without them' (J. Huxley 1931b: 239, italics in original). Also committed to preserving natural habitats at home, Julian would chair the Wild Life Conservation Special Committee in Britain, which worked to establish national parks in Britain modeled on existing parks in Switzerland (McCormick 1989: 31-34). In 1949, the work of Julian Huxley and other British conservationists such as A.G. Tansley in this field would lead to a Royal Charter founding the Nature Conservancy in 1949 (Nicholson 1970: 250).¹⁵

Throughout the decades following his tenure at UNESCO, Julian Huxley would travel across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, lobbying political leaders across the postcolonial world to establish national parks. In 1961, he wrote to the Minister of Natural Resources in Zomba, Nyasaland and framed his arguments for conservation, with an eye to the concerns of leaders in the postcolonial world, in terms of national self interest: 'If a National Park were established there it could readily be integrated with the National Parks of Eastern Africa... This would undoubtedly bring considerable revenue...and...it would speedily become a source of national prestige for the territory throughout the world' (J. Huxley 1961a). In that same year, a dramatic and detailed series of articles that Julian Huxley wrote for the *Observer* in London on the destruction of wildlife across Africa would lead directly to the creation of the World Wildlife Fund (Kellaway 2010).

15. For more concerning the environmental activism of both Julian and Aldous Huxley after 1945, see Deese 2010.

Aldous Huxley: From a 'Bad Utopia' to a Plausible Oasis

Like his brother, Aldous was drawn to the life sciences, and planned at a very early age to pursue a career as a physician. Because his eyesight was badly damaged by an infection of Keratitis that he suffered at the age of seventeen, he shifted his ambitions from science to literature. By the early 1920s, Aldous enjoyed great success as the author of a series of savagely funny satirical novels, which took aim at life in contemporary England and especially at his own social milieu, particularly upper middle class intellectuals who were increasingly disaffected with the utilitarian optimism of the prior generation. As noted earlier, many of Aldous Huxley's novels from the 1920s took passing shots at the technocratic utopianism that was part of transatlantic discourse during the interwar years, but it was not until he wrote *Brave New World* that Aldous Huxley would give the visions of such contemporaries as H.G. Wells and J.B.S. Haldane his full and sustained attention. The term dystopia had not been coined when *Brave New World* was published, though it may be argued that the phrase 'bad utopia' remains the best description of Huxley's vision here. Unlike the terrified and tortured subjects of Orwell's *1984*, the inhabitants of Huxley's *Brave New World* are, regardless of their caste, in love with their captivity and thoroughly convinced that they are living in an ideal society. By depicting a society in which the hedonic calculus of utilitarianism had been taken to its absurd conclusion, Aldous created one of the most engaging and haunting critiques of utopian thought in the twentieth century.

Where the ecological vision of Julian Huxley and his PEP colleague Max Nicholson grew directly out of their commitment to political and economic planning and a belief at least in the possibility of rational progress, Aldous Huxley presented a parody of their vision in *Brave New World*. The World State that he described eliminated war, kept the population at a sustainable two billion, recycling everything, including human beings, whose phosphorous was salvaged from gigantic state-run crematoria for its use in agriculture. It also eliminated crime and anti-social behavior, by programming citizens through behavioral and chemical conditioning. While contemporaries such as Charlotte Haldane, then wife of J.B.S. Haldane, accused Aldous of succumbing to the craving for the solace of traditional religion that had been epitomized by the Victorian moralist Matthew Arnold (another famous forebear of the Huxley family), *Brave New World* did foreshadow some of the ethical issues that would be raised not only by biotechnology but also by the ecology movement itself in the late twentieth century (Clark 1969: 236). Peder Anker has pointed to the limitations of the nascent ecology movement among British intellectuals in the first half of the twentieth

century by juxtaposing it with Hannah Arendt's critique of social orders that privilege the *oikos*, or needs of the household over those of the polis (Anker 2001: 242). In Aldous Huxley's *World State*, the individual household has been supplanted by a massive state-sponsored family in which 'everybody belongs to everybody'. The polis in which individual wills contend and compromise has been eliminated. Although the questions it raises about the values of the Fabians and ecologists have emerged with a new significance to later readers, the real impact of the work in the 1930s was its powerful depiction of mass culture as possessing an insidious power to monopolize the cultural marketplace and extirpate all other forms of human thought, interaction, and experience. While Aldous Huxley's friend and admirer H.L. Mencken had made a cottage industry in the previous decade out of ridiculing the beliefs and pastimes of the 'booboisie', Aldous went several steps further and depicted the burgeoning world of mass culture as not just insipid but insidious.¹⁶

