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| **FEAR OF A FEELING PLANET -- A REVIEW OF KURT WIMMER'S "EQUILIBRIUM"** |
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| by Charles Carreon  [http://www.american-buddha.com/AEQUILFEARFEELINGPLANET2_small.jpg](http://www.american-buddha.com/AEQUILFEARFEELINGPLANET2.jpg)  [Equilibrium -- Little Movies](http://www.american-buddha.com/perf.geom.LMtoc.htm) [Equilibrium -- Illustrated Screenplay & Screencap Gallery](http://www.american-buddha.com/perf.geom.toc.htm) [Equilibrium -- Screenplay](http://www.american-buddha.com/video.equil.htm) [Diary of a Sense Offender -- A Review of Kurt Wimmer's "Equilibrium," by Charles Carreon](http://www.american-buddha.com/diary.sense.1.htm) [Fahrenheit 451 -- Illustrated Screenplay and Screencap Gallery, by Francois Truffaut and Jean-Louis Richard](http://www.american-buddha.com/fahrenheit.toc.htm) [Fahrenheit 451 -- Screenplay, by Francois Truffaut and Jean-Louis Richard](http://www.american-buddha.com/fahrenheit.screen.htm) [Fahrenheit 9/11 -- Illustrated Screenplay & Screencap Gallery, written and directed by Michael Moore](http://www.american-buddha.com/fah911.toc.htm) [The Vulcans Table of Contents](http://www.american-buddha.com/vulcan.toc.htm) [Fahrenheit 451, by Ray Bradbury](http://www.american-buddha.com/fahren-ray.toc.htm)  Kurt Wimmer, who wrote the screenplay and directed Equilibrium, explained in a December 2003 interview that he underwent a psychic renaissance some years back, after years of emotional shutdown. Wimmer explains that he shut down emotionally after he suffered the slings and arrows of outrageous art-school assholes, and decided all art was shit. Eventually, he went back into some European museums and realized he'd made a mistake. Art is great, and he wanted to feel again. So Equilibrium, for him, is about fighting back against emotional repression.  In an interview before the movie's release, Wimmer noted that in Libria, the fictional world of the movie, sense materials are banned with the "EC10" rating, that "EC" stands for "Emotional Content," and that he explicitly relates this to the Motion Picture Association of America's content rating system, with its PG13 and NC17 ratings. As a screenwriter, I presume he's felt plenty of pressure to write within these demarcations, which is undoubtedly difficult and frustrating. But for me, the movie was good for a great deal more than voicing a complaint about modern censorship. I heard and saw the movie from the perspective of one who sees Americans daily gobbling up Eastern philosophies that urge the annihilation of feelings. Some critics decried the movie's premise as absurd, but I do not find it so. Buddhism, especially as understood by many Americans, takes it as an article of faith that feelings cause problems and people are better off without them. Most people imagine this as a favorable condition, in which they are not bothered by intrusive or unpleasant feelings, but that's not how it works in actual practice, which often becomes a war against all emotion arising in the meditator's mind.  For example, the four "noble truths" of Buddhism are:  1. Life is suffering  2. Desire is the cause of suffering  3. Desire can be ended  4. Desire can be ended by following the Buddhist path  Whether the Buddha really laid out his philosophy in this fashion, we'll never know, and different people believe different things. For example, Tibetan Buddhists give lip service to the four noble truths, but in practice, find desire too attractive to abandon.  Suffice it to say that the Buddhist four noble truths somewhat resemble the precepts that guide the Librians:  1. Humans engaged in wars for centuries  2. Wars were caused by an inner defect  3. That defect is the capacity for feelings  4. Feelings can be overcome by taking Prozium  5. Everyone must take Prozium  Wimmer didn't mention Buddhism at all in the interview, which surprised me at first. He had plenty to say about the mechanics of casting the film (it wasn't easy), finding the monolithic architecture (Albert Speer's Germany), and working with Christian Bale (splendid). He seemed almost to disclaim the idea that there was an overarching social theme binding his work to 1984 and the other dystopian epics. He distanced himself from the idea that the work was a form of social commentary. He relished discussing filming the Gun Kata sequences, which he himself designed as the apotheosis of the gunslinger's art. He just never seems to have much to say about the authoritarian ethos as an objective phenomenon, suggesting it merely provides a social frame for the mental atmosphere of emotional suppression.  If Wimmer is being candid about his perception of the film, he has produced more than he realizes. Equilibrium shows us how Western technocratic efficiency could be blended with Eastern didactic methods to mold society into a pliable whole whose citizens accept complete domination as the price of peace. In Libria, the citizens are under the vigilant eyes of heavily armed men at all times. Each person is relegated to their space. Solitude and uniformity are the two attributes of the Librians. At every turn, the Librians are reminded of their good fortune to be in this condition. Each one keeps watch on every other, helping them to guard against the evils of sense offense.  