

*The Elementary Particles: “Brave New World”
According to Michel Houellebecq*

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Introduction

The five-hundredth anniversary of Thomas More’s *Utopia* may be an opportunity to re-examine other foundational texts of the utopian studies. Huxley’s 1932 novel *Brave New World* is definitely one of them. It is commonly described as a “negative utopia” (sensu: Baker 1990, Körtner 1995, Higdon 2013, Samaan 2013) a vicious satire on the technocratic society, in which most human beings lead emotionally and spiritually barren lives, being reduced, by means of brainwashing and genetic engineering, to utter stupidity. It is argued that Huxley warns us against “scientific utopianism” responsible for this nightmarish future, in which there is no room for such values, central to each liberal thinker and humanist, as freedom, love, or human dignity.

It seems that such re-examination is currently underway. The traditional reading of Huxley’s classic is challenged in Michel Houellebecq’s 1998 novel *The Elementary Particles*, an interesting mixture of a realistic novel and a utopia. Bruno, a frustrated intellectual, one of the two protagonists, somewhat provocatively announces, “Everyone says *Brave New World* is supposed to be a totalitarian nightmare, a vicious indictment of society, but that’s hypocritical bullshit. *Brave New World* is our idea of

heaven: genetic manipulation, sexual liberation, the war against aging, the leisure society. This is precisely the world that we have tried—and so far failed—to create” (Houellebecq 2001: 131).

Bruno expects to be contradicted by his brother, a molecular biologist, the other protagonist of Houellebecq’s novel, to whom he makes this declaration, but Michel supports Bruno’s opinion with additional facts. He mentions Julian Huxley’s book *What Dare I Think*, published in 1931: “All of the ideas his brother used in the novel—genetic manipulation and improving the species, including the human species—are suggested here. All of them are presented as unequivocally desirable goals that society should strive for”(Houellebecq 2001: 132). He points out that Aldous “had always been in favor of complete sexual liberation, and he was a pioneer in the use of psychedelic drugs” (Houellebecq 2001: 132); therefore, there is no reason why he should criticize a society in which casual sex and mind altering drugs are available to everyone. Michel suggests that because “Nazi ideology completely discredited eugenics and the idea of improving the race” (Houellebecq 2001: 132), after the war, Aldous wanted to distance himself from his earlier notion of utopia and convinced other people that *Brave New World* should be read as a satire (Houellebecq 2001: 132).

This is what Jerry Andrew Varsava describes as “counterfactual intertextuality that radically transvalues Huxley’s insistent anti-utopian liberalism” (Varsava 2005: 158). The term does not seem to be precise, though, for what is really challenged (or “transvalued”) are not facts but their interpretations (or the intentions ascribed to Huxley)¹. Furthermore, all intertextuality is, in a sense, “counterfactual” (to stick to the term used by Varsova). Varsava seems to forget that intertextuality is always a two-way process. The text which is being referred to (intertext) contributes to the meaning of the text referring to it, but the intertext does not remain unaffected. When old texts are placed in a new context their meaning will be inevitably altered. Sometimes this alteration is very insignificant, at other times it is striking. Hence, in this chapter, I shall discuss both how Huxley’s novel influences our reading of *The Elementary Particles* and how *The Elementary Particles* might influence our reading of Huxley’s novel. In order to establish the latter, I will have to devote some space to the discussion of the reception of Huxley’s novel. The phrase “Brave New World”,

¹ Of course one has to remember that this is a conversation between two literary characters and one has to place it in the context of the story the novel tells. In other words, its analysis will not show us what Houellebecq truly thinks about Huxley’s *Brave New World* but how he uses it for his own purposes.

evoked in the title of my article, has at least a double meaning; it refers both to Huxley's work (reinterpreted by Houellebecq) and a certain vision (or rather visions) of the society described by Houellebecq (which may be compared to and contrasted with the society described by Huxley).

Bruno and Michel live in the late twentieth-century France. This is a world which, to a large extent, has been anticipated by Huxley, the world of market economy and ever developing science and technology, including genetic engineering. Interestingly enough, genetic engineering and broadly understood market economy (and its influence on the individual's private life) are the main focus of both Huxley's *Brave New World* and Houellebecq's *The Elementary Particles*.