Aldous Huxley would later regret that the only alternative to the utilitarian hive of the World State to receive a detailed description in *Brave New World* was the feral wilderness of the Savage Reservation. In a radio-play adaptation that he narrated for CBS in the 1950s, Aldous adds greater stress to Mustapha Mond's discussion of island communities where exceptional people were allowed to live outside of the restrictions of the World State (A. Huxley 1956). This idea of an island utopia in a world that has succumbed to both totalitarianism and consumerism would, of course, provide both the inspiration and the title, his last novel. However, the stark polarity of the Savage Reservation and the World State does give the novel a dramatic tension that it could not otherwise possess. Lenina Crowne reflects on the adventure of visiting a Savage Reservation in the west: 'Not more than half a dozen people in the whole Centre had ever been inside a Savage Reservation. As an Alpha-Plus psychologist, Bernard was one of the few men she knew entitled to a permit' (A. Huxley 1932: 58). The same exotic and forbidden quality that makes the Savage Reservation exciting to Lenina makes the Savage himself a celebrity when he comes into contact with the citizens of the World State.

For all their voyeuristic fascination with John Savage, however, the defining trait of the citizens of the World State is a complete lack of interest in the natural world. It is his vaguely romantic interest in nature that makes Bernard Marx so puzzling, annoying and even a bit frightening to Lenina:

16. For more concerning Aldous Huxley's friendship and correspondence with Mencken and his evolving views of American mass-culture, see Bradshaw 1994.

...Bernard considered Electro-magnetic golf a waste of time. 'Then what's time for?' asked Lenina in some astonishment. Apparently for going on walks in the Lake District; for that is what he now proposed (A. Huxley 1932: 59).

In the society of the World State, the natural world has been well preserved, but only as a backdrop for mindless and thoroughly social recreation. One can visit the Lake District, or with the right permits, a Savage Reservation in the American West. But the contemplation of either the beautiful or the sublime in nature itself is dangerous to the health of the social organism, and therefore precluded by thorough social conditioning. The fact that Bernard wants to walk in heather of the Lake District or contemplate the moon in rough weather over the English Channel is emblematic of his maladjustment:

On their way over the English Channel, Bernard insisted on stopping his propeller and hovering on his helicopter screws within a hundred feet of the waves. The weather had taken a change for the worse; a south-westerly wind had sprung up and the sky was cloudy.

'Look', he commanded.

'But it's horrible', said Lenina shrinking back from the window. She was appalled by the rushing emptiness of the night, by the black foam-flecked water heaving beneath them, by the pale face of the moon, so haggard and distracted among the hastening clouds. 'Let's turn on the radio. Quick! She reached for the dialing knob on the dashboard and turned it at random. '...skies are blue inside of you', sang sixteen trembling falsettos, 'the weather's always...'. (A. Huxley 1932: 61).

The scene, as described through Lenina's eyes, evinces how thoroughly she has been conditioned to see literally everything in the purely social terms of the hive mind. The moon is neither distant nor solitary, but seems more like the countenance of a citizen in an urban crowd, 'a pale face...haggard and distracted'. Lenina's reflexive dash for the radio to shut the sublime image of this seascape and replace it with the comforting noise of the radio is an image from *Brave New World* that Theodor Adorno found particularly compelling.¹⁷

Brave New World does more than reflect a revolution in social norms—it also articulates a distinct vision of a new relationship between civilization and nature, engineered to be sustainable in every respect. Some authors, such as the French novelist Michel Houellebecq, have taken this as evidence that Aldous was actually a proponent of the sort of society depicted in *Brave New World*. Since Aldous's first science fiction novel

17. 'Huxley is well acquainted with the latest model citizen who contemplates a bay as a tourist attraction while seated in his car listening to radio commercials' (Adorno 1983: 102).

began as a parody of H.G. Wells, it is most likely that it owes its attention to sustainability to the models found in such Wells books as *The World Set Free* (Wells 1914) and *Men Like Gods* (Wells 1923). In his attention to detail, however, Aldous exceeds the ecological vision of Wells's utopian novels, and he would pay even greater attention to ecological issues in later novels, especially *Island* (A. Huxley 1962).

During the Second World War, as the factories for the production of bombers and other armaments transformed Los Angeles into a new kind of metropolis, Aldous published an essay on the paintings and etchings of the Spanish visionary Francisco Goya in which he posited the following interpretation of Goya's famous caption 'El sueño de raison produce monstros':

... 'The dream of reason produces monsters'. It is a caption that admits of more than one interpretation. When reason sleeps, the absurd and loathsome creatures of superstition wake and are active, goading their victim to an ignoble frenzy. But this is not all. Reason may also dream without sleeping, may intoxicate itself, as it did during the French Revolution, with daydreams of inevitable progress, of liberty, equality and fraternity imposed by violence, of human self-sufficiency and the ending of sorrow, not by the all too arduous method which alone offers any prospect of success, but by political arrangements and better technology (A. Huxley 2002b [1943]: 422).

