

Creating the Perfect Caste System

“Come along with us, and give these boys the benefit of your expert knowledge.”

Mr. Foster smiled modestly. “With pleasure.”

Mr. Foster duly told them of the growing embryo on its bed of peritoneum. Made them taste the rich blood surrogate on which it fed. Explained the system of labelling—a T for the males, a circle for the females and for those who were destined to become **freemartins** a question mark, black on a white ground.

“For of course,” said Mr. Foster, “in the vast majority of cases, fertility is merely a nuisance. One fertile ovary in twelve hundred—that would really be quite sufficient for our purposes. But we want to have a good choice. And of course one must always have an enormous margin of safety. So we allow as many as thirty per cent of the female embryos to develop normally. The others get a dose of male sex-hormone. Result: they’re decanted as freemartins—structurally quite normal but sterile. Guaranteed sterile. Which brings us at last,” continued Mr. Foster, “out of the realm of mere **slavish** imitation of nature into the much more interesting world of human invention.”

He rubbed his hands. For of course, they didn’t content themselves with merely hatching out embryos: any cow could do that.

“We also predestine and condition. We decant our babies as socialized human beings, as Alphas or Epsilons, as future sewage workers or future Directors of Hatcheries”

They were passing Metre 320 on Rack 11. A young Beta-Minus mechanic was busy with screw-driver and spanner on the blood-surrogate pump of a passing bottle. The hum of the electric motor deepened by fractions of a tone as he turned the nuts. Down, down. A final twist, a glance at the revolution counter, and he was done. He moved two paces down the line and began the same process on the next pump.

“Reducing the number of revolutions per minute,” Mr. Foster explained. “The surrogate goes round slower; therefore gives the embryo less oxygen. Nothing like oxygen-shortage for keeping an embryo **below par**.” Again he rubbed his hands.

“But why do you want to keep the embryo below par?” asked an ingenuous student.

“Ass!” said the Director, breaking a long silence. “Hasn’t it occurred to you that an Epsilon embryo must have an Epsilon environment as well as an Epsilon heredity?”

It evidently hadn’t occurred to him. He was covered with confusion.

“The lower the caste,” said Mr. Foster, “the shorter the oxygen.” The first organ affected was the brain. “But in Epsilons,” said Mr. Foster very justly, “we don’t need human intelligence.”

Didn’t need and didn’t get it. But though the Epsilon mind was mature at ten, the Epsilon body was not fit to work till eighteen. Long years of superfluous and wasted immaturity. If the physical development could be speeded up till it was as quick, say, as a cow’s, what an enormous saving to the Community!

“Enormous!” murmured the students. Mr. Foster’s enthusiasm was infectious.

That was the problem. And it was all but solved.

Aldous Leonard Huxley, *Brave New World*, chap 1, 1931

Freemartins : *Génisse jumelle d'un mâle sexuellement normal, présentant une anomalie ovarienne qui la rend stérile.*

Slavish : *servile*

below par : *en dessous de la moyenne*