Many commentators have noticed that, unlike the other seminal dystopia, Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which might have seemed outdated when liberal democracy defeated totalitarian communist regimes², *Brave New World* anticipated the (post)modern world with much greater accuracy³. In 2003 Francis Fukuyama wrote in *Our Posthuman Future*: "Huxley was right [...] that the most significant threat posed by contemporary biotechnology is the possibility that it will alter human nature and move us into a »posthuman« stage of history" (Fukuyama 2003: 7).

Others have noted that Huxley was also right about market economy (Zigler 2015: 55-60). Contrary to Hayek's famous argument (1944), market economy does not have to promote liberal democracy, as it is evidenced by the example of China. What is more, market economy might have a detrimental effect on liberal democracy by turning people into mindless units of consumption and production, rather than citizens capable of making responsible choices. In an article on the subject of

² Back in 1989 Richard Rorty wrote that "Orwell's best novels will be widely read as long as we describe the politics of the twentieth century as Orwell did" (169). He further developed this prediction: "Someday this description of our century may come to seem blinkered or shortsighted. If it does, Orwell will be seen as having inveighed against an evil he did not entirely understand. Our descendants will read him as we read Swift—with admiration for a man who served human liberty, but with little inclination to adopt his classification of political tendencies or his vocabulary of moral and political deliberation. Some present-day leftist critics of Orwell (e.g., Christopher Norris) think that we *already* have a way of seeing Orwell as blinkered and shortsighted" (Rorty 1989: 170).

³ In the light of more recent political developments (Russia's aggressive foreign policy and the rise of antidemocratic sentiment in the West), this optimism, based on the conviction that the future will be shaped by the economic forces, not big politics, seems somewhat premature. Also Richard Rorty (1989) in his book *Irony, Contingency, and Solidarity* argued that the collapse of the Soviet Union did not make *Nineteen Eighty-Four* obsolete. He, however, offered an interesting reinterpretation of Orwell's work, claiming that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is primarily a philosophical rather than political novel. According to Rorty, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* shows the dangers connected with living in the world in which there is no objective verifiable truth, which to Rorty seems an apt description of the postmodern condition.

Houellebecq's first novel *L'Extension du domaine de la lutte* (quite surprisingly translated into English as *Whatever*), Carole Sweeney claims that we are already living in the age of Post-Fordism, "a particular mutation of late twentieth century capitalism":

Post-Fordism (sometimes called cognitive capitalism) has in its sights not just the transformation of labor but also the intimate spaces and activities of everyday life. This economic incursion into the private spaces of the ethical and erotic activities of subjectivity produces the flexible post-Fordist personality, happily and healthily consuming from cradle to grave in the new improved capitalist economy, now with added flexibility, immateriality and affectivity. In part, a more totalizing application of commodity fetishism, post-Fordism saturates the entire range of human activities (Sweeney 2010: 42).

Hayek believed that taking economic freedom away from the individual is the beginning of the road to serfdom and all centrally planned economies sooner or later degenerate into totalitarian regimes as political freedom is a corollary of economic freedom, apparently remaining oblivious to the fact that the corollary of economic freedom is not political freedom (i.e. liberal democracy) but consumerism and conformism. This danger was seen, for instance, by Ralph Waldo Emerson, who, living during the times of the early American capitalism, maintained that:

Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint stock company in which the members agree for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity (Emerson 1841).

In a sense, Emerson's insight is developed by Huxley, who does not cherish any illusions about the benevolent nature of market economy. *Brave New World* shows that the road to serfdom leads through consumerism and conformism. The inhabitants of Brave New World are perfectly happy to exchange their freedom for a pleasant and uncomplicated life.

Thus the critical consensus regarding the interpretation of Huxley's *Brave New World* is that liberalism and humanism are annihilated by the combined forces of genetic engineering and market economy. This is not a world in which we would like to live.