Here Aldous Huxley's explicit views on progress are illuminated by Goya's lucid metaphor. Where his brother Julian was animated by a steady faith in the power of reason, Aldous argued that the forces of progress, if they were not tempered by compassion and humility, could be every bit as dangerous as 'the absurd and loathsome creatures of superstition'. In the years immediately following World War II, Aldous would expand upon this argument in *Ape and Essence* (A. Huxley 1948), one of the earliest post-apocalyptic novels of the Cold War era. This macabre satire is punctuated by such grotesque violence that Aldous Huxley's widow Laura Archera Huxley vowed that she would never release the film rights to the novel for fear that it would be produced as an exploitation film, with no regard for its underlying commentary on the emerging nuclear arms race and the technocratic intellectuals who made it possible (L. Huxley 2006). Here Aldous presents more than a nightmare vision of nuclear war and its aftermath; he also offers a critique of civilian nuclear power that was remarkably prescient for 1948. Alluding to the Baruch plan to internationalize nuclear technology and thus blunt the threat of nuclear weapons, the narrator of *Ape and Essence* declares, 'For though Baruch might save us (perhaps) from taking our place in an ossuary such as this, he can do nothing to avert that other

slower, nastier death...’ of birth defects that inevitably result from the steady exposure to radiation that would likely become more common as a result of nuclear power. ‘For in a world powered by nuclear fission everybody’s grandmother would have been an X-ray technician. And not only everybody’s grandmother—everybody’s grandfather and father and mother as well...’ (A. Huxley 1948: 74-75). Thus more than a generation before the well-publicized nuclear accidents at Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, and Fukushima would render the optimistic tone of postwar ‘Atoms for Peace’ propaganda both sinister and quaint, Aldous Huxley was warning his readers that nuclear power was not the clean and limitless source of energy that it appeared to be. Still more remarkably, Aldous had been promoting solar power as an alternative to the energy provided by large-scale utilities as early as the 1930s and wind turbines since at least 1946.¹⁸

Aldous Huxley’s response to the challenges of the postwar world culminated in his advocacy of a political, spiritual, and economic program influenced not only by Gandhi and Tolstoy but also by Americans such as Henry David Thoreau, Henry George, and Ralph Borsodi.¹⁹ In the decades following World War II, Aldous Huxley’s position on the liberal ideal of human progress was diametrically opposed to the ideas of Julian Huxley, and the two brothers were frequently engaged in open

18. In *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*, the character of Mr. Propter, who is in many respects a mouthpiece for the author’s own views, discusses his personal attempt to build a solar-powered water heater for his home as an experiment in Jeffersonian democracy. Mr. Propter reasons that too great a reliance on utility companies for energy is a recipe for tyranny, and thus concludes that any technology, such as solar power, that allows individuals and family to generate power for themselves is an important means for protecting not only their economic but also their political liberty (A. Huxley 1939). Regarding wind power, Aldous wrote to Julian in December of 1946, ‘The most obvious power source hitherto inadequately exploited is wind. I gather that the experimental wind turbine which has been producing fifteen hundred kilowatts in Maine has proved entirely satisfactory. If scientists genuinely want to contribute to peace and well being, they can collectively and intensively consider the yet more efficient development of such wind turbines...’ (A. Huxley 1969: 557).

19. An early twentieth-century pioneer of the back-to-the-land movement, Borsodi blamed not technology but centralized production for society’s ills: ‘All civilizations have been ugly. They could not well avoid it. But this civilization is unique. Machines make it possible for this one to be beautiful, and yet it is in many respects indescribably uglier than the civilizations that have preceded it. For this civilization, instead of using machines to free its finest spirits for the pursuit of beauty, uses machines mainly to produce factories—factories which only the more surely hinder quality-minded individuals in their warfare upon ugliness, discomfort, and misunderstanding’ (Borsodi 1933: 1).

debate. In 1946, Aldous published a slim volume entitled *Science, Liberty and Peace*, whose thesis was summed up in its opening epigraph by Leo Tolstoy:

If the arrangement of a society is bad (as ours is), and a small number of people have power over the majority and oppress it, every victory over Nature will inevitably serve only to increase that power and that oppression. This is what is actually happening (A. Huxley 1946: 1).

Applying Tolstoy's words to the condition of the human race at mid-century, Aldous wrote that, 'Science and technology have made notable advances', but then, 'so has the centralization of political and economic power, so have oligarchy and despotism'. While rejecting the Luddite position that science and technology were inherently destructive of human values, Aldous stated, 'All that is being maintained here is that science is one of the causative factors involved in the progressive decline of liberty and the progressive centralization of power, which have occurred during the twentieth century' (A. Huxley 1946: 1). Citing the radical economist Thorstein Veblen's analysis of the conflict between the goals of centralized production and the pragmatic needs of ordinary people, Aldous recommended the sort of decentralized economy promoted by Ralph Borsodi in the interwar period (A. Huxley 1946: 57). During the war years, Aldous came closer than most to living the way of life that Borsodi recommended. On their forty acre ranch at Llano in the Mojave Desert, Aldous and Maria lived in a very rustic and diminutive farmhouse, grew a fair portion of their own food, and lived 'off the grid', subsisting on the electricity from a small generator (Dunaway 1991: 161-67).