Ironically, the defenders of the system, the Grammaton Clerics, are finely developed sensors, who mask their ability to feel under the title of Intuition. This Intuition they place at the service of ferreting out sense offenders. The GCs are thus able to enjoy exercising their feelings as emotional dowsers, while keeping the blame pointed at the sense offenders for having feelings in the first place. GCs are the government point-men and designated hitters in the frequent shootouts with armed sense offenders, who are loath to surrender themselves for Processing, and persist in hopelessly defending their hoarded copies of old paintings, brickabrack, and cool junk stashed in little hidden rooms. Hopelessly because Preston and other GCs, when pressed, perform the Gun Kata with great accuracy, killing the hell out of every damn sense offender in sight and out of sight, in a whirling blaze of bullets that is highly Asian in its derivation.  A Grammaton Cleric channels sensing into Intuition, and aggression into lawful killing, which is a moral imperative, because of the great risk that feelings pose to society at large. Librians compete to demonstrate loyalty to Father, by rejecting their impulse to feel with eager certainty. Libria rewards those citizens who pursue their practice of self-repression zealously. In Libria, all public gatherings are supervised by men dressed in body armor and motorcycle helmets, patrolling with assault rifles at the ready. All public gatherings appear to be for the purpose of imbibing Father's wisdom, which flows freely from giant telescreens, all day, every day.  The Clerics are just footsoldiers, of course. When they get old and start to show signs of feeling, they are pushed aside and ground underfoot. Only ignorant youth can abide the claustrophobic restraint. The Clerics, true believers, are the front line in the battle against common sense. The Clerics are subject to pressure from above, however, and when Preston gets called on the carpet, it's a very nice carpet, in a room with beautiful marble pillars, and sumptuous Renaissance paintings adorning the walls. The members of Father's inner circle are apparently free to acquire and enjoy sense objects.  Hypocrisy is the true tent pole of authoritarian doctrines that prescribe the right course of conduct for every individual. In Tibetan Buddhism, it has been routinely revealed, the authorities are completely unable to walk their talk. Celibacy has apparently been honored only in the breach by many teachers, both the prominent and the obscure. Similarly, while preaching patience and serenity, many lamas use anger and blackmail to influence the behavior of their students. On this one-way street, the lamas are always free to manifest emotions, and students never are. Loyalty is the first and last rule in Libria, and in Tibetan Buddhism. As Preston discovers that the Librian system is fundamentally anti-life, he argues to Father's top man that, if sense offenders are simply to be killed upon discovery, without any process whatsoever, it is simply mayhem. In response, he is told that process does not matter. What matters is our obedience to the will of Father. For anyone who has been involved in a cult, this exchange is familiar. That is when we know that the cult is telling us to kiss our conscience goodbye, and learn to follow orders. The increasing popularity of a philosophy that leads in that direction is a cause for concern. Equilibrium, intentionally or unintentionally, shines a bright light on the problem.  Many critics have derided the movie, chanting Orwell, as if they were not the very purveyors of dishonest speech that Orwell exposed in "Politics and The English Language." Ty Burr of the Boston Globe committed a primary Orwell sin against the English language when he spouted this criticism of Equilibrium: "what once was conviction is now affectation." This statement is very bad English, not grammatically, or stylistically, but rather in the way Orwell primarily identified -- it says nothing. Consider these questions: (1) Who was it that once had this "conviction?" (2) What "conviction" was it that they held? (3) What relation did this "conviction" have to the "real Orwell"? (4) When did this presumably meritorious "conviction" attain the status of a hoary social dogma, so that nowadays, dystopian visions are mere "affectations?" and (5) Since when did it become the vogue to pay homage to Orwell with Orwellian proclamations?  