In *The Elementary Particles* Bruno suggests, and Michel seems to agree, that what is really wrong with market economy is not that it leads to mindless consumption but that it fails to deliver the goods for consumption. In the world of market economy individuals compete for a limited number of goods, be its material products or sexual partners, who are also bought with a kind of currency (personal attractiveness

or social prestige). And there is simply not enough of those. Thus, this is a world of constant anxiety and constant struggle. As Houellebecq wrote in *Whatever*:

Economic liberalism is an extension of the domain of the struggle, its extension to all ages and all classes of society. Sexual liberalism is likewise an extension of the domain of the struggle, its extension to all ages and all classes of society (Houellebecq 1999: 99).

The successful individuals accumulate money and sexual partners, the less successful ones, such as Bruno, who lives alone after his girlfriend dies of cancer, are left with nothing. For the old and ugly (and the poor) the possibilities of sexual satisfaction are rapidly shrinking. Eventually Bruno, who works as a French literature teacher, masturbates in front of his teenage student. In comparison with Houellebecq's vision of market economy, Huxley's world is a world of a kind utopian socialism in which goods are distributed to everyone, according to their needs, and individuals selflessly share sexual partners since everyone belongs to everyone else (so there is no need for economic or sexual anxiety). Furthermore, eternal youth and eternal health are not a lie but a reality there. This explains why Bruno perceives Huxley's *Brave New World* as a genuine utopia. This is a world which does not fail to deliver what it promises.

Past Madness vs Future Lunacy

Bruno's reading of Huxley's novel is very similar to those very naïve readings which tend to identify the views expressed by the *Brave New World*'s officials with the author's beliefs. Most critics dismiss them as blatant misreading which misses the obvious satirical tone of the novel. Students who read *Brave New World* in this way frequently become the objects of teachers' jokes. Other teachers might conclude that this is only to be expected. Similarly to David Lurie, the main protagonist of Coetzee's *Disgrace*, they have "long ceased to be surprised at the range of ignorance of [their] students. Post-Christian, posthistorical, postliterate, they might as well have been hatched from eggs yesterday" (Coetzee 2008: 32). But this mistake, if it is indeed a mistake, is not made by naïve students only.

It has been made by a great number of people. Initially, there was a visible confusion as to what the author's intended message was. This is reflected in the fact that such countries as Ireland and Australia banned the import of the book, deeming it a

vile attack on religion and traditional values, extremely dangerous to public morality. In January 1933, Rev George A. Judkins, Director of the Social Services Department of the Methodist Church, wrote to Australian Customs Minister TW White:

I have read the book and I wish to state than its apparent advocacy of promiscuity, its suggestion of sexual games for children and its contemptuous reference to “a thing called God” brand it as a book unworthy of a place among decent literature and among self-respecting people (Lay 2013).

And in February 1932 an anonymous contributor to the Australian *Daily Telegraph* stated that:

Aldous Huxley does not write “literature,” nor has he ever been guilty of any idea likely to be of the least value. He belongs to the school of “bad, naughty little boys” of which G. B. Shaw and our own Norman Lindsay are such distinguished members. This school is not so anxious to teach as to shock... (Lay 2013).

Thus strengthened in their resolve to protect “simple and unsophisticated [sic] young people” (the phrase used by the wife of the resident Bishop of Thursday Island) from corruption, the Australian authorities continued to search for illegally smuggled copies and once they found them, they burned them (Lay 2013). The Australian ban was lifted 1937 but thirty years later, in 1967 the ban was introduced in India, where Huxley was called a pornographer (Lay 2013).

Of course such practices cannot be defended but some more recent critics to a certain extent redeem those guilty of similar misreading. They point to usually overlooked aspects of Huxley’s work which are not fully consistent with the novel’s accepted meaning. In other words, Huxley might have been at least partially responsible for this misunderstanding.

Margaret Atwood, for instance, in her 2007 review of *Brave New World* focuses on the fact that it is not only a satire on some hypothetical distant future but also on a very real, and not so distant—at least for Huxley—past, namely Victorian Britain. She reminds us that:

[...] when Huxley was writing *Brave New World* at the beginning of the 1930s, he was, in his own words, an “amused, Pyrrhonic aesthete”, a member of that group of bright young upstarts that swirled around the Bloomsbury Group and delighted in attacking anything Victorian or Edwardian (Atwood 2007).