While many intellectuals, including his brother Julian, reasoned that the nuclear age signaled the need for some form of world government, Aldous Huxley lamented that the twentieth century had already become 'the golden age of centralized government and dictatorship'. He recommended a greater emphasis on local forms of political autonomy to counter the growing centralization of both economic and political power: 'Bitter experience has proved that no individual or group of individuals is fit to be entrusted with great powers for long periods of time... The abuse of power can be avoided only by limiting the amount and duration of the authority entrusted to any person, group or class' (A. Huxley 1958 [1949]). Although Aldous had been a harsh critic of both Tolstoy and Gandhi two decades earlier (A. Huxley 1968 [1933]), his views about economic and political decentralization in the Cold War era owed a great deal to their teachings, as well as to the ideas of American reformers such as Henry George and Ralph Borsodi. Aldous Huxley presented his

calls for decentralization in a number of essays after World War II, and *Island* (A. Huxley 1962) was his attempt to crystallize his vision for political and economic decentralization in a novel.

Although Aldous did not place hope in the gradual movement toward world government that his brother saw UNESCO as initiating, he did see real value in the organization. Aldous had contributed to the work of the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation as part of the League of Nations in the 1920s, and, in spite of the disappointing career of the League, he continued to see real value in intellectual and scientific cooperation across borders. In 1949, he expressed the hope that UNESCO would lead in the creation of, 'a new Manhattan Project, under international auspices, for the development of universally available surrogates for the unevenly distributed and soon-to-be-exhausted minerals on which our industrial civilization depends for its very existence—e.g. wind power to take the place of power produced by coal, petroleum and that most dangerous of all fuels uranium...' (A. Huxley 1949: 203).

In the decades following Aldous Huxley's call for 'a new Manhattan Project' dedicated to the creation of alternatives to scarce resources and unsustainable forms of energy, the 'new Manhattan Project' trope would become a handy cliché among environmentalists calling for breakthroughs that would lead to both less centralized and less polluting forms of energy. However, the use of this handy phrase in the service of global environmentalism is always betrayed by the irony that the centralized, secretive, and deadly work of the Manhattan Project represented a striking divergence from the very values that Aldous Huxley and other advocates of more humane and sustainable technologies were seeking to promote. The technical prowess of the Manhattan Project was impressive even to a pacifist like Aldous Huxley, and he could not help but hope, even against his famously jaundiced view of human history, that such a prowess could be put to work for the common good if it could somehow be placed 'under international auspices'.

Aldous Huxley's commitment to promoting international action to confront global problems would continue in the first decade after World War II, as evidenced by his essay 'The Double Crisis' which he published in the *UNESCO Courier* in 1949, after it had been met with summary rejections from *Foreign Affairs*, *Harper's*, *The Atlantic*, *LIFE*, and from Norman Cousins at *The Saturday Review of Literature*. In this essay, Aldous warned that, 'The human race is passing through a time of crisis, and that crisis exists, so to speak, on two levels—an upper level of political and economic crisis and a lower level of demographic and ecological crisis'. There was plenty of public concern about the political and economic crises of the late 1940s, but concerning their ecological and

demographic underpinnings, Aldous lamented, 'hardly anything is heard in the press, on the radio, or at the more important international conferences' (A. Huxley 1949: 6). Until his death in 1963, Aldous Huxley would work to promote awareness of the demographic and ecological challenges of the postwar world. In the beginning, he would be in the company of a few other individuals, such as Fairfield Osborn, whose work he also admired. In the early 1960s, Rachel Carson would lend her voice to the fight and both Julian and Aldous would praise her work. Julian wrote the introduction to the British edition of *Silent Spring*, and Aldous remarked in a letter to his brother about the threat posed by DDT and other chlorinated hydrocarbons to birds on both sides of the Atlantic, that 'we are losing half the basis for English poetry' (J. Huxley 1963: 20).

Aldous Huxley's concern about human ecology, which he was tirelessly promoting to university students at MIT, Stanford, and the University of California in the late fifties and early sixties, infuses his last and his only utopian novel, *Island*. There are myriad differences between the earnest utopia presented in *Island* and the 'bad utopia' of *Brave New World*, but the chief among them is stability. In *Brave New World*, the visiting stranger is destroyed by the unceasing conformity and good cheer of the World State. In *Island*, the visiting stranger helps to ensure the destruction of the ideal society merely by his presence there.

