



BRAVE NEW THEORY

JEFFREY R. DI LEO, EDITOR AND PUBLISHER

Mathematical theory speculates that we are now using the equivalent of 1.6 planets to provide the resources we use and to absorb our waste. This means that it takes the Earth one year and six months to regenerate what we use in a year. The contemporary mathematician Joel E. Cohen believes that one way to save the world is to reduce this ratio through the use of theory.

In Cohen's view, extensively articulated in *How Many People Can the Earth Support?* (1995), there have been three general theoretical approaches this past century to the problems of poverty, overpopulation, environmental degradation, and social injustice. The first, is the *Bigger Pie Approach*, which advocates the use of technology to produce more and alleviate shortages; the second is the *Fewer Forks Approach*, which "make contraception and reproductive health care available to eliminate unwanted fertility and slow population growth"; and the third, is the *Better Manners Approach* which says "eliminate violence and corruption; improve trade, the operation of the markets, and government provision of public goods; reduce the unwanted aftereffects of consumption, such as environmental damage; and achieve greater social and political equity between young and old, male and female, rich and poor." Be this as it may, "enthusiasts of one school often neglect and suspect suggestions from the others," says Cohen.

Moreover, these general theoretical approaches to saving the world are nowhere to be found in contemporary literary and cultural theory. This of course does not mean that literary and cultural theorists are not interested in these approaches or the problems that give rise to them. It also does not mean that literature and culture does not address them. In fact, arguably, these three approaches are frequently explored in literature, perhaps most famously and memorably in a work that now has a permanent albeit problematic place in our cultural imagination, namely, Aldous Huxley's novel *Brave New World* (1932).

In the literature classroom, novels like *Brave New World* provide the opportunity to directly address the problems of poverty, overpopulation, environmental degradation, and social injustice — and to explore the social and political consequences of theories used to address them. In the case of *Brave New World*, the two major theories are Fordism and Freudianism, which respectively might be associated with Cohen's *Bigger Pie* and *Fewer Forks* approaches. Huxley uses these theories in tandem to postulate a future world where "Everybody's happy now." To exhibit their interrelatedness, Huxley has Mustapha Mond, "Our Ford," the Resident Controller of Western Europe, refer to himself as "Our Freud," when he speaks of psychological matters.

While the reason for this shift in self-identification is enigmatic to the narrator of *Brave New World*, it is quite clear to the reader: to establish Freudian psychology as one of the central theoretical inspirations of this future society. Writes Huxley,

Our Freud had been the first to reveal the appalling dangers of family life. The world was full of fathers — was therefore full of misery; full of mothers — therefore of every kind of perversion from sadism to chastity; full of brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts — full of madness and suicide.

The "brave new world" of Huxley's dystopic satire is a "World State" set 600 years in the future that is controlled by a group of ten of these Fords (or Freuds). The sway between Our Ford and Our Freud is one between the two major world-making theoretical-axes of the future circa 1930: the industrialized world exemplified by the development of the assembly line technique of mass production, homogenization, and consumption of disposable goods (Ford) and the psychological world characterized by the development of techniques of psychological manipulation, classical conditioning, and sleep-learning (Freud).

Nevertheless, it bears noting that "Our Freud" is *not* the unqualified champion of happiness that Huxley makes him out to be in *Brave New World*. Though Freud is linked in the popular imagination with the idea that sexual activity is associated with happiness, he was far less enthusiastic about the possibility of happiness in modern civilization. What Huxley is after in *Brave New World* is a "revolution" in psychology — or theory more broadly conceived — that becomes the basis of a new form of economics and government based on happiness. Though it can be linked in ways to Freudian psychoanalysis — and its extensions later in Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek — the government of happiness in Huxley's novel is very different. Huxley notes as much in a 1949 letter to George Orwell:

The first hints of a philosophy of the ultimate revolution — the revolution which lies beyond economics and politics, and which aims at the total subversion of the individual's psychology and physiology — are to be found in the Marquis de Sade, who regarded himself as the continuator, the consummator, of [Maximilien de] Robespierre and [François-Noël] Babeuf.

But to overcome individual psychology in the furtherance of power, totalitarian governmentality will not resort to physical violence, which Huxley finds "arduous and wasteful," but will rather utilize various forms of psychic control, which are much easier and more efficient:

I have had occasion recently to look into the history of animal magnetism and hypnotism, and have been greatly struck by the way in which, for a hundred and fifty

— Di Leo continued on page 33

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