If in Heart of Darkness and Darkness at Noon, Conrad and Koestler stage the empire-building phase of the will to power, whether in its colonialist or in its communist guise, in Brave New World Huxley stages its postcolonialist and postcommunist phase. Huxley’s dystopian empire has now encompassed the entire planet and is called the World-State, bearing an uncanny resemblance to the New World Order envisaged by the multinational global elites of the late 20th century, after the fall of Communism. Its watchword is no longer the will to conquest, but “stability” or the will to order. Likewise, the main instrument of the will to power is no longer the infliction of physical and psychological pain, as in Darkness at Noon and in Nineteen Eighty-Four; on the contrary, it is the “infliction of pleasure” (Huxley’s phrase). This does not mean, of course, that the New World Order will not resort to violence and massive pain-infliction whenever global “stability” (read: its hegemony) is threatened, as the current “war on terror,” oil proxy wars, and other local nationalist and/or religious conflagrations amply demonstrate.

In Koestler’s novel, the end of the will to power still masquerades as Communist utopia, be it in its modified version driven by the “oceanic feeling.” Rubashov still believes that power can be seized “with the object of abolishing power,” and that “ruling over the people” can
have as objective “to wean them from the habit of being ruled”; in other words, that power’s end can ever be to put an end to itself. This useful political fiction has been one of the most effective strategies of the will to power, and has been invoked again and again throughout human history, particularly by those “revolutionaries” who are out of power and want to gain it by all means. What Rubashov does not understand (but Stalin did) is that in the case of the will to power, end and means coincide. This thinly veiled truth is rendered stark naked in another brilliant 20th-century dystopia, Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four: the true end of power is, invariably, its own enhancement, preservation, and perpetuation, by any means and at all costs.¹

Plato and, in modern times, Nietzsche have well understood that both pleasure and pain are instruments of power and that a social engineer needs to manipulate both in order to achieve the desired social goals, whatever these goals may be; and furthermore, that manipulating pleasure through rewards often yields much more effective and lasting results than punishment. Therefore, Brave New World is, appropriately, a dystopia based on pleasure; and this kind of dystopia is much more insidious than the kind based on pain, as we can see from our own consumerist “culture of narcissism” (Lasch 1979) As Huxley puts it in his Foreword to the 1946 edition of the novel (the first edition having been published in 1931): “A really efficient totalitarian state would be one in which the all-powerful executive of political bosses and their army of managers control a population of slaves who do not have to be coerced, because they love their servitude.”²

Orwell’s novel imagines a postmodernist, Nietzschean future where archaic values return in full force, people being subdued and controlled by sheer violence. This dystopian world is already a reality in Stalinist Russia, as Koestler’s narrative brilliantly shows. By contrast, Huxley imagines a subtle dystopian world that is equally driven by the will to power, but achieves “stability” through a shrewd combination and management of the two sets of power-oriented values: archaic and median. The resulting society of Brave New World is made up of an amusing hodge-podge of past utopian schemes, whether Platonic or socialist, with postindustrial capitalism, socialist collectivism, sexual promiscuity, and an artificial, genetically engineered, caste-system thrown into the mix.

This preposterous social organization is rendered possible through the support of reductionist science, and the kind of modern