Aldous would attempt in *Island* to lay out a new vision of human society that combined his conception of religious fulfillment with his longstanding concerns about ecological sustainability. While Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest* as his last play, and Francis Bacon wrote *New Atlantis* in the last year of his life, Aldous Huxley's *Island*, also written as he neared death, aspired to combine some of the poetic vision of the former and the rigorous empiricism of the latter. As in Shakespeare's final play, the protagonist in *Island* finds himself in this unique society after his boat has been wrecked at sea. The Prospero who has created this world, an enlightened physician Andrew MacPhail, has long since died, but his reasons for leaving European society were somewhat similar to those of the rightful duke of Milan. And as with Bacon's *New Atlantis*, the small island nation of Pala keeps itself hidden from the outside world and only sends its emissaries out to gather knowledge with other nations, not to engage in diplomacy or commerce. And, aside from being located in roughly the same corner of the world as Bacon's *New Atlantis*, the *Island* nation of Pala shares a further similarity in its combination of science and religion, though in Bacon's utopia Christianity is the state religion while Huxley chose an easy-going strain of Mahayana Buddhism tempered by Tibetan Tantra and Western skepticism to be the prevailing

religion among the Palanese. In the rice fields of Pala the deities of both Eastern and Western religions are represented by fanciful scarecrows that Palanese children make to guard the rice paddies. Each scarecrow is fitted with strings so that the children, as well as the wind, can make them move. The purpose of this tradition is to teach children early that, 'all gods are homemade and that it's we who pull their strings and so give them the power to pull ours' (A. Huxley 1962: 246).

Of course, while the similarities between Aldous Huxley's *Island* and the visions of Shakespeare and Bacon are remarkable, the differences are more important. While Shakespeare's *Tempest* mocks the idea of Utopia in the long-winded discourses of Gonzalo on his vision for an ideal 'commonwealth', *Island* takes the idea of a utopian society quite seriously, even if it does not expect such a society to be unmolested for long in the modern world. And while Bacon's imaginary kingdom of Bensalem in *New Atlantis* takes extensive precautions to prevent any invasion from the outside world, the kingdom of Pala is pacifist and so utterly defenseless against the ruthless machinations of Colonel Dipa, the military strongman who runs the neighboring nation with the backing of Western Cold War allies and the blessing of a British media magnate and a few multinational oil companies. In other words, while Prospero's governance was his method for biding his time and engineering his return to Naples, MacPhail's Pala is a deliberate alternative to Western Civilization. And while Bacon's Bensalem is a country that looks out for its own interests, the Palanese are a people who, by and large, seek to transcend their own individual and material needs.

As skeptical as Aldous Huxley was about the vision of technical and social progress promoted by H.G. Wells, and, somewhat more cautiously, by his brother Julian, he never showed very much affinity for the radical critique of science and technology put forward by Frankfurt school thinkers such as Adorno and Horkheimer. In their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer lay a far share of the blame for the horrors of the Second World War at the feet of Baconian science which they see as an epistemology that springs not from a dubious will to knowledge but an obvious will to power (Adorno and Horkheimer 1997: 9-12). Erasing any distinction between pure science and applied science, Adorno and Horkheimer portrayed the Baconian method as nothing more than an instrument for enhancing human power over nature. Seen through the Baconian lens, all of creation is a disenchanting mass of raw materials laid open to a seamless process of scientific investigation and technological exploitation. Thus, even the most notorious horrors of the Holocaust, such as Mengele's experiments or the production of soap from human ashes, follow a certain logic that Adorno and Horkheimer

saw as already implicit in the Baconian worldview, which seizes all things formerly imbued with spiritual significance and transforms them into resources to be rationally assayed, commanded, and exploited. While Aldous Huxley had depicted the systematic conversion of human remains into fertilizer in *Brave New World*, it is clear enough that what he described as his 'Swiftian' satire of a technological utopia was not an attack upon the scientific epistemology that necessarily precedes technological progress. Even as he warned about the dangers presented by new technologies to enhance the power of dictators or multiply the damage that human beings could inflict upon the planet, he never extended his critique of applied science and technology to the foundational critique of science articulated first by the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School and later by the ecofeminist historian Carolyn Merchant (Merchant 1983: 164–68). Until the end of his life, Aldous struggled to reconcile what the British physicist C.P. Snow had come to call the 'two cultures' of the sciences and the humanities, and the quasi-religious, quasi-technocratic utopia he depicted in *Island* was part of this effort.

Where Julian Huxley had praised large-scale technocratic projects such as the state-funded scientific research initiatives in the Soviet Union and the Tennessee Valley Authority in the United States, Aldous Huxley's utopian society of Pala is diligent about keeping its application of new technologies targeted and small-scale. As one leading citizen of Pala explains, 'Lenin used to say that electricity plus socialism equals communism. Our equations are rather different. Electricity minus heavy industry plus birth control equals democracy and plenty. Electricity plus heavy industry minus birth control equals misery, totalitarianism and war'.