Hence, similarly to the anonymous contributor to the Australian *Daily Telegraph*, she also suspects that Huxley’s intention might have been to shock his more conservative audience:

The word “mother”—so thoroughly worshipped by the Victorians—has become a shocking obscenity; and indiscriminate sex, which was a shocking obscenity for the Victorians, is now *de rigueur*.

“He patted me on the behind this afternoon”, said Lenina.

“There, you see!” Fanny was triumphant. “That shows what he stands for. The strictest conventionality”.

Many of *Brave New World*'s nervous jokes turn on these kinds of inversions—more startling to its first audience, perhaps, than to us, but still wry enough. Victorian thrift turns to the obligation to spend, Victorian till-death-do-us-part monogamy has been replaced with “everyone belongs to everyone else”, Victorian religiosity has been channelled into the worship of an invented deity—“Our Ford”, named after the American car-czar Henry Ford, god of the assembly line—via communal orgies. Even the “Our Ford” chant of “orgy-porgy” is an inversion of the familiar nursery rhyme, in which kissing the girls makes them cry. Now, it's if you refuse to kiss them—as “the Savage” does—that the tears will flow (Atwood 2007).

This list of “Victorian” jokes could be much longer. There is, for instance, Calvin and his sixteen sexophonists performing at Westminster Abbey Cabaret. Should we protest against seeing a place of religious cult violated and a religious prophet demoted to the status of an entertainer, and pass unequivocal condemnation on the civilization responsible for such monstrosities? The scene is, however, very unlikely to evoke in its readers a sense of moral outrage. It is irreverent yet funny. Rather than any real values, arbitrary cultural norms are being challenged. Again, it is Victorians who are the target of the author's satire as they attached much more importance to names and symbols than to realities.

The song that the band performs is also interesting. They deliver an elegy upon the impossibility of the return to the bottle: “Bottle of mine, it's you I've always wanted! / Bottle of mine, why was I ever decanted?” (Huxley 1969:51). This time, however, the object of ridicule is not the Victorian mentality, but Freud's idea of the return to the womb. The obvious absurdity of the clone's desire to return to the bottle underscores the absurdity of the desire attributed by Freud to normal human beings. Had it been a critique of the dehumanized future, we truly would have had to believe that the grotesque dream of the return to the bottle is a parody of the lofty human dream of the return to the womb.

This illustrates a certain rhetorical, or structural, weakness of *Brave New World*'s argument. Insofar as *Brave New World* criticizes Victorians, it cannot effectively criticize the society which is the very opposite of the Victorian society. These two satires are at odds with one another (Greenberg and Waddell 2016). A work which is at the same time a satire on prudishness and piety, and a satire on promiscuity and Godlessness is marked by internal contradiction. This may be related to what Huxley

himself said about *Brave New World* in his 1946 foreword to the novel, where he acknowledged that the Savage has to choose between two evils, namely insanity and madness, the utopian and the primitive (Huxley 1969: viii). Since everything is relative, in comparison with the contemporary madness, the future lunacy might indeed seem to be a legitimate utopia.

Reforming Human Nature: “Don't Worry Your Soul Is Already Dead”

Houellebecq's reading of Huxley's *Brave New World* may be viewed as an extension of this reasoning. Houellebecq dwells on the description of the contemporary madness. In order to make his critique of the contemporary world more effective, he delves both into the past and the future, contrasting them with the present. The past is represented by Michel's grandmother, who is idealized as a completely selfless creature, sacrificing herself, out of love and devotion, for others (not so much as thinking about it in terms of sacrifice). The implication is that such people could have existed only in the old world; in the world of market economy people are decisively different. This idealization of the past seems to be strangely at odds with Houellebecq's apparent praise of sexual liberation⁴. Probably the only moment when Bruno is truly happy is when he is with Christine on holiday at Cap d'Agde, a famous nudist beach, freely exchanging sexual partners, caring not only about his own sexual satisfaction but also about the satisfaction of his partner. Afterwards Bruno will conclude that sexual pleasure is the most intense feeling that human beings are capable of.

