

Joseph Jordan

Lincoln Lyceum Summer Essay Contest

July 31, 2024

Cheap Satisfaction

What makes life worth living? And what does society look like without those things? This is a question answered in three of the greatest Dystopian novels of our era, *1984*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *Brave New World*. Each has a slightly different answer. In *1984* a lack of freedom and controlled intake of media forces man into submission to the system. In *Fahrenheit 451* fear of the state and distraction keep society in order. Finally in *Brave New World*, humans are engineered and conditioned to form specific tasks. A drug called *soma* is commonly used to make one happy, which can isolate an individual in ignorant bliss in the midst of any situation. Marriage is quite unheard of, and child bearing or any semblance of a family is something only found among the savages. Individuals gratify their sexual desires nearly whenever they wish, with whomever, and have no loyalty to any one person. Which of these novels most closely resembles the dangers America may face? Of these three, *Brave New World* strikes closest to home. Distraction, pleasure, and escape from the uncomfortable dominates society. It seems then that a dystopia would likely have certain features. In all three novels, there are 4 common elements: The reading of old books or poetry or any historical literature is strictly forbidden; education is handled by the state; the greatest threat to society is nonconformity, the *individual*; Everything possible is done to prevent any serious thinking; and anyone who is found not meeting the standard is severely punished.

In Ray Bradbury's book, technology is used for distraction, in the form seashells and the 'family'. There are obvious parallels between these and modern technology such as

earbuds and social media, or even AI; however I believe the methods of distraction in *Brave New World* more accurately portray the dangers of our own. In *1984*, people are controlled by surveillance and fear. In *Fahrenheit 451*, suspicion of peers keeps one in check, and one is encouraged not to think. In *Brave New World*, it is not fear of authority that keeps order in society, but rather the fear of pain. At most times people are distracted, and at any moment are able to whisk away any unpleasant feelings through the use of a drug called soma. This drug is plentifully supplied to all, so keeping the population controlled. However, on rare occasions, individuals find themselves deprived of this magic, and are filled with intense longing for it. On the savage reservation, Lina and Lenina both long for soma after a short time without it, and Lenina quickly attempts to lose herself in something—anything that could distract her from the awful place she was in. And both Lenina and Linda, as soon as they again have access to soma, bury themselves in it. Soma appears to be quite a powerful thing, “All the advantages of Christianity and alcohol: none of their defects.”¹

In America, many long for happiness, but have not considered happiness without pain might mean. It becomes cheap and unfulfilling, but addictive. The cigarette of the modern age, the cellphone. Full of wonderful uses that benefit society, yet also wielding dangerous potential for destruction. Just as with soma, social media is a distraction from everyday life, and even in the most crowded of places, can isolate one from the rest of the world. Soma undoubtedly originally was intended for good, to make the world better, but that made it all the more dangerous. Another problem prevalent in modern America is pornography; quick sexual gratification. This is highly addictive, and extremely destructive. It leads to a complete lack of self control and cheapens the beautiful reality of God's intended purpose. In America education is often handled by the state, which while not a problem inherently, can easily lead to them. This

¹ (p 54) Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers) 2006.

takes the responsibility of raising and educating children away from parents, further distancing the family. The family is worse than unheard of, it is derided as primitive technology. They mock history. Do not we do the same? Finally, religion. In Huxley's dystopia, Christianity is no more, and its replacement, the government. Man must worship something after all. For many in America, has not science become their new God, or perhaps self? We have not yet reached the state of *Brave New World*, mostly due to our lack of technology. In his book, *Full Time*, David Bahnsen lays out the basic contributors to happiness; faith, family, friends, and work. In *Brave New World*, Faith and family are non-existent. Instead what is lacking in religion and family is made up for in friends and work. The sanctity of marriage is shared with friends, and worship of The state becomes nearly cultish. Still, neither of these can substitute the real thing, which leads to the common use of soma.

The characters in *Brave New World* are wholly invested in shallow things. Most were thoroughly convinced of this, and any who were not were thrown out. Despite constant love-making, there is no love. Although friendly with all, there are no true friends. Although always happy, there is not true happiness. Modern America thrives on cheapness. The quality of life is diminished, all for greed and instant gratification. Man needs greater purpose than himself, He was not created to serve solely himself, but his fellow man and his creator.