Bill Devall and George Sessions cited Aldous Huxley's last novel *Island* as a work that anticipated the principles of Deep Ecology:

Aldous Huxley came to an ecological perspective gradually during his long career, and as a result of his long association with D.H. Lawrence. Huxley's last novel...was an ecotopian vision. The novel is set on the island of Pala in southeast Asia... A Scottish physician had introduced Western science to Pala in the nineteenth century, but the prevailing Buddhism set the tone for the community. The village was the mode of human community. Population had been stabilized and the island was self-sustaining. Much of the plot revolves around the attempt by Pala to resist commercialization from a neighboring community and to resist exploitation of its oil reserves by outside corporations (Devall and Sessions 1985: 170).

When Bill Devall and George Sessions cited Aldous Huxley's *Island* as a precursor to the Deep Ecology movement, they left out two elements of its social structure that were more than incidental. The first of these is

the regular use of psychedelic drugs or 'moksha medicine' by the citizens of *Island*, at the behest of its educators and governors. This elision by Devall and Sessions at least raises the question of whether such drugs are essential to the heightened sense of ecological consciousness depicted in *Island*. While moksha medicine is glowingly described by the inhabitants of Pala as 'the reality revealer' and 'the truth and beauty pill', it is worth remembering here that Aldous Huxley had dedicated two decades of his life to the study of the mystical experience across the boundaries of the world's religious traditions before he ever ingested mescaline or any of the other psychedelic drugs (A. Huxley 1962: 166).²⁰ Aldous Huxley's pre-psychedelic mysticism fills the pages of his influential 1944 tract on comparative religion, *The Perennial Philosophy*, and it is a strong presence in virtually all of his fiction after his 1936 novel *Eyeless in Gaza*. Other scholars who have explored the ecological dimensions of Aldous Huxley's mysticism, such as Thomas Dunlap, have also drawn most heavily on the works that predate *The Doors of Perception*. As to whether the use of psychedelic drugs is essential to the ecological consciousness that Aldous sought to promote throughout so much of his work, perhaps the author himself gives us the best cue. Borrowing a term from Catholic nomenclature, Aldous Huxley described his own experience with these chemicals not as the centerpiece of his spiritual practice, but as 'a gratuitous grace' (A. Huxley 1954: 72).

The second element in *Island* that is still widely overlooked is the strong emphasis, not only on eugenics through artificial insemination, but also on the government's classification of citizens according to their physical type. Among his admirers in the Deep Ecology movement, Aldous Huxley's continuing endorsement of eugenics in the postwar era tends to be for the most part ignored along with other hobby horses that show up in his writings, such as his passionate endorsement of the Bates method for restoring sight, the Alexander method for improving coordination and personal well-being, and the system devised by William H. Sheldon for classifying human character types. In *Island*, Sheldon's methods for identifying the psychological profiles of individuals based on their body types provides one of the unintentionally disturbing moments in what Aldous explicitly intended to be his 'good utopia'. When Will Farnaby listens to a long explanation of how the small government of Pala identifies and controls such troublemakers as

20. For an excellent account of Aldous Huxley's mysticism that pays great attention to his studies and meditation both before and after his experiments with psychedelic drugs, see Dunaway 1991. For Julian Huxley's own brief speculation on potential use of peyote to 'promote the strength of visual imagery in thinking', see J. Huxley 1931a: 69.

‘musclemen’ and ‘Peter Pans’ before they can become a danger to the peace and tranquility of the island, a cold and distinctly Orwellian wind blows through the trees in what, for all intents and purposes, looks like the perfect blueprint for an easy-going hippy commune in the South Pacific (A. Huxley 1962: 185).

