

Utopia and dystopia

Possible answers and solutions

1. Outline what the Controller says about the concept of happiness in the new state. (*Comprehension*)

Aspects of the assignment:

– Concept of happiness:

Phrases from the text you could have highlighted	Your own words/paraphrases (Use your dictionary!)
“The world’s stable now. People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can’t get.” (II.44–45)	In the new state happiness and stability depend upon each other.
“They’re so conditioned that they practically can’t help behaving as they ought to behave.” (II.47–48)	Stability is achieved with the help of conditioning i.e. people are trained to behave in certain ways, they have no free will.
“They’re blissfully ignorant of passion and old age; they’re plagued with no mothers or fathers; they’ve got no wives, or children, or lovers to feel strongly about; [...]” (II.46–47)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Stability means the absence of emotional disturbances that might be caused by strong feelings like passion or fear. – There are no close relationships to members of the opposite sex or members of the family; marriage and families are institutions that no longer exist.
<p>“But why is it prohibited? [...] Because it’s old; that’s the chief reason.” (II.19–21)</p> <p>“Beauty’s attractive, and we don’t want people to be attracted by old things. We want them to like the new ones.” (II.24–25)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Laws forbid the use of old things like Shakespeare’s plays because they might be more attractive than the new ones. – People might reject (and not buy?) the new things.
“They’re well-off; they’re safe; they’re never ill; [...]” (II.45–46)	To the inhabitants of the new state happiness means physical well-being.

2. Characterise the Controller and explain how the point of view in this passage influences the reader’s perception of him. (*Analysis*)

Aspects of the assignment

– The Controllers’ character:

Phrases from the text you could have highlighted	Your own words/paraphrases (Use your dictionary!)
<p>“Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments will hum about my ears and sometimes voices.” (I.12)</p> <p>“But as I make the laws here, I can also break them.” (II.15–16)</p> <p>“Because our world is not the same as Othello’s world.” (I.43)</p>	The Controller is an educated man who understands and controls the system. Unlike the other inhabitants of the new world he still has his free will. He is very eloquent and argues with John in a convincing way.

Task 1 aims at the content of the text (*Anforderungsbereich 1*).

Outline means that you have to give the main features, structure or general principle of a topic, without minor details. The topic is mentioned in the assignment: happiness in the new state. Make sure you use your own words. Your English-English dictionary will help you to do so. Avoid quotations but add some line references in brackets: (I.6) or (II.13–14).

Task 2 aims at the formal elements of the text (*Anforderungsbereich 2*).

Characterise means that you have to describe and examine the way in which the character (here: Mustapha Mond) is presented. **Explain** means that you describe and define an aspect of the text (here: point of view) in detail. Short quotations from the text might be necessary. Never give your opinion in this *Anforderungsbereich*.

– Point of view:

Phrases from the text you could have highlighted	Your own words/paraphrases (Use your dictionary!)
(Complete excerpt)	The scene is presented from a third-person point of view; the narrator is not involved in the story. He does not comment on what he narrates.
“He had been prepared to lie, to bluster, to remain sullenly unresponsive; but reassured by the good-humoured intelligence of the Controller’s face, he decided to tell the truth, straightforwardly.” (II.3–5) “Bernard started and looked horrified. What would the Controller think?” (I.6)	The narrator has access to the thoughts and feelings of the characters, but he is selective. He presents mainly what John experiences. Occasionally the reader catches a glimpse of what Bernard Marx thinks, too.

– Influence on reader’s perception:

Phrases from the text	Your own words/paraphrases
“the good-humoured intelligence” (I.4) “sudden pleasure” (I.13) “the excitement of meeting a man who had read Shakespeare” (II.19-20)	John’s first impression of the Controller is very positive: he is encouraged to be open and feels impressed by the Controller’s knowledge. The narrator’s focus on John means that the reader is likely to share John’s view.
(any of John’s questions)	Like the reader, John is a stranger in the new world and knows little about the way it works; he can ask the questions the reader might have, too.

3. Compare Huxley’s fantasy of the future with other visions you have discussed in class. Do you think such visions are still relevant for us today? (Evaluation: comment)

- Ideas for the comparison:
 - What is the individual definition of happiness like?
 - Which forms of entertainment are possible/allowed?
 - Which role does mass media play?
- Also give a clear personal opinion on the relevance of the texts you have discussed. For example, you could
- claim that today genetic engineering has increased the level of control over the human body even beyond what is possible in *Brave New World*.
- say that since the end of the Soviet Union totalitarian dystopias (such as Orwell’s *1984*) have become less relevant.
- argue that, on the other hand, modern technologies and the security measures taken after 9/11 make dystopias in which people are completely under control more relevant.
- write that utopia/dystopia have in a narrow sense become less relevant, but that modern science fiction (literature and films) adopts many elements of them (e.g. *The Matrix*).

Task 3 aims at an evaluation of the text (*Anforderungsbereich 3*).

Compare means that you are expected to point out similarities and differences. In this assignment you are expected to refer to utopian/dystopian visions. After that you have to state your opinion on their relevance today and support your view with evidence.

4. The controller argues that Shakespeare can't be understood in his world because this "is not the same as Othello's world" (l.43). Do you think that the same is true for us? Discuss. (*Evaluation: comment*)

On the one hand:

- the world has changed thoroughly since the Elizabethan age: technologically, economically, culturally (→ for details see the Fact file on Shakespeare)

On the other hand:

- The basic human needs and emotions are the same today and in Shakespeare's time. In the Controller's world, however, some of these basic needs have been changed, e.g. there are no families anymore.
- The Controller claims that people need to know social instability to understand Shakespeare; in our world this is still the case: there is poverty, disease, war, etc.
- Shakespeare's plays are extremely successful today, which suggests that their themes are still relevant.

Task 4 aims at an evaluation of the text (*Anforderungsbereich 3*).

Discuss means that you have to give reasons for and against the thesis in the task.