

Orwell vs. Huxley: Who Are You Behind?

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by Lauren Feeney

In his book “[Amusing Ourselves To Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business](#),” the late media critic Neil Postman compares two dystopian futures — one, imagined by George Orwell in his book [1984](#), in which the government maintains its control by keeping us under constant surveillance; the other, conceived by Aldous Huxley in [Brave New World](#), in which citizens are kept happy enough to never put up a fight:

“We were keeping our eye on 1984. When the year came and the prophecy didn’t, thoughtful Americans sang softly in praise of themselves. The roots of liberal democracy had held. Wherever else the terror had happened, we, at least, had not been visited by Orwellian nightmares.

But we had forgotten that alongside Orwell’s dark vision, there was another – slightly older, slightly less well known, equally chilling: Aldous Huxley’s Brave New World. Contrary to common belief even among the educated, Huxley and Orwell did not prophesy the same thing. Orwell warns that we will be overcome by an externally imposed oppression. But in Huxley’s vision, no Big Brother is required to deprive people of their autonomy, maturity and history. As he

Who was more prophetic, Orwell or Huxley?

- ☐ Orwell
- ☐ Huxley
- ☐ Both
- ☐ Neither

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saw it, people will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think.

What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture, preoccupied with some equivalent of the feelies, the orgy porgy, and the centrifugal bumblepuppy. As Huxley remarked in *Brave New World Revisited*, the civil libertarians and rationalists who are ever on the alert to oppose tyranny “failed to take into account man’s almost infinite appetite for distractions”. In 1984, Huxley added, people are controlled by inflicting pain. In *Brave New World*, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short, Orwell feared that what we hate will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us.”

This excerpt has prompted many to ponder the same question that [Bill Moyers asked Marty Kaplan on this week’s program](#): Who’s proving the most successful prophet? Huxley or Orwell? What do you think? Vote above, and leave your thoughts in the comments section below.

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