Many found *Island* a disappointing book, and even some leading figures of the appropriate technology movement ranked it among the least inspiring of Huxley’s novels. Even though the deliberately small scale use of technology in *Island* would prefigure the appropriate technology movement that he would help to launch, *Whole Earth Catalog* founder Stewart Brand could not place *Island* among his favorite Aldous Huxley books. Brand met Aldous Huxley at Stanford in the late 1950s and admired him for his ‘edginess and his embrace of biology—science evoked seriously by a humanist intellectual, which was revolutionary and considered suspect at the time’. The utopian vision of *Island*, however, ‘seemed softcore’, or less than compelling (Brand, pers. comm.). The evidence also suggests that the author himself was less than satisfied with *Island* as the consummate expression of his utopian vision. Had Aldous Huxley’s life not been taken by cancer in 1963, *Island* most likely would not have been his last work of speculative fiction. In August of 1962, he wrote to his brother that he was mulling a new novel that would alternate cautionary visions of an ecological apocalypse with, ‘a kind of science fiction vision of what might be, if we used our resources with intelligence and good will’ (Huxley 2007 [1962]: 482). For all of its flaws, however, *Island* does present the ethics of ecology in a strikingly original fashion. Where Aldo Leopold had conceived of the Land Ethic in his *Sand County Almanac* as the final extension of human ethics beyond the boundaries of the species itself, Aldous turned this paradigm inside out (Leopold 1966 [1949]: 239). For the Palanese, the mindful and ethical treatment of one’s ecological niche was the foundation for the mindful and ethical treatment of other human beings. It is the starting point for the moral education of their young: ‘Never give children a chance of imagining that anything exists in isolation. Make it plain from the very beginning that all living is relationship. Show them relationships in the woods, in the fields, in the ponds and streams, in the village and in the country around it. Rub it in’ (A. Huxley 1962: 260).

Conclusion

In the late nineteenth century, Friedrich Nietzsche posed an arch question in *Twilight of Idols*: ‘What? is man just one of God’s mistakes? Or is God just one of man’s?’ (Nietzsche 1998 [1888]: 1). By the late twentieth

century, the idea of utopia seemed to have gone down the same path of the other grand ideas, such as a God, against which we once measured ourselves. The real problem, in the minds of many leading intellectuals, was not that our mistakes always made us fall short of achieving utopia, but that to yearn for utopia in the first place was a dangerous mistake. Influential critics, philosophers, and historians such as Hannah Arendt, Karl Popper, and Isaiah Berlin all pointed to the dangers of the utopian dream by highlighting its connections to the great totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century. As Berlin put it, when a regime is predicated on the idea that utopia is possible it will very likely reason that, 'no amount of oppression, cruelty, repression, coercion will be too high' to achieve 'the ultimate salvation of all men' (Berlin 1992: 47). This line of argument, made against the backdrop of a century of failed utopian experiments punctuated by mass murders and other atrocities, has proved to be quite persuasive. By the dawn of twenty-first century, only a few voices, such as the intellectual historian Russell Jacoby and the political philosopher Michael Walzer, have sought to defend the modern tradition of utopian thought from its now wholesale identification with totalitarianism. Jacoby rightly observes that many of the major atrocities of the twentieth century, such as the bloodletting of the First World War, the Nazi Holocaust, and the more recent genocides in the Balkans and in Rwanda, have had their origins in nationalism, racism, and ethnic hatred, and not in any recognizable vision of utopia (Jacoby 2007: 17-20). He makes a strong argument here, although he is not dealing with dangers that are mutually exclusive. A student of the twentieth-century atrocities can walk away with the conclusion that any form of fanaticism, whether the product of racist, religious, nationalist, or utopian fervor is likely to be as dangerous as the next. Those who have reached this conclusion will greet the utopian believer's disquisitions on the nature of the ideal society with the same reflexive skepticism that they would offer to the religious zealot's accounts of a paradise on the other side of death. From this standpoint of justified skepticism, utopias would only remain useful as an intriguing genre of fiction or a window into the minds of those who invented them or cherished them.

At their best, however, utopian narratives can provide fertile ground for thought experiments about the structure of our relationship with each other and with our environment. Furthermore, the passion of those inspired by utopian visions has frequently proved to be an indispensable force in the reform of civil society. In a recent defense of utopian thought and movements, Michael Walzer observes that while we frequently rely on the pragmatic assumption that 'material conditions are the "root cause" of political action', we should never forget that 'high hopes and

utopian aspiration are at least as important. If we were ever to renounce those latter two, the rich and the powerful would be a lot more comfortable than they have any right to be'. Thus, while Walzer concedes Isaiah Berlin's point that believers in a utopian millennium can become the foot soldiers of totalitarianism, he also warns that any polity that has abandoned utopian aspirations altogether faces the danger of drifting into the more quotidian but perhaps no less dangerous territory of stratification and repression (Walzer 2009).