Indeed, the critics seem to have been dispatched on their own clerical missions as enforcers for the media chieftains. Adopting the favored Big Lie strategy of painting themselves as precisely what they are not, these critics venerate the name of Orwell to attack the living spirit of dissent that Orwell championed. I would wager real money that most of these critics last read Orwell in high school or college, and are comparing Equilibrium with their vague recollection of that work. Somehow they have missed the fact that Christian Bale delivers a tremendous depiction of emotional repression as Preston, the exemplary Cleric, and that the character of Preston's son is masterfully presented by a young actor whose taut reserve and well-contained spite surprisingly transform in a scene that is as tender as a dystopian movie can possibly manage without breaking the illusion. Particularly slavish in their knee-jerk condemnation of this movie were Sean Axmaker of the Seattle Post, and Manohla Dargis of the LA Times. Dargis appears actually not to have seen the movie, but had to make deadline and dinner, too, so it was just as easy to trash a movie all the other critics were trashing. The review leaves you with nothing but an aftertaste of fussy impatience.  Josh Bell, writing for the literary powerhouse, Las Vegas Weekly, committed ludicrous offense to the English language with what Orwell called a "dead metaphor": "Wimmer delivers the already labored story with the subtlety of a sledgehammer." This phrase was born to be delivered directly to the "huge dump of worn-out metaphors which have lost all evocative power and are merely used because they save people the trouble of inventing phrases for themselves." Please note how vividly Orwell's "dump" appears before your eyes, unlike Bell's sledgehammer, which collapses of its own weight, and fails to injure the target. After reading all the serious critical assessments of Equilibrium, it would be fun to read what these same critics said about "Millionaire," "Survivor," or are saying about the latest TV "reality" epic, which I think is called "Trump Jerks Off!" Undoubtedly we will find the serious brows of these lofty critics creased with worry about these cheesy distractions. Not! These critics, in the interest of "giving good copy" to their media overlords, try to make everyone feel good about how ordinary folks love the current reality-fare, which is truly Orwellian. The concerted effort to massacre a film that warns of media consolidation and mind control was planned and executed by people who are desperately afraid of its message.  A culture of emotional suppression may seem like the farthest thing from those of us suffering from sensory overload, advertising poisoning, and information glut. However, in precisely this environment, lots of people are beginning to think that feelings really are our problem. There is widespread acceptance of meditation jargon that declares the "ego" or "self" to be an enemy, an illusory enemy that steals happiness. It seems like I meet someone everyday who blandly declares that our selves are illusory. I almost feel too polite to object to my own disappearance.  Perhaps people aren't ready to start shooting Prozium into their neck like chickens getting a hormone injection, but they sure gulp all the Prozac they can get their hands on. Chemical regulation of human behavior is on the agenda of both government and the international drug companies. We are always on the search for painkillers and stimulants that do not have the "drawback" of causing euphoria like morphine and amphetamines. Taking Viagra, a dangerous drug that is killing large numbers of young men, is seen as the equivalent of buying a nice truck that will make you look like a stud. Blowfish toxin is being explored as a non-addictive painkiller. Modafinil is supposed to keep you awake for two or three days, without making you feel excessively glad to be alive.  There's tremendous lost productivity due to emotionality. People take sick days, stress leave, and murder their coworkers when they get too emotional. They talk back to management, ask questions about their job benefits, and get their hackles up about work conditions. Wouldn't it be great if we had a drug that made people not want to ever join a union? Of course, people wouldn't take it if you called it Disperse! But if you called it something else, like Attune, then people would be more interested.  American citizens are uncertain whether our government really is "of the people, for the people, and by the people." Awed by our government's restless exercise of military power, bowled over by the government's intrusion into our privacy, hamstrung by the new fetish for "security," people increasingly feel irrelevant. We have our own Father, a white dominator who is never too busy to punish the evildoer, never straying far from the rules of a hundred years ago. Our Father took power without permission, and has kept the populace cowed for three years. We may not be herded into stadiums to listen to harangues yet, but personally, [I don't want to live anywhere near one](http://www.american-buddha.com/katrina.stadiumplotdelphia.htm).  [Return to Table of Contents](http://www.american-buddha.com/perf.geom.toc.htm) |

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