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Existentialism and Constructivism in Aldous Huxley's Island: a Surreal Perception

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Abstract

Aldous Huxley's *Island*, published in 1962, stands as a masterful literary exploration of education, in a time characterized by the rapid advance of science and technology. The mid-20th Century was marked by profound shifts in human understanding, set against a backdrop of social and political upheaval. This era gave rise to Existentialist philosophy– a movement that addressed the human condition, emphasizing the struggle for freedom and the confrontation of mortality as defining aspects of existence. Constructivism learning theory, having emerged concurrently in the field of psychology, defines the human reception of knowledge as an intuitive process in which learners actively participate. While utopian literature often presents idealized societies, Huxley's novel, employing narratives of personal experience and social discourse, uses the fictional Palanese society to explore both Existential and Constructivist themes. He achieves a textual homeostasis by delving richly into Eastern philosophy, contrasting it with these Western principles. The tension between Eastern and Western thought fuels existing, ongoing scholarly discourse: fostering beneficial discussions within the realm of academia. I propose that the examination of Huxley's *Island*, with its Existentialist and Constructivist themes– complemented by Surrealist elements, offers a unique canvas where these contrasting philosophical forces not only coexist but also harmonize in a process-centered utopian discourse. In this utopian world, the focus isn't on the end result but rather on the ongoing process of being – being in a state of “attention”. Huxley achieves this through vivid descriptions and rich dialogue, creating an environment where differing views engage in a dynamic interchange of ideas and actions. These interactions have the power to shape and transform individuals and, by extension, entire societies. *Island* acts as an excellent vehicle of “surplus value”, in which a rhetorical discussion of greater length may be initiated and maintained. A term often associated with economics and Marxist theory: in the context of *Island*, “surplus value” takes on a broader philosophical meaning. It symbolizes the excess of meaning and

significance that exist beyond the apparent surface of the narrative (Maxwell). Scholars in publication for the Society for Utopian Studies position that an Existentialist reading of *Island* is enrichment for both personal enlightenment and pro-social behavior (Macdonald). This essay will attempt to invite readers to delve deeply into Huxley's final novel to unearth its many subtle insights. Just as the Surrealism movement sought to unveil the unconscious mind's creativity, Huxley in crafting *Island*, uses unexpected juxtapositions, dream-like scenes, and symbolism to unravel Existential and Constructivist dimensions.

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