Yet it is far more interesting what Houellebecq is to say about the future, disconcertingly similar to Huxley's *Brave New World* and still viewed as unambiguously positive. In *The Elementary Particles*, *Brave New World* is reinterpreted from the post-modern perspective. Fukuyama admits that Huxley's future horrifies him because he, similarly to Huxley, believes that “nature itself, in particular human nature, has a special role in defining for us what is right and wrong, just and unjust, important and unimportant” (Fukuyama 2003: 7). Furthermore, he believes that “human nature exists, is a meaningful concept, and has provided a stable continuity to our experience

⁴ What Houellebecq criticizes is not sexual liberation itself but what he describes as “sexual liberalism,” i.e. sexual activity, during which the individual thinks only about his or her own pleasure.

as a species. It is, conjointly with religion, what defines our most basic values” (Fukuyama 2003: 7). The dangers of interfering with it (which means biotechnology), “captured so well by Huxley, [...] are summed up in the title of an article by novelist Tom Wolfe »Sorry, but Your Soul Just Died«” (Fukuyama 2003: 8). In *The Elementary Particles* Houellebecq’s argument is twofold. First, as a postmodernist, he challenges all metaphysics, both that of established religion and that of nature. His ethics is painfully rational, even brutal. If injustice is a part of human nature, then human nature should be abolished. Second, as a radical critic of the contemporary civilization he argues that we have nothing to lose, as our souls are already dead.

As it has already been noted, genetic engineering is an important theme both in *Brave New World* and *The Elementary Particles*. Michel Djerzinski is the world’s leading molecular biologist who studies DNA and the methods of cell division. His research eventually leads to a groundbreaking discovery, foreshadowing the demise of mankind. In the article *Toward Perfect Reproduction*, which he wrote before committing suicide, he explained how to create a new rational species that will not have to reproduce sexually. In the Epilogue we learn that this new species, asexual and immortal, “which had outgrown individuality, separation and evolution” (Houellebecq 2001: 277), finally replaced mankind.

The story is allegedly told from the perspective of these posthuman beings who reminisce upon the sad lives of their distant maker and his brother. This perspective is particularly visible in the Epilogue and the Prologue, where the narrator introduces his tale in the following manner:

This book is principally the story of a man who lived out the greater part of his life in Western Europe, in the latter half of the twentieth century. Though alone for much of his life, he was nonetheless occasionally in touch with other men. He lived through an age that was miserable and troubled. The country into which he was born was sliding slowly, ineluctably, into the ranks of the less developed countries; often haunted by misery, the men of his generation lived out their lonely, bitter lives. Feelings such as love, tenderness and human fellowship had, for the most part, disappeared. The relationships between his contemporaries were at best indifferent and more often cruel (Houellebecq 2001: 7).

This miserable world Houellebecq contrasts with Huxley’s *Brave New World* in order to make his point: There is no need to fear Huxley’s future, our present is much worse. The world of Western Europe in the latter part of the twentieth century is, like Huxley’s *Brave New World*, characterized by conspicuous consumption and sex-

ual liberation, but unlike Huxley's *Brave New World*, it is also full of violence and suffering. Its inhabitants are deeply unhappy and they cannot come to terms with old age and dying.

The principal cause of this unhappiness is economic and sexual liberalism. This is the message that Houellebecq consistently repeats in all his novels. Arguably, his most recent novel, *Submission*, is the most outspoken critique of liberalism. There is already too much freedom, Houellebecq seems to be saying, and what the world needs now is not more freedom but its opposite, submission. This is what will guarantee true happiness. Therefore, in *Submission* Islam becomes so popular in France. It is a way out of the existentialist and spiritual crisis caused by celebrating individualism.

This anti-liberal philosophy also permeates *The Elementary Particles*, which is a work considerably darker in tone. Houellebecq draws attention to the disorganization of the world. Yes, religion is right, he argues, human nature is corrupt. Humans will not be able to create a better world unless a better man is created. But how could this be achieved? How can corrupt creatures "discorrupt" themselves?

Puritans believed it to be impossible. The Bible emphasizes that "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit" (Matthew 7:18)⁵. Hence the Puritans maintained that people cannot change themselves; they believed in the necessity of the divine intervention. Only God's grace could transform a merely natural man, i.e. a sinner, into a saint, to purge him of the original sin.