Utopian speculations can be a powerful solvent for ungluing our assumptions about the way things are and have to be. In his essay 'Biology in Utopia', Julian divided the utopian genre between those which were 'in reality satires' and those which could be held up as 'genuine or idealistic Utopia' such as Plato's *Republic* or *Men Like Gods* by his friend H.G. Wells (J. Huxley 1926). Where Julian Huxley signaled his preference for the latter type of utopian literature, Russell Jacoby makes a strong argument for the value of the former. In his second study of utopias, *Picture Imperfect* (2007), Jacoby divides the genre of utopian discourse between the 'iconoclastic' utopians who can, at their best, liberate us from our assumptions about the structure of society, and the 'blueprint' utopians, who can, at their worst, lay the plans for movements and states that will become fanatical and repressive. In examining the utopian visions of Julian and Aldous Huxley, we find Julian marching in the stately ranks of the blueprint utopians, while Aldous dances among the iconoclasts. Even in *Island*, where Aldous attempts to sketch a plausible utopia, he presents that society through the eyes of Will Farnaby, a wisecracking tabloid journalist who 'won't take yes for an answer' (A. Huxley 1962: 18). Several years before the publication of *Island*, Aldous wrote an essay on utopianism entitled 'Ozymandias' (A. Huxley 2002a [1956]), after Shelley's textbook mediation on human vanity. Here he surveyed the wreckage of various utopian communities including the Llano del Rio cooperative in the desert northeast of Los Angeles, which had been founded with great hopes in 1914 and fallen apart soon thereafter. Regarding the study of such communities, Aldous saw not only ripe targets for ridicule but a rich fund of knowledge: 'For anyone interested in human beings and their largely unrealized potentialities, even the silliest experiment has value, if only as demonstrating what ought not to be done' (A. Huxley 2002 [1956]: 309). Contemplating what he regarded as the more successful experiments, such as the Oneida community in upstate New York (whose sexual practices he compared to Tantric Buddhism), Aldous concluded that some utopian experiments have, 'contributed to our knowledge of that most difficult

and most important of all arts—the art of living together in harmony with benefit for all concerned’ (A. Huxley 2002 [1956]: 309-10).

Fascinated by the potential of the modern state, Julian Huxley spent most of the twentieth century arguing for a planned society, and after 1945, would expand his vision to a global scale. Although he was careful in his writings to affirm the liberal piety that the rights of the individual should take precedent over the rights of the state, Julian Huxley’s long-term plans for a vast concentration of centralized authority on a global scale provide no explicit allowance for the division of power that has historically been the best safeguard for individual liberty.²¹

Aldous, on the other hand, began his foray into utopianism by casting a loud vote for the satirical strain of the species with *Brave New World*. This ‘bad utopia’ has endured as a fine specimen of the iconoclastic genre, as it compels us to see how our own age of consumerism, anti-depressants, and electronic distractions is as repressively banal as the enforced culture of the World State. Even in *Island*, which Aldous clearly intended to be a blueprint utopia, the mischievous mind of the iconoclast could not be banished. To the extent that *Island* offers a blueprint for the ideal society in its depictions of Pala, it partakes of the stately boredom of all such utopias. But to the extent that it depicts the forces arrayed against Pala, such as the cynicism of its protagonist, the machinations of the postcolonial dictator next door, and the global appetite for the oil underneath the island of Pala, it is a powerful satire of the Cold War era that retains a great deal of resonance. And because the Palanese way is predicated on pacifism, it does not represent a utopian blueprint that would be imposed on the rest of us by force. In fact, the destruction of Pala at the novel’s close sounds a resounding counterpoint to the critique of utopian thought that emerged in the late twentieth century. In this case, it is not the utopian vision of the Palanese that is the source of the violence, but the quotidian violence of the Cold War era, motivated by the usual scramble for industrial resources, and justified by the usual rhetoric of progress, nationalism, and anticommunism.

For all of their differences, the utopian visions of both Julian and Aldous Huxley share a trait that makes their work distinctive in the twentieth century and relevant in the twenty-first. In their distinct ways Julian and Aldous each dared to confront a problem that had haunted utopian thought since the end of the eighteenth century, when Thomas Malthus had framed his ‘Essay on the Principle of Population’ as a direct challenge to the ambitious utopian schemes of Condorcet (Malthus 1999

21. ‘Nor with its stress on democracy...can [UNESCO] adopt the view that the State is higher or more important than the individual’ (J. Huxley 1947: 7).

[1798]: 123). This is the enduring problem of how an ideal society, or any human society for that matter, depends upon the carrying capacity of its ecological niche in order to survive. While Malthus had raised this issue specifically in connection to human population, Julian and Aldous Huxley would highlight the ecological context of utopian thought in relation to a far broader range of issues, including resource extraction, soil erosion, and the preservation of biodiversity. And while Malthus raised the specter of population and food supply with the intention of attacking the utopian and reformist schemes of his contemporaries, Julian and Aldous Huxley both sought to integrate their solutions to these ecological challenges with their visions of an ideal polity. In Julian's case, this awareness of the ecological context of any possible utopia led him to help found the IUCN in the late 1940s and the WWF in the early 1960s. For Aldous, an acute sense of the ecological dimensions of utopian thought influenced both his nightmare visions, as presented in *Brave New World* and *Ape and Essence*, and the fragile dream of a better society that he attempted to sketch in *Island*. In the early twenty-first century, when so many of the utopian schemes of the modern era strike contemporary readers as at once banal and sinister, it is this ecological dimension in the utopian visions of Julian and Aldous Huxley that retains a deep and enduring resonance.

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