Interestingly enough, it was deeply religious Puritans, and not atheists, who provided one of the most compelling arguments against nature. They equated nature with corruption (nature was the realm of the devil) and demanded that it should be perfected, redeemed. This condemnation of nature was based on the following quotations from the Bible: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14), "But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption" (2 Peter 2: 12), or "But these speak

⁵ All quotations from the Bible form King James Version.

evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves” (Jude 1: 10).

Jonathan Edwards in *Sinners in the Hands of Angry God* wrote that “natural men are held in the hand of God, over the pit of hell; they have deserved the fiery pit, and are already sentenced to it” (Edwards 1739). And he further warned his audience:

[...] those of you that finally continue in a natural condition, that shall keep out of hell longest will be there in a little time! your damnation does not slumber; it will come swiftly, and, in all probability, very suddenly upon many of you. You have reason to wonder that you are not already in hell (Edwards 1739).

This radical anti-nature sentiment is preserved today by the members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They define the concept of “natural man” in the following terms:

A person who chooses to be influenced by the passions, desires, appetites, and senses of the flesh rather than by the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Such a person can comprehend physical things but not spiritual things. All people are carnal, or mortal, because of the fall of Adam and Eve. Each person must be born again through the atonement of Jesus Christ to cease being a natural man (Lds.org 2016).

This definition is supported by a number of quotations from their holy texts (all quotations below from: Lds.org 2016):

The natural man is an enemy to God and should be put off (Mosiah 3:19).

He that persists in his own carnal nature remaineth in his fallen state (Mosiah 16:5; Alma 42:7-24; D&C [Doctrines and Covenants—M.P.] 20:20)

What natural man is there that knoweth these things? (Alma 26:19-22).

Natural or carnal men are without God in the world (Alma 41:11).

Neither can any natural man abide the presence of God (D&C 67:12).

Houellebecq adapts this religious argument to his secular beliefs. The original sin truly exists. It is neither a symbol nor a metaphor, but something that can be seen under a microscope; specific genes that are responsible for human selfishness, manifesting themselves in the economic and sexual rivalry (which, using religious vocabulary, may be described as greed). Obviously, baptizing children (or performing any other rituals) will not make any difference, still science can fix this problem. The defective genes may be eliminated. Thus Houellebecq, quite surprisingly, uses religious arguments to support genetic engineering. Genetic engineering is primarily a

solution to moral problems. Probably equally surprising, especially in the light of his earlier remarks regarding *Brave New World*, is his claim that the road to true happiness leads not through instant gratification of every desire but elimination of desire.

Genetic engineering is described as a metaphysical mutation comparable to the rise of Christianity. In the last pages of the novel Michel Djerzinski is styled after Jesus. He works on his theory in seclusion, studying illuminated Gospels. After submitting for publication a sensational article, he disappears in mysterious circumstances. People speculate about him committing suicide but his body is never found. Then, after some time, a man named Frederick Hubczejak enters the scene. He bears a strong resemblance to Saint Paul. He may not exhibit the genius of Djerzinski but he is an extremely efficient organizer. He popularizes Djerzinski's ideas, stressing that mankind must give way to a new species. Not getting any support from the established religions, such as Judaism, Christianity or Islam (they condemn him for trying "to undermine human dignity in uniqueness in its relation with the Creator"), he turns to the commonly ridiculed New Age ideology, and eventually, using slightly modified New Age ideas, thanks to his great rhetorical skill and cleverness, he manages to bring the world's opinion to his point of view. And a new species which will replace natural man is created (Houellebecq 2001: 264-272).

Conclusion

The Elementary Particles presents the following diagnosis. Utopia cannot be achieved unless human nature is changed. Mankind "must break with the twentieth century, its immorality, its individualism and its libertarian and antisocial values" (Houellebecq 2001: 266). This is possible. The Revolution, to use Hubczejak's slogan, will not be mental, but genetic. However, one should bear in mind that *The Elementary Particles* is primarily a critique of the western civilization, "its immorality, its individualism and its libertarian and antisocial values". Houellebecq's seemingly wholehearted acceptance of genetic engineering and his praise of Huxley's *Brave New World* is a rhetorical trick which he uses to make this critique even more effective for his conservative audience. Thus, ultimately, Houellebecq turns out to be a moralist. Similarly to a biblical prophet, he warns his readers that if mankind persists in its follies, it should be destroyed.

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